

Jesus, Our Sacrifice and Salvation



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S STUDY: Hebrews 9 and 10.

MEMORY TEXT: “For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Voluntarily, Jesus laid down His life and became the Supreme Sacrifice in order to save us. His sacrifice made superfluous all other sacrifices.

HE [JESUS] BEGAN HIS MINISTRY by being hungry, yet He is the Bread of Life. Jesus ended His earthly ministry by being thirsty, yet He is the Living Water. Jesus was weary, yet He is our rest. Jesus paid tribute, yet He is the King. Jesus was accused of having a demon, yet He cast out demons. Jesus wept, yet He wipes away our tears. Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver, yet He redeemed the world. Jesus was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, yet He is the Good Shepherd. Jesus died, yet by His death He destroyed the power of death.” —Gregory of Nazianzus, A.D. 381 (article, “Jesus” [cited 28 January 2000], from www.sermonillustrations.com). Let us look closely at some concepts found in Hebrews regarding His sacrifice.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What role does blood play in Hebrews? What did Christ accomplish with His death? Why does Hebrews stress the once-and-for-all nature of Christ’s death? How are we cleansed and purified of sin?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 6.

THE CENTRALITY OF BLOOD.

“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Heb. 10:4).

Why do you think that the blood of animals, even those used in the earthly sacrificial system (instituted by God Himself), was unable to “take away” sins?

The Greek term for “blood” appears twenty-one times in Hebrews, the highest concentration occurring in Hebrews 9. The theme of blood, introduced in Hebrews 9:7, becomes central in these verses and recurs constantly from verse 18 to the end of the chapter. In addition, a unique phrase is used in Hebrews 9:22, the “shedding of blood.”

Read the following texts: Hebrews 9:7, 18-22; 10:29; 12:24; 13:20. What’s the point they are making in regard to the blood? Why is blood deemed so important?

The old covenant and the new covenant were ratified by blood. Whereas “the blood of the covenant” in Hebrews 9 refers to the old covenant, in Hebrews 10–13 the focus is on the blood of Jesus and the new covenant.

Hebrews 9:7, 18, and 22 contain the word *without*. The high priest of the old system entered the Most Holy Place not *without* blood. The old covenant was not inaugurated *without* blood. There is no forgiveness *without* the shedding of blood. Blood is essential.

Hebrews 9:7-14, 25 contrasts the application of animal blood with the application of the blood of Jesus, thus showing the limits of the old system. Hebrews 9:18-21 emphasizes the importance of blood with regard to the covenant and the inauguration of the Old Testament sanctuary. Finally, Hebrews 9:22 contains the basic principle and forms a climax: Forgiveness of sin is possible only by shedding of blood; that is, the blood of Jesus, which alone has the ultimate power to purify and cleanse from sin.

Read Hebrews 9:22. Why can there be no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood? Whose blood? Hint: See Leviticus 17:11.

THE EFFECTS OF CHRIST’S SHED BLOOD.

We often tend to think of blood in very negative terms: It reminds us of violence, death, and war. In the book of Hebrews, however, blood means something quite positive.

What did Jesus accomplish by His blood being shed?

Heb. 9:12 _____

Heb. 9:14 _____

Heb. 9:22 _____

Heb. 10:19 _____

Heb. 13:12 _____

Take what you’ve written on these verses and summarize the gist of what they say Christ’s blood has accomplished. What do these accomplishments mean for us personally?

“The blood of Christ is life-giving and hope-giving, accomplishing fully the eternal purpose of God to rescue man from the predicament of sin. . . . No book of the New Testament so exalts the place of Calvary as does Hebrews. It sets out its message of the finality and all-sufficiency of the blood of Christ in such striking and contrasting terms with the Old Testament that every believer may indeed find absolute confidence.”—Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence*, pp. 112, 114.

Read Hebrews 10:29. How would you explain this text in the context of all the hopes presented in Hebrews?

The blood of Jesus purifies. It cleanses the sinner and the sanctuary (Heb. 9:14, 23); it also brings salvation. But if it can do all those things for those who accept it, then those who reject it must face the consequence, and that is—condemnation. Jesus does not want us to fall away from Him, the Source of eternal life. Hebrews is nothing, if not an exhortation to stay faithful.

THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST (Heb. 10:12).

While the concept of blood dominates Hebrews 9, the terms *sacrifice*, *offering*, and *to offer* find their highest concentration in Hebrews 10. The first part of Hebrews 10 discusses the inadequacy of the sacrifices of the old covenant. Starting with verse 10, the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus is contrasted with the services in the old tabernacle (see Heb. 10:10-18).

As mentioned earlier, but worth repeating (since the apostle does the same): Christ’s sacrifice was once and for all. That sacrifice did not need to be repeated, over and over, as in the Old Testament system.

Why do you think Hebrews emphasizes the fact that Christ had to die only once? Why is it not repeatable? What is it about its once-and-for-all nature that makes it better than the Old Testament system? What point is the author trying to make by stressing the uniqueness of this sacrifice? Keep in mind the general theme of Hebrews as you dwell on your answer. See also Hebrews 10:18.

Jesus offered up Himself, once and for all, as a sacrifice; this means that He took upon Himself the punishment that we deserved for our sins. He was sacrificed in our behalf. Sin brings death; but, out of His love for us, He faced that death in our stead. He bore the punishment that we deserve. This is the essence of His sacrifice.

Although it is said that He had been offered (Heb. 9:28), other texts perceive the initiative originating with Him. Hebrews 9:14: Jesus “through the eternal Spirit offered himself” (see 10:12). These texts seem to express that Jesus voluntarily accepted suffering and death, including humiliation.

The point is that His sacrifice is all sufficient. It is one sacrifice offered once for all. Its results are that people *are* sanctified and perfected and experience forgiveness (Heb. 10:10, 14, 18).

Is it fair that Jesus, being innocent, should suffer and die for the guilty? But do we want fairness? If we got fairness—in other words, if we got what we deserved—what would we get?

THE CONCEPT OF PURIFICATION (Heb. 10:22).

There are different ways to describe God’s saving activity. The Bible uses a variety of images and terms such as “justification,” “redemption,” “atonement,” “ransom,” and being “in Christ” to describe the same outcome. Another one of these words is “purification,” a concept heavily emphasized in Hebrews.

Look up Hebrews 1:3; 9:13, 14, 22, 23; 10:2, 22. In what ways do they show not only the idea of defilement but also of purification? What things are defiled? What things need to be purified, or cleansed? How do you understand what this cleansing means?

Justification pictures a legal process in which someone is declared just. Redemption is a picture explaining how something is being “bought back.” Forgiveness implies the cancellation of a debt. But purification alludes to the removal of uncleanness and defilement. And Hebrews teaches that humanity needs purification.

The first use of the concept of “cleanse, purify” occurs in the prologue of Hebrews. After Jesus has been introduced as the Creator, His achievements are mentioned, the first being that He “purged our sins” (Heb. 1:3). Thus, the tone is set for the rest of the epistle. Jesus has made purification of sins.

“By His atonement Christ accomplished both the cleansing of sin in general—which work was made possible by the sacrifice on the cross and will at last issue in the purification of the universe from sin—and the cleansing of the individual from sin. This latter work, also made possible by the cross, is still in progress and will not be finished till the last soul is saved.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 397.

“One is not *redeemed* from defilement, just as one is not *forgiven* it, *reconciled* to it, or *justified* in spite of it. If one is defiled, he must be made clean—the stain, the corruption must be taken away. And, argues the author of Hebrews, the means of that purifying and purification is blood, the blood of Christ Himself, the purifying agent par excellence.”—William Johnsson, *Issues in the Book of Hebrews* (Silver Spring, Md.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1989), p. 89.

Hebrews 9:13, 14 tells us that through Christ’s blood even our conscience can be purified. What do you think that means? How can our knowledge that Christ paid, in full, the penalty for all our sins and that we can stand faultless before God help “purge” or “cleanse” us from “dead works”?

JESUS, OUR AUTHOR AND FINISHER.

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

Read for today Hebrews 12:1-4. Notice that it comes right after the famous Hebrews 11, which gives a litany of loyal followers of the Lord who lived by faith. Chapter 12 begins by referring back to those people as examples for the Hebrews to follow.

In Hebrews 12:1, he talks about the Christian life as a “race.” How do you understand the meaning of that term in the context of living by faith?

Though pointing them first to various biblical figures, the author of Hebrews then points them to Jesus, whom he calls the “author and finisher of our faith.” The word for “author” there also can mean “originator,” “founder,” “pioneer,” “finisher,” and “perfecter.” What this tells us is that everything we need for salvation, for faith, for assurance, and for personal holiness comes from Jesus. He began the process of our salvation, and He will end it. It all rests in Him; and the work that He has accomplished for us, He will finish *in* us. Jesus is our salvation. In Him our redemption was completed. Our part is to cling to Him in faith, to live by faith, and to endure in His strength.

Yet, at the same time, it’s clear by the whole context of the passage, and in the message of the whole book of Hebrews, that He can work in us only as long as we allow Him to. It takes our cooperation, our surrender, our willingness to live by faith, to remain steadfast and unwavering, even amid great trial and tribulation.

Read carefully Hebrews 12:2-4. What is the author saying to the readers here? Not only is he pointing us to Jesus; he’s telling us to focus on a specific aspect of Christ’s life and ministry. What aspect is that, and what’s the specific point he’s trying to make in these passages?

FURTHER STUDY: Take a concordance and look up the terms *to save, salvation, and savior* or investigate the topic on salvation in the book of Romans: chapters 5:9, 10; 8:24; 9:27; 10:9, 13; 11:14, 26.

Note: “Our Saviour is in the sanctuary. . . . He is our interceding High Priest, making an atoning sacrifice for us, pleading in our behalf the efficacy of His blood. Parents should seek to represent this Saviour to their children to establish in their minds the plan of salvation. . . . The fact that the only-begotten Son of God gave His life because of man’s transgression, to satisfy justice and to vindicate the honor of God’s law, should be constantly kept before the minds of children and youth. . . . Christ suffered in order that through faith in Him our sins might be pardoned. He became man’s substitute and surety, Himself taking the punishment, though all undeserving, that we who deserved it might be free, and return to our allegiance to God. . . . He is our only hope of salvation. . . . Man repents, becomes contrite in heart, believes in Christ as His atoning sacrifice, and realizes that God is reconciled to him.”—Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 369.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read Hebrews 2:10; 5:7, 9; and 9:28. How do they show the work of both the Father and Son in the plan of salvation?
2. Hebrews talks about us being purified or cleansed from sin. How do we experience this purification and cleansing in our lives? God doesn’t do this without our cooperation. What must we do, as Christians, to allow this process to take place?
3. Read Hebrews 12:4. What is the apostle saying here to us about the battle against sin? What do his words imply about the struggle involved in that battle?

SUMMARY: Someone has written: “If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer. But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior.”—Author unknown ([cited 28 January 2000] from www.sermonillustrations.com). And the book of Hebrews, by stressing the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ, gives us a wonderful view of just what our Savior has done for us.



A New Twist on Evangelism

An Adventist teenager in The Netherlands found an innovative use for her mobile phone—she sent Bible-verse messages to a friend as a way to encourage her and share her faith. As a result of this, 19-year-old Esther Breure won her friend to Christ.

Esther shared her faith with several of her friends, but most were not really interested. However, one of her classmates was interested in the Bible, and the girls started studying together. But the girl’s parents objected to her interest in the Adventist faith. To encourage and support her friend, Esther began sending her short messages on her personal mobile phone each night just before going to bed. She always included a Bible verse.

One day Esther mentioned a devotional book she had. Her friend wanted one too, but Esther had only one. So she began to write short devotional letters in which she quoted a Bible verse and talked about what it meant to her. The next day she would give these letters to her friend at school. Esther’s friend appreciated the notes and responded with her own letters, in which she included questions and sometimes Bible verses and her own thoughts on the texts.

The two girls started writing devotional letters to each other every evening, giving them to the other the next day at school. When another girl noticed the exchange of letters, she too wanted to join. This girl now has started reading the Bible and writing notes to Esther and her friend every day. One day she commented that her Bible usually lay in a drawer, unused, but “now I *have* to read it!” She has attended a few Bible studies with the pastor and joined Esther at a youth congress.



Esther’s high-tech messages have proven to be an effective way to share her faith. Recently her friend took her stand for Christ and was baptized. Esther and her friend are part of a group of young Adventists who are planting a unique youth church in the city of Utrecht, The Netherlands.

Esther Breure (left) plans to serve a year in Thailand as a student missionary before starting her university studies in The Netherlands.

Produced by the Office of Mission
Sabbath School-Personal Ministries department of the General Conference
Email: gomission@gc.adventist.org