

The New Way to God



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 26

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Hebrews 9:24; Hebrews 12:18–21; Leviticus 16:1, 2; Hebrews 10:19–22; Hebrews 12:22–24.

MEMORY VERSE: “Christ [Jesus] did not enter a sacred [holy] tent made with human hands. That tent was only a copy of the true [real] one. He [Jesus] entered heaven itself. He did it to stand in front of God for us. He [Jesus] is there right now” (Hebrews 9:24, NIV).



Then the followers watched
Jesus go to heaven.

THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS are happy. A short time ago, the followers were with Jesus on the Hill of Olives. Before Jesus left the earth, He invited His followers to come to God in His name. Then the followers watched Jesus go to heaven. In heaven, God made Jesus the King of the whole earth. Now the followers of Jesus know that God will answer their prayers (John 14:13, 14). Yes, the followers must keep living on earth where evil people may hurt them. But the followers are full of hope. They know that Jesus went to heaven to make a home for them (John 14:1–3). Jesus will save them from sin. Jesus also made a new way for them into heaven. Jesus made this way by His blood.

The teaching that Jesus went to heaven is important to the book of Hebrews. After He went to heaven, Jesus started His work as our High Priest, or Top Spiritual Leader, and King. Most important, the New Agreement started. Now we can come to God with firm trust and bold faith. We can do these things because of Jesus and His holy life.

WHEN JESUS COMES TO THE FATHER (Hebrews 9:24)

**Why does Jesus leave this earth and go to heaven?
For the answer, read Hebrews 9:24.**

To help us understand Hebrews 9:24, let us first look at the feasts that God gave to Israel: “ ‘Three times a year you must celebrate a feast in my honor. Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened [flat] Bread. For seven days, eat bread made without yeast [makes dough rise], just as I commanded you. Do it at the appointed [chosen] time in the month of Aviv [late March]. You came out of Egypt in that month. You must not come to worship me with your hands empty [with no offering]. Celebrate the Feast of Weeks. Bring the first share [part] of your crops from your fields. Celebrate the Feast of Booths [shelters]. Hold it in the fall when you gather in [collect] your crops from your fields. Three times a year all your men must come to worship me. I am your LORD and King’ ” (Exodus 23:14–17, Nlrv).

So, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or Passover, showed the time when God freed Israel from Egypt. Next came the Feast of Weeks, also named Pentecost. By New Testament times, the Jews celebrated Pentecost as the time when God gave Israel the law at Sinai. Finally, the Feast of Booths showed the time when God cared for Israel in the desert.

Now that we reviewed the feasts, let us go back to Hebrews 9:24. This verse shows Jesus coming to the Father after He wakes up from the dead. Jesus does not come empty handed. He offers God a better gift than any priest, or holy leader, can give: His own blood (Hebrews 9:23, 24).

Jesus honors all the special feasts right on time. He dies at the ninth hour the day before Passover. The ninth hour is the time when the Passover lamb is killed (John 19:14; Matthew 27:45–50). Then Jesus wakes up from the dead and goes to heaven where God accepts His offering for our sins (John 20:17; 1 Corinthians 15:20). On this day, the priest waves the ripe barley to show thanks to God for the first crops (Leviticus 23:10–12). 40 days later, Jesus starts His work for us in heaven and pours out the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1; Acts 2). At this time, the New Agreement starts.

Why did males in Bible times travel to the feasts? They went to “see [God’s] face” (Psalm 17:15, ERV). To “see the face of God” shows us someone who asks God for help (2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 27:8; Psalm 105:4). That is what Jesus does when He goes to heaven. He asks God to help us.



**“Bring the first share [part]
of your crops from your
fields” (Exodus 23:16, Nlrv).**

THE INVITATION FROM GOD (Hebrews 12:18–21)

What experience does Israel have at Sinai? For the answer, read Hebrews 12:18–21.



On the third day, the people “wait until the trumpet blows” first before they go near the mountain (Exodus 19:13, ERV).

God has a special plan for His people after He frees them from Egypt. What is this plan? God wants a special, personal friendship with His people. God tells Israel, “ ‘You people saw what I did to the people of Egypt. You saw that I carried you out of Egypt like [the same as] an eagle and brought you here to me’ ” (Exodus 19:4, ERV; read also Exodus 19:3).

So, God tells Moses to help the people get ready to meet Him (Exodus 19:10–15). The people who do not get ready will die. So, the people get ready for two days. They wash their clothes. They pray. They ask God to clean their hearts from sin. On the third day, the people “wait until the trumpet blows” first before they go near the mountain (Exodus 19:13, ERV). God wants the people to have the same experience Moses and the leaders will have later when they go up the mountain to meet God. At that time, the leaders “saw God, and ate and drank” and did not die (Exodus 24:9–11, NLV). Later, Israel understands that God showed His glory to them when He came down on the mountain. They also learned that humans can “ ‘continue living even after God speaks to’ ” them (Deuteronomy 5:24, ERV). But when the time comes for the people to come near the mountain, they do not have enough faith. Moses talks about this time many years later: “ ‘You were afraid of the fire and did not want to approach the mountain’ ” (Deuteronomy 5:5, NLT). So, the people ask Moses to go up the mountain to talk to God for them (Deuteronomy 5:25–27; compare with Exodus 20:18–21).

God showed His glory at Sinai to teach His people an important lesson. God wanted His people to “fear” or respect and obey Him. When we “fear” the Lord, we will have life, wisdom, and honor (Deuteronomy 4:10; compare with Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; Proverbs 9:10; Proverbs 10:27). God also wanted His people to see that He is full of mercy and love for His people (Exodus 34:4–8). God wanted His people to come to meet with Him so much. But they were afraid and asked Moses to go to God for them. God did not want His people to be afraid of Him. Their fear was not part of His plan. The people felt fear because they had no faith.

Our holy God wants to meet with us. What must we do first to get ready to come near Him?

THE NEED FOR A CURTAIN (Leviticus 16:1, 2)

The Israelites in the desert built the Tent of the Agreement. There they met God and worshiped Him. The tent had several “curtains.” First, a curtain or screen went around the whole yard for the tent (Exodus 38:9, 18). This screen was the same as a wall. Second, a curtain separated the tent from the yard outside (Exodus 36:37). Third, a curtain hung between the Holy Room and the Most Holy Room inside the tent (Exodus 26:31–35). So, these curtains were the same as doors and walls. Few people were allowed to enter those rooms.

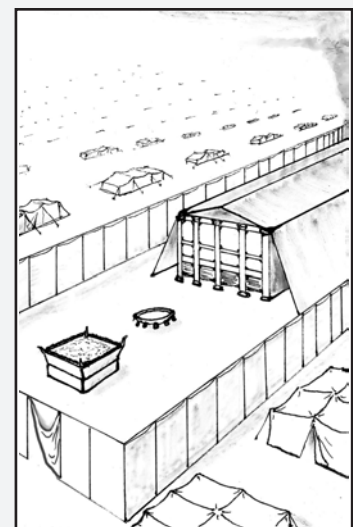
Read Leviticus 16:1, 2 and Leviticus 10:1–3. What warning do we read about in these verses?

When Israel worshiped the gold cow, God refused to lead the people to the Promised Land. The people were stubborn. God did not want the people to do anything that caused Him to destroy them on the way (Exodus 33:3). So, Moses moved the Tent of the Agreement far away from the camp (Exodus 33:7). Then Moses asked God to forgive Israel. God forgave them. God also agreed to take the people to the Promised Land (Exodus 33:12–20). But first God made rules to protect Israel while He lived with them.

The Israelites set up their camp in the shape of a square. The Tent of the Agreement was put in the middle of this square. Then the Levites camped around the tent to protect it and its furniture from anyone who was not a Levite (Numbers 1:51). So, we see that the Levites were the same as a human “curtain” that protected the people of Israel: “The Levites will set up their tents so that they surround [go all the way around] the Tent of the Agreement. They will serve as guards [watchmen] and keep the people away from the Tent. This will protect the Israelites from the Lord’s anger” (Numbers 1:53, ERV).

Jesus, our High Priest, or Top Spiritual Leader, is our “curtain.” Jesus became a man to show us the saving mercy of God (John 1:14–18). God lived in His Son and made His home with us. Because of Jesus, a holy and perfect God can live among people who are not perfect.

God made the earth and sky. This same God lived among people who were slaves that escaped from Egypt. What does this Bible truth teach us about our God who wants to live with us?



The Israelites set up their camp in the shape a square. The Tent of the Agreement was put in the middle of this square.

THE NEW AND LIVING WAY (Hebrews 10:19–22)

Read Hebrews 10:19–22. What invitation does Paul share with us in these verses?



Jesus invites us to follow Him inside the temple in heaven.

Paul tells us that Jesus invites us to follow Him inside the temple in heaven. This idea agrees with Bible truth we already learned in Hebrews. Jesus is the “leader of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2, ERV). Jesus went ahead of us to open a new way behind the curtain in the temple in heaven (Hebrews 6:19, 20; Hebrews 2:10). This new way is named the New Agreement. The agreement started when Jesus went back to heaven and God accepted His offering for our sins. The new way is different from the Old Agreement. Paul says the Old Agreement is “old and useless” and “ready to disappear” (Hebrews 8:13, ERV). Under the New Agreement, God forgives us for our sins. God also writes His law in our hearts. Now we can come to God with sure faith. Have we done anything to make ourselves worthy to come near to God? Of course not! We can come near to God only because of Jesus. Jesus did everything the agreement said needed to be done so that God can freely forgive us.

Paul says that the Old Agreement started when two things happened: (1) The Holy Tent of Meeting was built. (2) Also, the priests, or religious leaders, were separated from the rest of Israel to serve God (Hebrews 9:18–21; compare with Exodus 40; Leviticus 8; Leviticus 9). God made the Old Agreement because He wanted a close personal connection with His people, Israel (Exodus 19:4–6). When Israel accepted the agreement, God right away commanded them to build Him a house. Then He lived among them. The agreement started when God came to live with His people. The New Agreement works the same way for us (Hebrews 5:1–10; Hebrews 7:1–8:13).

Jesus did something else for us when He became our High Priest, or Top Spiritual Leader. Jesus put a stop to the visits Satan made to heaven to accuse us in front of God. Zechariah 3 shows how Satan went to God and accused Joshua the high priest. Joshua is a word picture for the people of God. Satan accused Job, too (Job 1; Job 2). But because Jesus made an offering for our sins, God threw Satan out of heaven forever (John 12:31; John 16:11). Now Jesus fights for us and saves us!

What will Satan say against you? Are you happy that God will stop Satan? How do you grab hold of this promise?

THEY WILL SEE HIS FACE (Hebrews 12:22–24)

Read Hebrews 12:22–24. In these verses, Paul says, “You have come to a hill called [named] Zion. You have come to the city of the living God. It is the Jerusalem in heaven” (Hebrews 12:22, WE). What is Paul talking about?

Paul says the followers of Jesus “come” to Zion. Zion is another name for Jerusalem. By faith, the followers come to the Jerusalem in heaven where they will live in the future. The city of heaven is part of the things they “do not see” now but “hope to get” by faith (Hebrews 11:1, WE).

But this Bible truth is not the whole meaning of Hebrews 12:22–24. We also come to Zion because of Jesus. Jesus gives us a place where we may sit with Him right now in heaven (Ephesians 2:5, 6; Colossians 3:1). Jesus is in heaven right now. His being in heaven right now is Bible fact and history. This history encourages us to “keep our trust in Jesus Christ” and “hold on to the things we believe” (Hebrews 4:14, 16, NLV, WE).

So, with Jesus’ help, we can live in heaven right now with God. Our lives should show we believe in the Bible. Because of Jesus, we are “blessed to hear God’s good message and see the great power of his new world” (Hebrews 6:4, 5, ERV). Jesus is our High Priest, or Top Spiritual Leader, in heaven right now. “This promise gives our hearts something to hold on to. It keeps our hearts strong and steady. It will take us into the Holy Place right inside God’s house” (Hebrews 6:19, WE). We can trust in this promise, for sure (Hebrews 7:22).

God has a plan not only for Jesus but also for us. Remember how we said that when Jesus went to heaven, He honored all the special feasts right on time? We saw how Jesus honored the Passover and the Feast of Weeks (read the study for Sunday). Hebrews and Revelation show us that Jesus will keep the final feast in the future: the Feast of Booths, or Shelters. We will celebrate this feast with Jesus when we are in “the city that is planned and built by God” (Hebrews 11:10, ERV; read also Hebrews 11:13–16). This city is the New Jerusalem in heaven. We will not build shelters there in the city the way the Israelites did in the city of old Jerusalem. God is our Shelter or Tent. God Himself will come from heaven to this earth. Then we will live with Him forever (Revelation 7:15–17; Revelation 21:1–4; Revelation 22:1–5; Numbers 6:24–26).



Paul says the followers of Jesus “come” to Zion. Zion is another name for Jerusalem.



“God pours His Holy Spirit on the followers of Jesus.”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Jesus goes back to heaven. His followers know that His leaving is a sign that God will keep His promise. God will send them the Holy Spirit. The followers of Jesus must wait for this blessing before they start their work for God. When Jesus enters the gates of heaven, God tells Jesus to sit on His throne. Angels stand all around the throne and give Jesus honor and praise. Then God pours His Holy Spirit on the followers of Jesus. God gives them a large amount of His Spirit. The large gift gives glory to Jesus. This glory is the same glory that Jesus always had with the Father from the beginning. The gift of the Holy Spirit shows the followers that God made Jesus their High Priest, or Top Spiritual Leader, and King. The gift of the Holy Spirit also shows the followers that God gave Jesus, their High Priest and King, control over everything in heaven and on earth. . . .

“So, the followers of Jesus can talk about Him with sure hearts. Jesus is their Friend. He is their Older Brother, too. Jesus brought His followers into close friendship with Himself. Now by faith, the followers sit with Jesus in heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pages 38, 46, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① A writer of the psalms said, “I am thirsty for God. I am thirsty for the living God. When can I go and meet with him?” (Psalm 42:2, NIV). How can we also have this same “thirst” or wish to come near God? What things do you enjoy doing? How do these things help you feel joy in knowing God and talking with Him?
- ② Israel asked Moses to meet with God for them so they did not need to. This story shows us an important Bible truth. We need to come to God on our own. We often allow other people to study the Bible for us. Some people may feel that the prayers of other people are better than their own, too. So, they let other people do their praying for them. Why must we avoid these mistakes? Why can we, because of Jesus, come to God on our own without needing anyone else to go to God for us?
- ③ Hebrews is about having hope in God’s forgiveness. We can be sure God saves us because of everything Jesus does for us. Why must we be careful not to have false faith? A person shows false faith when he refuses to obey God and expects God to continue to accept him.

GOD IS THE BEST WITNESS

My name is Anna. I am 18 years old. I want to share my faith with other people. But I am afraid to talk to people.

"I am so scared, Jesus," I often pray. "I do not know how to share You."

Then I learn that I need an operation. I go to a hospital near Moscow, the capital of Russia. Russia is a country in northern Asia. I am put in a room with three other female patients. These women read or watch TV.

"How should I spend my time before my operation?" I ask myself. I decide to read my Bible.

The woman across from me asks, "Are you a Christian?"

"Yes," I said.

"Which church do you go to?" she asked.

Many Russians think that Seventh-day Adventists are members of a strange religious group. So, I do not want to tell the woman I am a Seventh-day Adventist. What if she makes fun of me?

"I am a Protestant Christian," I say.

The woman asks, "Which Protestant church do you belong to?"

"I am a Seventh-day Adventist," I say.

The woman gives me a big smile.

"Wow! A Seventh-day Adventist!" she says. "I know Adventists. They are the best people!"

The woman starts to tell the other patients in our room about the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The other two patients listen with interest. They never heard about Adventists.

"Adventists are good Christians!" the woman says.

While the woman talks, her doctor walks into our room. He is surprised to see the woman there.

"What are you doing here?" the doctor asks.

"What do you mean?" the woman asks.

"I gave my permission for you to go home yesterday," he says. "You should already be at home."

30 minutes later, the husband of the woman comes to the hospital to take his wife home.

I look at the empty bed of the woman. Then I understand that God answered my prayer in a way I did not expect. God showed Himself on His own in my hospital room. I did nothing. God did everything. Because of Jesus, the other patients now know that I am Adventist. They also know that we Adventists love Jesus.

Before my visit to the hospital, I went to church. I believed in Jesus. But being a Christian is more than that. We must tell other people about Jesus. If you want to tell other people about Him, Jesus can help. He will do everything for you.

INSIDE
Story
by ANNA LIKHOLET



The woman across from me asks, "Are you a Christian?"

