

(S) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. Today we introduce the letter to the HEBREWS - PART 2. We will learn the main messages of the letter to the Hebrews.

POINT 6. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS.

First. The letter to the Hebrews establishes the finality of Christianity.

The writer establishes the finality of the Christian gospel by contrasting it with all that went before it. And he establishes the finality of Christianity by showing the supremacy of Jesus Christ in both his Person and his work. With respect to his person, he regards Jesus Christ as greater than all the human servants and spokesmen, greater than all the prophets and greater than Moses. He regarded Jesus Christ as greater than all God's other servants in the universe, the angels. He shows that Jesus Christ is God in chapter 1 and that he is man in chapter 2. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, God's agent in creating and maintaining the universe, and yet, he became the Son of Man, who submitted himself to humiliation and death. Now Jesus Christ is exalted above the heavens, enthroned at God's right hand, and he lives forever there as his people's Representative with God. The writer warns that whoever rejects this revelation of God in Jesus Christ, must face the dreadful judgement of the living God (10:26-31; 12:25-29).

Second. The letter to the Hebrews teaches the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Hebrews 10:1 teaches, "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never ... make perfect those who draw near to worship". The Old Testament contains *the shadows*, while the New Testament contains *the realities* of these shadows! The Old Testament covenant, priesthood, sanctuary, festivals and offerings were *foreshadowing* the realities of the New Testament. The Old Testament *types* or *illustrations* pointed forward to the New Testament *antitypes* or *fulfillments*. The Old Testament reveals God's *preparation* and the New Testament reveals God's *fulfilment*.

The New Testament reveals *the new covenant*. It teaches that Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament shadows and prophecies. Christians no longer have *priests*, because Jesus Christ is our *only high priest*. Christians worship God no longer in a *sanctuary*, but *in spirit and truth*. Christians no longer celebrate the Old Testament *festivals*, but especially the Lord's Supper and the day of the Lord (Sunday). Christians no longer bring *animal sacrifices*, because the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross was the perfect *sacrifice once for all*. *God's people* in the Old Testament were limited to the faithful people in Israel, but God's people in the New Testament are extended to believers from every nation on earth! Therefore, Christians should not study the Old Testament without looking at its fulfillments in the New Testament. Christians should interpret the Old Testament revelation in the light of the New Testament revelation.

Third. The letter to the Hebrews teaches a change of priesthood in chapter 7.

The priesthood of Jesus Christ is unique and absolutely different and superior to all other priesthoods.

One. The priesthood of Jesus Christ is not based on the law, but on the gospel. God prophesied that he would be a priest in the order of Melchizedek that would supersede the Aaronitic priesthood. And God confirmed his promise with an oath. The uniqueness of his priesthood is that he is both priest and sacrifice.

Two. The priesthood of Jesus Christ is based on his perfect character. In the Old Testament, the high priest of Israel was not personally free from sin. By an animal sacrifice for his own sins he was *ceremonially set apart* from the other Israelites for the proper discharge of his sacred functions. But Jesus had no need to present a daily sacrifice, nor even a yearly sacrifice, either for his own sins or for the sins of his people. He had no need to be set apart in any such ceremonial manner. The perfect character of Jesus is shown in his sinless life on earth and his complete separation from sin in heaven. *Christ's separation from sin is inward and moral, not merely outward and ceremonial*. Of all people who ever lived, only Jesus Christ was completely sinless. Hebrews 2:17-18 says that he lived among us and was tempted like all of us, yet without sinning. Therefore he can be and is *a merciful high priest, who can sympathise with all our weaknesses* (4:15). Although Jesus in his human nature lived among sinners, received sinners, ate with sinners, was known as a friend of sinners, yet he remained completely separate from sin and completely dedicated to God! He is in a total different class than sinful man. *Christ's separation from sin is total, because he is now in heaven*. He has withdrawn from sin in this world and sits exalted at the right hand of God. Hebrews 7:26-28 says, "Such a high priest meets our need - one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens ... perfect forever!"

Three. The priesthood of Jesus Christ is based on his resurrection from the dead. In the Old Testament, there were many high priests, because death prevented them from continuing in their office (7:23). Generation after generation, the high

priests in Israel died and their office passed on to another high priest. Their high priesthood was *temporary*. But the high priesthood of Jesus Christ is far superior, because it is *permanent*! It is permanent, because he was resurrected from the dead, ascended into heaven and lives for ever! Hebrews 7:24 says, "Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood". Hebrews 9:24 says, "He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence". Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ, has Jesus Christ as his high priest right at the right hand of God the Father. Because he lives forever, his saving power is available without end! His saving power cannot be hindered by any of the changing circumstances of this life. His task is to eternally save, protect and bless every Christian. And the way of approach to God the Father is always open, because in the presence of God, Jesus Christ represents his people as "a priest for ever".

Fourth. The letter to the Hebrews teaches a change of covenant in chapter 8.

One. There is a change of covenant, because the new covenant is superior to the old covenant. In the Old Testament, in Genesis 12-22 God made a covenant with Abraham. The people of God should respond to this covenant by faith. 430 years later, in Exodus 19-24 God added the law to the covenant with Abraham in order to show people their transgressions and to lead them to faith in Jesus Christ and his work of salvation. The people of God should respond to this covenant by obedience. In the letter to the Hebrews, *the writer compares this covenant of the law in the Old Testament to the covenant of faith in the New Testament.*

Both covenants were ratified by the shedding of blood. In Exodus 24:1-8, this covenant of the law was confirmed by animal sacrifices and the sprinkling of blood on the altar, on the Book of the Covenant and on the people. Moses called it "*the blood of the covenant*", that is, the shedding of blood that ratified the covenant. Hebrews 9:18-22 refers to this same ratification of the covenant.

But the people of Israel disregarded and disobeyed God's old covenant. God said, "From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my servants the prophets. But they did not listen to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their forefathers" (Jer 7:23-26). And God said, "Both the house of Israel and the house of Judah *have broken the covenant* I made with their forefathers. Therefore ... I will bring on them a disaster they cannot escape" (Jer 11:10-11).

In Jeremiah 31:31-34 Jeremiah predicts the inauguration of *a new covenant* and thereby announces the impending dissolution of the old covenant together with its order. Hebrews 8:7-9 says, "If there had been nothing *wrong with the first covenant*, no place would have been sought for another covenant. But God found fault with the people. Israel did *not remain faithful to God's covenant*". What was wrong with the first covenant was that the people of Israel broke it! They *did not* keep the covenant! They *could not* keep the covenant in their own power, because they were not regenerated.

Although the formulation of the covenant with Abraham remains the same throughout all ages, it is given a much deeper meaning and fulfilment in the New Testament, so that it is called "a new covenant". The superiority of the new covenant is based on three important differences:

The first difference. The implanting of God's law in their hearts is much more than the memorising of God's law! In Deuteronomy 6:6-7, God commands the Israelites that his commandments should be on their hearts and they should impress them on their children. However, even the memorising of the law of God cannot guarantee the performance of what is memorised! What is needed is *regeneration, a new nature, a heart liberated from its bondage to sin*. The people need a heart that not only spontaneously knows and loves the will of God but has the power to do it! Through Ezekiel God prophesied the coming of the new covenant. The new covenant would consist of a new relationship to God. God would remove all their sin, remove their heart of stone and give them a new heart and new spirit. God would put his Holy Spirit in them and thus cause them to obey his commandments (Ez 11:19-20; 36:25-28). Through Jeremiah God prophesied the coming of the new covenant. God would implant his laws in the hearts of people. Their knowledge of God would be a matter of personal experience. And God would blot out their sins (Jer 31:31-34). The covenant would be *a new covenant*, because it could impart this *new* heart, this regeneration through the Holy Spirit!

The second difference. The knowledge of God is a personal an intimate experience that goes far beyond the national acknowledgement of God! Already the second generation of Israelites in Canaan did not know the Lord or what he had done (Judg 2:10). Even just before their exile to Assyria, the prophet Hosea said that there was no faithfulness, love or acknowledgement of God in the land of Israel (Hos 4:1). There was only an ignoring of God's law (Hos 4:6). God desired mercy towards people and acknowledgement of God rather than sacrifices and offerings (Hos 6:6). And the prophet Jeremiah explained "knowing God" as "doing what was right and just" and "defending the cause of the poor and needy" (Jer 22:15-16). Thus, in the old covenant, the knowledge of God was simply *a national acknowledgement of God*, reflected in their character and conduct (1 Sam 2:12).

However, in the new covenant "knowing God" would be a personal and intimate experience. Each individual of God's people would possess this knowledge, because of the new heart each person receives. Hebrews 8:11 says, "They will all know me". 1 Corinthians 13:12 teaches that it is a knowledge of God, which grows until it reaches perfection when Christians see Christ face to face.

The third difference. The blotting out of sins was known in Israel, but becomes essential to the new relationship with God under the new covenant! Under the old covenant, God was incomparably a pardoning God, blotting out transgressions (Isa 43:25), sweeping away sins like the morning mist (Isa 44:22), treading sins underfoot and hurling all iniquities into the depths of the sea (Mic 7:18-19). He is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness to thousands, forgiving their wickedness, rebellion and sin (Ex 34:6-7). However, under the new covenant, forgiveness and eternal acquittal is written into the very terms of the covenant. In Hebrews 8:12 God says, "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more". When God remembers sins, his holiness takes action against sins and he punishes sins (Rev 16:19). But if God does *not remember* the sins of people, then it is *because his grace has determined to forgive them*, not in spite of his holiness, but in complete harmony with his holiness. He will never bring our sins against us in the Final Judgement Day! Therefore the writer of Hebrews teaches in Hebrews 7:22 and 8:6 that the new covenant is "*a better and superior covenant*" than the old covenant, because of whom Jesus Christ is and what he has done. He is the Mediator of the new covenant, fulfilling all the shadows of the Old Testament and making complete salvation a reality for every believer! The above three promises are "the better promises" (8:6) on which the new covenant is based. Based on the completed work of Jesus Christ, God first regenerates people and puts his laws in their hearts. Then they will all know God personally. Finally, God will remember their sins no more!

Two. There is a change of covenant, because the new covenant is extended from Israel to all the nations. The Old Testament already prophesied the extension of the new covenant to all nations. Jeremiah spoke of the new covenant that God would make with "the house of Israel", because at that time Israel was the only "people of God". However, Isaiah 42:6 prophesied that God would make the Messiah, Jesus Christ, "a covenant and light for all the nations"! What God promised to his people in the Old Testament, he now promises in the New Testament to all Christians from every nation: "I will be their God and they will be my people" (2 Cor 6:16)! The new covenant has made the old covenant obsolete. In stead of the Old Testament blood sacrifices, Christ instituted the new covenant with the cup at the Lord's Supper and called it "the blood of the covenant" (Mk 14:24). And Paul says that what the old covenant of the law was powerless to do, God did by sending Jesus Christ as a sacrifice of atonement. Jesus Christ fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law for us in our place (Rom 8:3-4). The age of "the law and prophets" of Israel is past. Hebrews 1:1 says that "the age of the Son" is here and is here to stay! Therefore, Hebrews 8:13 says, "By calling this covenant 'new', he has made the first covenant obsolete; and what is obsolete and ageing will soon disappear"!

Fifth. The letter to the Hebrews teaches a change of sacrifice in chapters 9-10.

One. Jesus Christ sacrificed his own body. While the Old Testament priests in the order of Aaron brought animal sacrifices, Jesus Christ gave himself as a living sacrifice for the sins of his people. In Psalm 40:6-8, the Psalmist, who knew the uselessness of animal sacrifices, dedicated his own life to God for the obedient accomplishment of his will. In Hebrews 10:5-7, this language is recognised as the language of Christ, when he came into the world. In the body, which God prepared for him, he fulfilled the will of God. At the end it was this consecrated body and this obedient life that he offered up to God in death on the cross. His sacrifice was completely acceptable to God and effectually cleansed his people in their heart and conscience.

Two. Jesus Christ sacrificed himself once-for-all. While the Old Testament priests in the order of Aaron had to sacrifice repeatedly, Jesus Christ sacrificed himself once-for-all. The Old Testament sacrifices had to be repeated because they could not meet the real need of the people. But the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is completely perfect and therefore was once-for-all time. The complete redemption and cleansing effects in the lives of the followers of Jesus Christ has been a matter of plain experience for more than 1900 years! Such a sacrifice as Jesus Christ brought needs no repetition. It is once-for-all time!

Three. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is completely effective. According to Hebrews 10:4, it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. But according to Hebrews 9:14, the blood of Jesus Christ purifies us from all sins (1 Jn 1:7). His death on the cross is a ransom for all sins committed during the Old Testament period (9:16) and a ransom for all our sins in the present time (Mk 10:45). His death obtained eternal redemption for us, his people (9:12). It cleanses our consciences from all guilt, thus justifying us before God (9:15; Rom 3:24-25). It makes us completely holy, thus sanctifying us before God (10:10; 1 Cor 1:30), and makes us perfect forever (10:14; Rom 8:30). This perfection includes the fact that God implants his laws in our hearts and writes them on our minds (10:16) and that he will not remember our sins and lawless acts anymore, that is, he will never bring our sins against us in the Final Judgement Day (10:17). And according to Hebrews 10:19-22, we can and may draw near to God with a sincere heart and in full assurance of faith (4:16).

Sixth. The letter to the Hebrews teaches a change of sanctuary.

Moses had to build a sanctuary according to the pattern shown to him on Mount Sinai. Although this sanctuary was *a copy*, it must not be viewed in terms of the philosophy of Plato, as a copy of some archetype or eternal idea in heaven.

The heavenly realities are not glorified archetypes of things on earth, but are the spiritual realities that cannot be fathomed by limited people on earth. The real heavenly sanctuary is not a more ideal type of sanctuary somewhere in heaven, but represents *the holy and majestic presence of God*. The writer uses the known things on earth, which people can imagine, to describe the realities in heaven, which people cannot even imagine!

The writers of the Bible, like Ezekiel, the writer of Hebrews and John in the book of Revelation, use *apocalyptic language* to describe the eternal heavenly realities or realities of the spiritual order. The writer reveals the realities in heaven in terms of “the new Jerusalem” and “the heavenly sanctuary”, which would come down onto the new earth after the Second Coming of Christ. Hebrews 12:22-24 describes the heavenly sanctuary as the reality of God who reveals himself in Christ and is surrounded by countless angels and the Church Triumphant, that is, Christians that have already died.

Also on earth the Church Militant does not need temple buildings to worship God, because every Christian is a spiritual stone of a spiritual temple in which God dwells through his Holy Spirit. Christians have direct and permanent access to God through Christ. Christians not only live on earth in the direct spiritual presence of God, but now also worship God no longer through the Old Testament sacrifices, but in spirit and in truth. Christians are a holy priesthood, which offers spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.

As is clear from all the cross-references to other passages in the New Testament, the letter to the Hebrews is not an intruder into the New Testament, but makes a proper and indispensable contribution to the whole New Testament!

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK.

First. During the next week, read James 1-5. Next week we will introduce James.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and preach God’s Kingdom” and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.