

# The Letter to the Hebrews and to Us



## SABBATH—DECEMBER 25

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Hebrews 2:3, 4; Hebrews 10:32–34; Hebrews 2:18; 1 Kings 19:5–18; Hebrews 1:2.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “You must be patient. After you have done what God wants, you will get what he promised you” (Hebrews 10:36, ERV).

**DID YOU EVER WANT TO TRAVEL BACK IN TIME** to see Jesus or one of His 12 followers preach? Sure, we can read parts of their sermons in the Bible. But that is not the same thing as talking with Jesus or His followers in person. God does give us one full sermon in a book of the Bible: the letter to the Hebrews. Some Bible experts say that this letter is the first whole sermon we have.

Paul wrote the letter to the Hebrews. He tells his readers, “I wrote this letter to strengthen [give you hope and to help] you” (Hebrews 13:22, ERV). Paul wrote Hebrews to Christians who were attacked and hurt after they accepted Jesus. These Christians lived through many hard times. People lied and said mean and nasty things against the Christians in public to hurt them (Hebrews 10:32–34). Some of the Christians lost money and riches when they accepted Jesus (Hebrews 13:5, 6). We all have suffered some of these same things today for our faith, right?

So, Paul encourages his readers (and us) to stay strong in faith. We must have faith in Jesus. When times are hard, we must look only at Jesus. Jesus is at His temple in heaven right now. There, He works hard to save us. He answers our prayers and gives us power over sin.



**Jesus answers our prayers and gives us power over sin.**

**A STRONG AND BEAUTIFUL START (Hebrews 2:3, 4)**

If we want to understand Hebrews, we must first know more about the people Paul wrote to. Who were they? What happened to them in the past? What is happening in their lives when they get the letter from Paul?

**Paul writes his letter to a group of Christians. What experience do these Christians have after they accept Jesus? Read Hebrews 2:3, 4 for the answer.**

Hebrews 2:3, 4 shows us that the people Paul writes to did not hear Jesus Himself preach. These people heard the Good News from other preachers.

Paul also says the preachers “proved to us” that their message came from God (Hebrews 2:3, ERV). God Himself “showed that this message is true by signs and wonders. He showed that it’s true by different kinds [types] of miracles. God also showed that this message is true by the gifts of the Holy Spirit” (Hebrews 2:4, NIV). Often, many miracles happened when preachers announced the Good News in new places. These preachers healed the sick and removed demons from inside people. Often God poured His Spirit on people. Then these new Christians got spiritual gifts.

This same thing happened when the Christian church first started. God poured His Spirit on His followers in Jerusalem. They started to talk in languages they never knew before. They did many miracles (Acts 2; Acts 3). Philip did miracles in Samaria (Acts 8). Peter did miracles, too, in Joppa and Caesarea (Acts 9; Acts 10). Paul also did miracles in Asia Minor and Europe (Acts 13–28). The miracles helped prove that their messages came from God (Hebrews 12:25–29).

The Holy Spirit helped Christians to believe that God forgave their sins. So, Christians were not afraid to be judged by God. Their prayers were brave. Their faith was strong. Their religious experience was filled with joy (Acts 2:37–47). The Holy Spirit also made people free from demons. This work was powerful proof that God was stronger than Satan. The Spirit showed that the kingdom of God was alive in the hearts of people that God freed from Satan.

**When did you first accept Jesus as your Savior? What is your story? How did your faith in Jesus grow stronger since you accepted Jesus? Why should we remember when and how God first helped us?**



**God poured His Spirit  
on His followers  
in Jerusalem.**

**HARD TIMES (Hebrews 10:32–34)**

When people joined the church, their lives changed. They became different from the people in the community around them. The people in the community felt judged by the holy lifestyle of the Christians. So, the people caused a lot of trouble for the church.



People locked the Christians in prison.

**What experience did the Christians in the book of Hebrews have after they accepted Jesus as their Savior? Read Hebrews 10:32–34 and Hebrews 13:3 for the answer.**

Paul writes to Christians who suffered because of their faith. (You can read in Acts 16:19–22 and Acts 17:1–9 about other Christians who were attacked because of their faith). People locked the Christians in prison. Possibly, the Christians were beaten. Leaders at that time were not fair. They often punished people without proof that the people were guilty (read Acts 16:22, 23 for an example).

**Read Hebrews 11:24–26 and 1 Peter 4:14, 16. How do the experiences of Moses and the Christians in 1 Peter help us understand why Christians were hurt and beaten?**

Do you see the words “to suffer with God’s people” in Hebrews 11:25, NLV? Moses chose to suffer shame and insults when he gave his life to God. In the same way, we may suffer for Jesus when we follow Him. Christians had this same experience in New Testament times. Many people hated Christians. Why? Because many non-Christians thought that Christians believed in strange things. People can get upset easily when they do not understand your beliefs. They also can get upset if your way of life makes them feel guilty or ashamed. About 20 years after Jesus woke up from the dead, Tacitus, a Roman leader, believed that Christians loved only other Christians and hated everyone else. Why did Tacitus say this? We do not know for sure. Whatever his reason, we know Tacitus was wrong. But his words show us that many Christians suffered for their faith. That group included the Christians that Paul wrote to in his letter.

**Do we suffer for Jesus today? If yes, how do we suffer?**

**SICKNESS (Hebrews 2:18)**

The Christians that Paul writes to in Hebrews were hurt and rejected by members of their own community. The Christians fought hard to keep their faith. They fought a good fight. Now they are tired.

**Read Hebrews 2:18; Hebrews 3:12, 13; Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 10:25; Hebrews 12:3, 12, 13; and Hebrews 13:1–9, 13. What problems did the Christians have?**

Paul says that the Christians continued to have many troubles. People continued to say awful things in public about the Christians (Hebrews 13:13). Some Christians had not gotten out of prison (Hebrews 13:3). No doubt, the church spent a lot of money to help Christians in prison. So, the Christians were tired of all their troubles (Hebrews 12:12, 13). Paul did not want them to “get discouraged” (Hebrews 12:3, ERV) and “lose hope” (Hebrews 12:3, NIV).

Sometimes we have a hard time after we win big. When our success is over, we relax. So, we are not ready for the next time our enemies attack us. We do not have enough strength to fight back when we are hurt a second time.

**Read about Elijah in 1 Kings chapters 18 and 19. Now read 1 Kings 19:1–4. What happens to Elijah in this part of the story?**

“Elijah has the same experience many people have after they show a lot of faith and are a success. Elijah fears that the changes that started on Carmel may not continue. He becomes sad. God honored Elijah very much. This honor made Elijah feel as if he stood on top of the very high hill named Pisgah. Now Elijah feels as if he is down low in a valley. When the Holy Spirit led Elijah, he stayed strong in faith. But now he feels discouraged. Jezebel swears she will kill Elijah. Satan works hard in the heart of this evil woman and in her plans. Fear causes Elijah to let go of his faith in God. Elijah forgets God and runs. Elijah runs on and on until he comes alone to a desert.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pages 161, 162, adapted.

**Think about the times when you failed in your Christian life. What caused you to fail? If you can go back and try again, what would you change?**



**“When the Holy Spirit led Elijah, he stayed strong in faith. But now he feels discouraged.”**

**STAY CLOSE TO EACH OTHER (1 Kings 19:5–18)**

What advice does Paul give to his readers about their problems? What can we learn from Paul to help us with our own problems? Before we look at this advice, let us first look at how God helps Elijah heal after he loses hope.

**Read 1 Kings 19:5–18. As we see from these verses, what does God do to help Elijah have faith again?**



**God takes care of His servants when they suffer. He helps them become strong in faith again.**

1 Kings 19:5–18 shows us the tender care and wisdom of God. God takes care of His servants when they suffer. He helps them become strong in faith again. God does several things for Elijah: (1) God gives Elijah food and lets him rest. (2) Then, in the cave, God gently scolds Elijah by saying, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:9, NLV). (3) God also shows Elijah how He works. God shows His servant that He is not in the wind. God is not in the earthquake. God is not in the fire. God is only in a “gentle blowing” (1 Kings 19:12, NLV). The gentle wind shows us important Bible truth. We may not always see or feel God work, but we must believe God works for us and keeps His promises. (4) After this lesson, God gives Elijah more work to do. God helps Elijah learn to trust Him about the future.

**What advice does Paul give his readers in Hebrews 2:1; Hebrews 3:12–14; Hebrews 5:11–Hebrews 6:3; and Hebrews 10:19–25?**

Several times in Hebrews Paul tells his readers things they must do to grow strong again in faith: (1) Take care of each other. (2) Share your meals together. (3) Visit the Christians in prison and care for their needs. (4) Share your things and give freely to everyone in need. If you do, God will not forget about you (Hebrews 13:1–6). Paul teaches his readers, then encourages them. (5) Paul warns them not to “be pulled away” from Bible truth (Hebrews 2:1, ERV). (6) He also warns them to “be careful that none of you has the evil thoughts that cause so much doubt that you stop following the living God” (Hebrews 3:12, ERV). (7) Paul also encourages his readers to go to church meetings (Hebrews 10:25). So, in short, Paul says: (1) stay close to each other, (2) encourage each other, (3) show love, and (4) do good works. Then Paul tells his readers to remember that Jesus works for them in the temple in heaven (Hebrews 8:1, 2; Hebrews 12:1–4).

## IN THESE LAST DAYS (Hebrews 1:2)

Read Hebrews 1:2; Hebrews 9:26–28; Hebrews 10:25, 36–38; and Hebrews 12:25–28. What is the message in these verses? What does Paul want us to understand about time?

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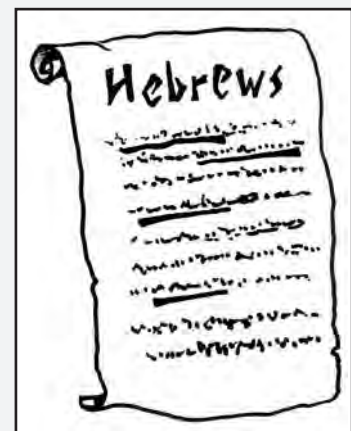


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Paul wants readers to understand a very important idea about time that makes his message more powerful. We live in the “last days” (Hebrews 1:2, ERV) when the promises God made will finally happen (Hebrews 10:36–38). So, Paul warns readers to pay attention to his message. Paul often compares readers to the Israelites in the desert who were about to enter the Promised Land. Paul wants readers to remember, “ ‘Very soon now, the one who is coming will come and will not be late’ ” (Hebrews 10:37, ERV). Then Paul encourages his readers: “We are not the people who turn back and so are lost. But we are people who believe, and so we are saved” (Hebrews 10:39, WE). The people of God in the past often met many dangers just before God kept His promises to them. As modern Israel, we should remember this important lesson.

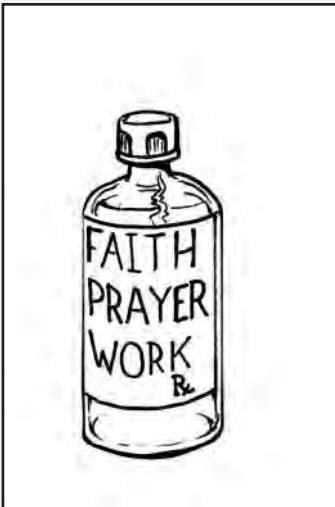
The book of Numbers talks about these dangers. Israel suffered two times right before they entered the Promised Land. We may read about the first time in Numbers 13 and 14. These chapters tell us that several evil leaders “poisoned” the minds of the people with doubts. The doubts caused the people to lose faith. Then the people decided to choose a new leader to replace Moses and lead them back to Egypt. Just before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they sinned a second time. The Israelites fell into a trap of sex sins and false worship of Baal at Peor (Numbers 24; Numbers 25). Satan led the Israelites to sin and caused God to be angry with them.

Paul warns us against both dangers: sex sins and false worship. First, Paul says to hold on to faith and look only at Jesus (Hebrews 4:14; Hebrews 10:23; Hebrews 12:1–4). Second, Paul warns against sex sins and loving money (Hebrews 13:4–6). Finally, Paul tells readers to obey their leaders (Hebrews 13:7, 17).



Paul warns readers to pay careful attention to his message.

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** David A. deSilva explains why the Christians in New Testament times suffered public shame and insult: “Christians chose a way of life that was different from their old way of life. Their way of life caused other people to think that they did not want to be friends or meet them because they were not Christian. Most everyone thought Christians were against the government, too. People in New Testament times felt that they should be loyal to the gods and make offerings to them. When people did these things, they showed they were loyal to the government, their leaders, friends, and family. So, worship of the gods showed that a person wanted to keep the community strong. That is why people did not trust the Christians and Jews who did not worship the gods. The people looked at Christians and Jews as lawbreakers against the government of the kingdom of Rome.”—*Perseverance in Gratitude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), page 12, adapted.



**“God has medicine that will not fail to heal people who have lost hope. The medicine is faith, prayer, and work.”**

“God has medicine that will not fail to heal people who have lost hope. The medicine is faith, prayer, and work. Faith and serving God will help a person feel trust and joy. This trust and joy will grow stronger every day. Is your heart filled with worry or a hopeless feeling? When things look the worst, do not fear. Have faith in God. He knows the things you need. God has all power. His love never fails or ends. He never grows tired of showing you mercy. Do not fear that He will fail to keep His promise. God is everlasting Truth. He will never change the agreement He made with the people who love Him. He will give His loyal servants exactly what they need. Paul tells us what Jesus Christ told him: ‘I am all you need. I give you My loving-favor. My power works best in weak people.’ I am happy to be weak and have troubles so I can have Christ’s power in me’ (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10, [NLV]).”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pages 164, 165, adapted.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① We have a Christian way of life that makes us different and often separates us from other people. How can we live this way of life without causing other people to think we do not care about them?
- ② Compare the experience of the Christians in Hebrews with the Laodicean church in Revelation 3:14–22. How is the experience of the two groups the same or different?

## GUARDED BY ANGELS

We often think that getting married is a time for joy and celebration. But not for Khome and her husband, Eung. They only suffer after they get married.

Khome and Eung live in a village in Laos. Laos is a country in Southeast Asia. Khome belongs to the Laven people group. Khome's mother is a fortuneteller. She talks to evil spirits. As a child, Khome is taught to be a fortuneteller, too. But Khome learns about Jesus and gives Him her life. Then Khome's mother gets very angry. Worse, Khome marries a Christian man from another people group. Everyone in the village is against Khome and her husband. The evil spirits are angry, too.

Soon after, an evil spirit comes to Khome. The evil spirit laughs at her. So, Khome kneels down and prays. Then she tries to walk to her Bible. The Bible is only a few feet away. But Khome can hardly move. Her feet feel so heavy! Khome prays, "God, protect me." Finally, Khome reaches her Bible. She reads a few verses and prays in the name of Jesus. The evil spirit leaves.

For many years, the evil spirits bother Khome. But Khome and Eung continue to worship God in their home. Everyone in the village hates Khome and Eung. Someone in the village lies about them to the police. This person accuses Khome and Eung of doing something bad. The policemen try to arrest Khome and Eung at their home. Two powerful angels stop the policemen in front of the house. The policemen run away in fear. The police come back and try to arrest the couple again. But when the policemen come inside the house, they see two mighty angels. The angels scare the policemen away. People in the village see angels from heaven protect Khome and Eung. So, the people start to respect Khome and Eung.

Khome and Eung start to share their faith. Little by little, people start to come to Khome and Eung for help. Sick people and people filled with demons come, too. They ask to be healed. Soon people start to accept Jesus. The home of Khome and Eung becomes a house church. One of the people who comes to the house church is Khome's sister. At first, the sister does not want anything to do with Jesus. But she sees a bright light shining in Khome's house at night. The next day, the sister asks Khome how she had light in her home when no one in the village had any electricity! Khome was asleep and did not see the light. For sure, the light is a miracle. So, Khome's sister accepts Jesus.

Today, Khome and Eung share Jesus with the Laven people in Laos. Part of the 13th Sabbath Offering for this quarter will help open a school for children in Laos. Please pray for this school. Pray for Eung and Khome and for the dear people in Laos.

## INSIDE *Story*

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



Two powerful angels stop the policemen in front of the house.

