

Jesus and Our Future



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Hebrews 11–13.

MEMORY TEXT: “For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Hebrews 13:14, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: However much Christians are enjoying the privileges of being God’s people here and now, their ultimate hope exists in the final fulfillment of all promises: Christ’s second coming.

HOWEVER MUCH HEBREWS HAS FOCUSED ON THE PAST, such as the earthly-sanctuary service and the death of Christ—the picture would be incomplete if it stopped there. For this reason, Hebrews looks toward the future, as well, particularly to Jesus’ return, which culminates the plan of salvation. Without this dimension, the Christian hope would be in vain. Maybe that’s why the word *hope* is found five times in the book, and for Christians, that hope is eternity with God in a new world, the one that His people have been eagerly anticipating since the fall in Eden and the first promise of salvation, a promise made complete in Jesus.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why does the author of Hebrews imply that he’s living in the last days? Why does the Bible talk about salvation as a present reality and at the same time a future hope? How is the sanctuary tied in with the second coming of Jesus?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 27.

THE TIME OF THE END.

Read Hebrews 1:2 and Hebrews 9:26. What do they mean by talking about the “last days” and “the end of the world” even before the first century A.D. had ended?

How do we understand these words? Perhaps, like this: The first coming of Christ was a climactic event that brought about a change of eras. A whole new spiritual order had been inaugurated by the ministry of Jesus, who had to suffer and die before sin and suffering ever could be over. The supreme sacrifice had been offered; the penalty for sin had been paid. All that was needed to secure salvation had been taken care of with Jesus’ once-and-for-all sacrifice. These things had to happen before the reality of a new heavens and a new earth could ever be realized. In this sense, and from this perspective, the apostle could talk about his time as the “end of the world,” no matter how many more centuries would elapse before Christ returned.

Read 1 Peter 1:18-20. Notice how he ties in the death of Jesus with the “last times.” Why did Jesus have to die before these “last times” could arrive?

The author of Hebrews wanted to let readers know that the old ways are gone and that something new and better, something that will bring to fruition all their hopes, has taken place through Jesus. The author, it seems, wasn’t so much trying to place them in a time line as much as let them know that they were in a new spiritual age.

“With the first advent of Christ, the new age had broken into or overlapped the old. The two ages would continue to exist side by side until the Second Advent, when the old age would finally be destroyed. Christians, therefore, live in two worlds at once. . . .”

Jesus even could combine the two concepts together in one sentence: ‘I tell you the truth, a time *is coming* and *has now come* when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God’ (John 5:25, NIV).” —Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End-Time* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994), pp. 77, 78, emphasis author’s.

We like to say that we are living in “the last days.” How do some of the verses we looked at today help us keep that concept in proper perspective?

THE ALREADY AND THE NOT-YET.

In the New Testament, and especially in Paul's writings, we find the concept of the "already/not-yet." What this means is that we are already saved and yet we are not finally saved. For example, John 5:24 reads, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, *hath* everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (emphasis supplied). Thus, we are already saved; we have eternal life, even now. In contrast, Matthew 19:29 reads, "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and *shall inherit* everlasting life" (emphasis supplied). In other words, final salvation is yet to come (for another example of this contrast, see Ephesians 2:6 and Romans 8:22-24).

In what ways does this already/not-yet tension appear in Hebrews? See Hebrews 12:28, 11:13-16. How can we resolve this tension? Or should we?

There are all sorts of tensions in the Bible that, if properly understood, actually harmonize with each other in helping fill in the big picture. The problem comes when we emphasize one aspect at the expense of another; instead, we should attempt to balance them out.

The Bible is full of statements that seem to be opposed to each other and yet both are true: While living on earth, Jesus was fully divine and fully human. The Bible is written by human authors; even so, it is the Word of God. God is independent of time, though He relates to us in time. There is one Godhead, but the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are called God. We are saved by faith and judged by works.

When it comes to God and His plan of salvation, we have to acknowledge that our mind can grasp only part of the reality, a few slices at best. In such a context, we must realize, too, that opposites are not necessarily contradictory but can simply be different parts of a much bigger picture. Trouble comes when we focus too much on a single part at the expense of the whole.

Look up these verses: John 3:15, 36; 1 Timothy 6:12; 1 John 5:12, 13. These, among many others, stress that we have eternal life now. Though the full realization of it wouldn't come until Christ returns, how do these promises give us comfort and assurance for the present? How differently should we live, knowing that we *have* eternal life, even now?

FUTURE EVENTS.

"But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city" (Heb. 11:16).

The discussion on the last days and on the already and the not-yet shows that Jesus is at the center of the end. "When the New Testament is rightly understood, Jesus Christ is what the end is all about."—Paulien, p. 81.

Which events—still future and depending on Jesus' intervention—are mentioned in Hebrews?

Heb. 9:28; 10:25, 36, 37 _____

Heb. 6:2; 9:27; 10:27, 30 _____

Heb. 11:16; 13:14 _____

Heb. 11:26, 39, 40 _____

Although the apostle refers to Christ's second coming, the resurrection of the dead, and the judgment, no timetable is given, either in Hebrews or in any part of the Bible. No doubt, it is more important to live a holy life than to know precisely when final events will play out, which is probably why the emphasis on the Bible is to be ready for the return of Christ, whenever it happens.

Future judgment is mentioned quite often in Hebrews. In 10:27, the judgment seems to refer to what we call "the executive judgment," because the consuming fire is mentioned (see Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:9, 10). Whenever and however it all takes place, we haven't been told; according to Hebrews, however, a few points come through:

1. God functions as Judge (Heb. 12:23).
2. He is going to recompense evil (Heb. 10:30).
3. He will reward His people (Heb. 11:26).

Though the emphasis in Hebrews is on the death of Christ and on His high-priestly ministry in heaven, there is still a clear focus on the end: judgment, Second Coming, resurrection of the dead, and the final reward. Why do you think that is so? As you ponder your answer, ask yourself this question, What is the purpose of Christ's death and high-priestly ministry as depicted in Hebrews?

THE HEAVENLY CITY.

Three passages in Hebrews talk about the heavenly city. What are similarities and differences in these passages? Heb. 11:10-16; 12:18-24; 13:12-14.

Old Testament believers, as well as followers of Christ, are on their way to the heavenly city. Hebrews 11:10-16 describes Abraham and the patriarchs as pilgrims heading toward the real homeland, the heavenly fatherland, the city of God. Old Testament times, New Testament times, it makes no difference: All of God’s people end up in the same place *if they will endure patiently unto the end*. Again, this is a key theme in Hebrews: Don’t give up!

The second passage describes the new-covenant community. The author makes an interesting contrast between Mt. Sinai, with all its fire and darkness and tempest and fear and Mount Zion (a common name for the earthly Jerusalem), the heavenly Jerusalem. Here, again, in a very poetic and powerful manner, he contrasts the old way with the new, letting the people know that thanks to Jesus they have a better revelation of truth than those who lived in the old covenant. In fact, believers are portrayed as having already come to the city of God. “The new covenant people . . . [have] already arrived at the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem and . . . are only waiting for the revelation of the ‘unshakable kingdom’ (v 28) they are about to receive.”—W. L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), pp. 470, 466.

Hebrews 13:12-14 presents a contrast between the earthly Jerusalem, which Jesus was forced to leave (He was crucified outside the gates of Jerusalem), and the future city, “the one to come,” the one all of God’s faithful followers are promised as their home.

Focus especially on Hebrews 13:14. What does the author mean when he says that we have “no continuing” city? What’s the point he’s making? Why don’t we have such a city? Why can’t we have one here, even if we wanted one? Once you answer that, ask yourself, Do I live as though I really believe that I have no continuing city? Or am I living as though this were my permanent home? Matthew 6:19-21 will help you find the answer.

THE SANCTUARY AND THE SECOND COMING.

As we’ve seen, and studied this whole quarter, the book of Hebrews cannot be understood apart from the Hebrew sanctuary service. In fact, it would be hard to understand the plan of salvation, particularly the death of Christ as the substitutionary sacrifice for sin, apart from an understanding of the Jewish sacrificial system. The whole plan of salvation is built around the concepts and symbols first revealed in the Old Testament sanctuary; in Christ, they reach their fulfillment.

We’ve seen, too, that Hebrews, while focusing on the past (Christ’s death) and on the present (Christ’s ministry in heaven), also looks toward the future, to the Second Coming and all that it entails.

Thus, Hebrews links the Second Coming with the sanctuary. How could it not? If the sanctuary points to salvation, and salvation is consummated in the Second Coming, then by necessity the sanctuary must be linked to the Second Coming. It’s hard to see how one logically could be separated from the other. No wonder, as Adventists with a sharp focus on the Second Coming, we have a distinct sanctuary message to present to the world.

In what ways does the author of Hebrews in the following verses link the sanctuary motif to the second coming of Christ?

Heb. 9:24-28 _____

Heb. 10:11-13 _____

Heb. 12:22-24 _____

The second advent of Christ is the consummation of what Jesus had done on the cross and of what He is doing as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. Both His death and His high-priestly ministry would be of no avail without the Second Coming.

Final salvation will become a reality when Jesus returns and takes His people to Mt. Zion, to the future city, the heavenly Jerusalem, where they can live in the direct presence of God. The teaching about the sanctuary and the teaching about the last things belong together and should not be separated.

Dwell again on the emphasis and importance the book of Hebrews has placed on the sanctuary service in heaven. How does this emphasis strengthen our faith that as Adventists we are on the right track, with strong emphasis on the heavenly sanctuary, as well?

FURTHER STUDY: Study James 5:1-11 and Revelation 22:6-21 and reflect on our glorious hope, as well as on the challenges and promises listed in these passages. Read also Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, pp. 283–287, 297, 298, 304–306.

Note: “We are homeward bound. He who loved us so much as to die for us hath builded for us a city. The New Jerusalem is our place of rest. There will be no sadness in the city of God. No wail of sorrow, no dirge of crushed hopes and buried affections, will evermore be heard. Soon the garments of heaviness will be changed for the wedding garment. Soon we shall witness the coronation of our King. Those whose lives have been hidden with Christ, those who on this earth have fought the good fight of faith, will shine forth with the Redeemer’s glory in the kingdom of God. It will not be long till we shall see Him in whom our hopes of eternal life are centered. And in His presence, all the trials and sufferings of this life will be as nothingness. ‘Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.’ [Hebrews 10:35-37.] Look up, look up, and let your faith continually increase. Let this faith guide you along the narrow path that leads through the gates of the city of God into the great beyond, the wide, unbounded future of glory that is for the redeemed.” —Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 287, 288.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why do the New Testament and also Hebrews present such a strong message about end-time events? Why are end-time events, such as the Second Coming, so important to the Christian faith?
2. Look again at the Ellen White quote above. How does her statement about those who fought “the good fight of faith” fit in perfectly with the basic message of the book of Hebrews?
3. According to some of the texts this week, those who have accepted Christ have, even now, eternal life. How would you explain what this means to a non-Christian, who sees Christians go to the grave just as nonbelievers do?

SUMMARY: As guests and strangers in this world, we are on the move toward a goal, the heavenly city. We are on the way to see God face to face.



I Don't Want to Become a Dog

J. H. Zachary

All her life Arasa had worked to build a worthy karma that would prepare her for a better life after her death. She carefully followed the instructions of her Buddhist priests. She was taught that there is no forgiveness for the evil that one does. In the next life each person will be rewarded for the good and evil in one’s life. “If you do evil you could become a dog in your next life,” she was taught.

While in her late teens she witnessed an accident: An automobile ran over a dog. It lay before her dead in the road. A horror filled her heart. *I don't want to be a dog in the next life. What shall I do?*

The Buddhist teaching of reincarnation filled her heart with fear. With no one to take care of the evil in her life, she would one day face the consequences. She began to wonder, *Is this teaching really true? Will I suffer in my next existence for all my evil?*

One day a friend invited her to attend a Christmas party. She had never attended a Christian meeting. She knew nothing about Jesus. During the party she heard the story of Jesus. She was impressed by His miracle birth and His life of service for others. The amazing story of the cruel death of this wonderful Person touched her heart.

She was amazed to learn that He died for the evil in the lives of others. He was a good man, perfect in every way. She left that party with some new thoughts. *The Christian God died for my sins! I will not be a dog in the next life.*

Then, when she was 20 years of age, her grandfather from Germany came for a visit. He was a Christian. He repeatedly told her that Jesus was soon to return. She must get ready to meet Him. She took Bible studies and was baptized.



Arasa felt a great burden for her family. One of her brothers filled his house with many idols. He resisted Arasa’s testimony. Arasa prayed for him every day. “I have seen a miracle,” she told me. “My brother is now a believer in Jesus. Thank You, Jesus, for being so kind and powerful.”

Arasa (left). J. H. Zachary is coordinator of international evangelism for The Quiet Hour.

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

Bible Study Guide for Fourth Quarter, 2003

The topic of study for this quarter's Bible Study Guide is the book of Jonah, written by JoAnn Davidson. The focus of Jonah is not on the "great fish" that swallowed Jonah alive but on the "great God" who prepared that fish. The book of Jonah reveals one thing that never changes: God's love for even the most unlovable among us.

Lesson 1: Biblical Prophets, Modern Critics

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

Sunday: Prophetic Autobiographies.

Monday: "And the Word of the Lord . . ."

Tuesday: More Historical Pointers.

Wednesday: The Miracles in Jonah.

Thursday: The Miracles in Jonah (continued).

MEMORY TEXT: Amos 3:7, NKJV.

SABBATH GEM: God had a good reason for putting Jonah in the Bible. With the book of Jonah, He shows us He is more than willing to do the unexpected in order to fulfill His purposes for us.

Lesson 2: People and Places

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:

Sunday: The Personal Touch (John. 1:1, 2).

Monday: The Hair on Our Heads (Matt. 10:30).

Tuesday: "Hey, You!"

Wednesday: People and Places.

Thursday: Nineveh—That Great City.

MEMORY TEXT: Jeremiah 1:5.

SABBATH GEM: The first few verses of the book of Jonah exemplify this biblical truth: God not only knows each of us personally but He is interested in our lives.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired

The regular Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.