

# Jesus Opens *the* Way Through *the* Veil



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Heb. 9:24; Exod. 19:3, 4; Heb. 12:18–21; Lev. 16:1, 2; Heb. 10:19–22; Col. 3:1.*

**Memory Text:** “For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (*Hebrews 9:24, NKJV*).

When the disciples returned from the Mount of Olives, right after Jesus had ascended to heaven, they were filled with joy and triumph. Their Master and Friend had ascended to a position of power over the world and had invited them to approach God in His name with the absolute confidence that God would respond favorably to their prayers (*John 14:13, 14*). Even though they continued in the world, attacked by the forces of evil, their hope was strong. They knew that Jesus had ascended to prepare a place for them (*John 14:1–3*). They knew that Jesus was the Captain of their salvation and that He had opened a way into the heavenly homeland through His blood.

The ascension of Jesus to heaven is central to the theology of Hebrews. It marks the beginning of Jesus' rule and the beginning of His High Priestly ministry in our behalf. And more important, Jesus' ascension marks the moment that the new covenant, which provides the means through which we can approach God boldly through faith, has been inaugurated. It is our privilege now to approach God with confidence through Jesus and the merits of His righteousness.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 5.

## Jesus Before the Father

**Read** Hebrews 9:24. According to this passage, what was the purpose of Jesus' ascension to heaven?

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God instructed Israel that their males should go three times every year up to Jerusalem to “appear before the Lord” with an offering. The appointed times were the feast of Passover (Unleavened Bread), the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), and the Feast of Booths (*Exod. 23:14–17, Deut. 16:16*). Passover celebrated Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. Pentecost celebrated the barley harvest, and by the time of the New Testament, it was associated with the giving of the law at Sinai. The Feast of Booths celebrated God’s care for Israel during their sojourn in the desert. According to the New Testament, all the Old Testament feasts also have prophetic significance.

Hebrews 9:24 describes Jesus’ ascension into the presence of the Father. He arrived at the heavenly sanctuary, “the true one,” in order to “appear” before God with a better sacrifice (*Heb. 9:23, 24, NIV*)—His own blood.

Jesus fulfilled the pilgrimage feasts’ prophetic significance with amazing accuracy. He died on the day for the preparation of the Passover at the ninth hour, the moment in which Passover lambs were sacrificed (*John 19:14, Matt. 27:45–50*). Jesus was resurrected on the third day and ascended to heaven to receive assurance that His sacrifice had been accepted (*John 20:17, 1 Cor. 15:20*), when the priest was to wave the sheaf of ripe barley as the firstfruits (*Lev. 23:10–12*). Then, He ascended 40 days later to sit at the right hand of God and inaugurate the new covenant on the Day of Pentecost (*Acts 1, Acts 2*).

The purpose of pilgrimage in ancient Israel was to “behold the face of God” (*Ps. 42:2, NRSV*). This meant to experience God’s favor (*Ps. 17:15*). Similarly, the Hebrew expression to “seek the face of God” meant to ask God for help (*2 Chron. 7:14, Ps. 27:8, Ps. 105:4*). This is the sense, in Hebrews, of Jesus’ ascension. Jesus ascended to God with the perfect sacrifice. Jesus also ascended to heaven as our Forerunner into the presence of God (*Heb. 6:19, 20*). He has made real the promise for the believers who journey, “seeking a homeland,” desiring “a better country,” looking “forward to the city . . . whose architect and builder is God” (*Heb. 11:10, 13–16, NRSV*).

**Again, why should the reality of what Christ has done, not only on the cross but also what He is doing now in heaven, give us assurance of salvation?**

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## God's Invitation

**Read** Hebrews 12:18–21. What was the experience of Israel at Mount Sinai?

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When God called the Israelites from Egypt, His plan was to create a personal, intimate relationship with them. He said, “ ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself’ ” (Exod. 19:3, 4, NKJV).

Thus, through Moses, God gave the necessary instructions to prepare the people to meet with Him. The people needed to consecrate themselves first (Exod. 19:10–15). Those who ascended to the foot of the mountain without preparation would die. Nevertheless, once the people had prepared themselves for two days, then “ ‘when the trumpet sounds a long blast’ ” on the third day, God instructed that the people “ ‘shall come up to the mountain’ ” (Exod. 19:13, ESV). He wanted them to have the experience Moses and the leaders of the people would have when they ascended the mountain and “beheld God, and ate and drank” in His presence (Exod. 24:9–11, ESV). The people later recognized that they had seen God’s glory and that it was possible for God to speak “ ‘with man, and man still live’ ” (Deut. 5:24, ESV). But, when the moment came, they lacked faith. Moses explained years later: “ ‘You were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain’ ” (Deut. 5:5, ESV). Instead, they asked Moses to be their intermediary (Deut. 5:25–27, compare with Exod. 20:18–21).

God’s manifestation of His holiness at Mount Sinai was to teach the people to learn to “fear,” or respect, Him. The “fear of the LORD” leads to life, wisdom, and honor (Deut. 4:10; compare with Ps. 111:10, Prov. 1:7, Prov. 9:10, Prov. 10:27)—and also to the lesson that He is merciful and gracious (Exod. 34:4–8). Thus, while God wanted Israel to come to Him, the people became afraid and requested for Moses to be their intermediary. The description in Hebrews of the events at Sinai follows, primarily, Moses’ reminder to the people of their lack of faith and their apostasy with the golden calf, and how he was afraid of meeting God because of their sin (Deut. 9:19). The people’s reaction was not God’s plan for them; it was, instead, the result of their faithlessness.

**Because of Jesus, why should we not be afraid to draw near to a holy God? What are the conditions, however, for us to be able to draw near?**

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## The Need for a Veil

Veils have a double function. The term Hebrews uses for veil (*katepetasma*) could refer to the screen of the court (*Exod. 38:18*), the screen at the entrance of the outer apartment of the sanctuary (*Exod. 36:37*), or the inner veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (*Exod. 26:31–35*). These three veils were both entrances and boundaries that only some people could cross.

**Read** Leviticus 16:1, 2 and Leviticus 10:1–3. What warning do we have in these passages?

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The veil was a protection for the priests as they ministered before a holy God. After the sin of the golden calf, God said to Moses that He would not accompany them in the way to the Promised Land lest He consume them because they were a “‘stiff-necked people’” (*Exod. 33:3, NKJV*). Thus, Moses moved the tent of meeting and pitched it far off, outside the camp (*Exod. 33:7*). After Moses interceded, however, God agreed to go with them in their midst (*Exod. 33:12–20*), but He established several measures to protect the people as He dwelled among them.

For instance, Israel camped in a strict order that created a hollow square in the middle, where the tabernacle was pitched. In addition, the Levites camped around the tabernacle in order to protect the sanctuary and its furniture from encroachment by strangers (*Num. 1:51, Num. 3:10*). They were, in fact, a kind of human veil that protected the people of Israel: “‘But the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the testimony, so that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the people of Israel. And the Levites shall keep guard over the tabernacle of the testimony’” (*Num. 1:53, ESV*).

Jesus, as our Priest, also has been our veil. Through His incarnation, God pitched His tent in our midst and made it possible for us to contemplate His glory (*John 1:14–18*). He made it possible for a holy God to live in the midst of an imperfect people.

**Think about what it meant that the Creator God, the One who made the universe, would dwell among His people, who at that time were a nation of escaped slaves. What does that teach us about how close God can be to us?**

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## The New and Living Way Through the Veil

**Read** Hebrews 10:19–22. What invitation do we have in this passage?

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The book of Hebrews argues that Jesus has entered into the heavenly sanctuary and invites us to follow His lead. This idea agrees with the conception introduced before that Jesus is the “captain” and “forerunner” of believers (*Heb. 2:10; Heb. 6:19, 20; Heb. 12:2*). The “new and living way” is the new covenant that Jesus inaugurated with His sacrifice and ascension. The expression “new and living” contrasts with the description of the old covenant as “obsolete and growing old” (*Heb. 8:13, NKJV*). It is the new covenant, which has provided forgiveness of sin and has put the law in our hearts, that makes it possible for us to approach God with confidence, not because of ourselves or anything we have done, but only because of what Jesus has done for us by fulfilling all the covenant obligations.

Hebrews noted that the inauguration of the old covenant involved the inauguration of the sanctuary and the consecration of the priests (*Heb. 9:18–21; compare with Exodus 40, Leviticus 8, Leviticus 9*). The purpose of the covenant was to create an intimate relationship between God and His people (*Exod. 19:4–6*). When the Israelites accepted this relationship, God immediately commanded that a sanctuary be built so that He could live among them. The inauguration of the sanctuary and God’s presence in the midst of His people marked the moment when the covenant between God and Israel was completed.

The same is true of the new covenant. The new covenant also implies the inauguration of Jesus’ priestly ministry in our behalf (*Heb. 5:1–10, Heb. 7:1–8:13*).

Jesus’ ascension before God has inaugurated a new era for the people of God. Zechariah 3 mentions that Satan was in the presence of God to accuse God’s people, who were represented by the high priest Joshua. This accuser is the same that raised questions about Job’s loyalty to God (*Job 1, Job 2*). With the sacrifice of Jesus, however, Satan has been cast out of heaven (*Rev. 12:7–12, compare with John 12:31, John 16:11*). Now it is Jesus who intercedes for us and through His sacrifice and faithfulness claims salvation for us!

**What accusations could Satan make against you before God, if he were allowed? Though he is a liar, how much would he have to lie about you in order to seek your condemnation? What’s your only hope?**

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## They Will See His Face

**Read** Hebrews 12:22–24. In what sense have we arrived at the heavenly Jerusalem into the presence of God?

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It is argued that believers “have come” to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, through faith. In this sense, their experience anticipates the future. Thus, the heavenly Jerusalem belongs to the realm of the things “hoped for” and “not seen” but nevertheless assured to us through faith (*Heb. 11:1*).

While true, this is not the whole meaning of this passage. We also have arrived at Mount Zion, in the very presence of God, through our representative Jesus (*Eph. 2:5, 6; Col. 3:1*). Jesus’ ascension is not a matter of faith, but of fact. It is this historical dimension of Jesus’ ascension that provides compelling force to the exhortation of Hebrews to hold fast to our confession (*Heb. 4:14, Heb. 10:23*). Paul says: “Since . . . we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, . . . let us . . . with confidence draw near” (*Heb. 4:14, 16, ESV*).

Thus, we already have arrived through our Representative and, therefore, should act accordingly. Through Him, we “have tasted the heavenly gift . . . and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come” (*Heb. 6:4, 5, ESV*). The reality of Jesus’ ascension and ministry in the heavenly sanctuary is “a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (*Heb. 6:19, ESV*), the guarantee that the promises have substance and are worthy of confidence (*Heb. 7:22*). For us, faith has a historical anchor.

God’s purpose will be fulfilled not only in Jesus, however, but also in us. We have said that Jesus’ ascension fulfilled the typology of the first two yearly pilgrimages of Israel, Passover and Pentecost. According to Hebrews and the book of Revelation, the last pilgrimage, the Feast of Booths, is yet to be fulfilled. We will celebrate it with Jesus when we are in the “city . . . whose architect and builder is God,” in the heavenly homeland (*Heb. 11:10, NIV; see also verses 13–16*). We will not build booths, but God’s booth, or tent, will descend from heaven, and we will live with Him forever (*Rev. 7:15–17, Rev. 21:1–4, Rev. 22:1–5, Num. 6:24–26*).

**How can we learn to make the promise of eternal life real to ourselves now, amid a world so full of pain and suffering? What answer can you give to those who say that this all is just a fantasy to help us feel better about our life here and now?**

**Further Thought:** “Christ’s ascension to heaven was the signal that His followers were to receive the promised blessing. For this they were to wait before they entered upon their work. When Christ passed within the heavenly gates, He was enthroned amidst the adoration of the angels. As soon as this ceremony was completed, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples in rich currents, and Christ was indeed glorified, even with the glory which He had with the Father from all eternity. The Pentecostal outpouring was Heaven’s communication that the Redeemer’s inauguration was accomplished. According to His promise He had sent the Holy Spirit from heaven to His followers as a token that He had, as priest and king, received all authority in heaven and on earth, and was the Anointed One over His people. . . .

“They could speak the name of Jesus with assurance; for was He not their Friend and Elder Brother? Brought into close communion with Christ, they sat with Him in heavenly places. With what burning language they clothed their ideas as they bore witness for Him!”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 38, 46.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 The psalmist said, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” (*Ps. 42:2, ESV*). How can we have the same thirst to come into the presence of God? If we don’t rejoice now in the presence of God as we worship Him and come before His presence in faith, will we rejoice in the future? What are the factors that lead to joy before God?
- 2 In a book mocking faith, someone created a robot that supposedly did our believing for us. Though this was a spoof, how can we be careful not to do as Israel did in the desert, and that is to make a request for intermediaries between us and God? We tend to allow other people to study the Bible in our behalf and find the gems of truth in the Bible. Some people may feel tempted to think that the prayers of others in their behalf carry more weight before God than their own prayers. Why should we avoid this spiritual trap? Why, because of Jesus, can we approach God without the need of anyone else?
- 3 Hebrews is about assurance of salvation. How, though, must we be careful not to mistake presumption for assurance?

## God Is the Best Witness

By ANNA LIKHOLET

At the age of 18, I longed to share Jesus with others. But I was afraid.

Then I needed surgery, and I was hospitalized in Tula, a city about two and a half hours by car from Russia's capital, Moscow. Three of the six beds in my room were occupied when I arrived. My operation was scheduled for the next day. *What should I do? What does someone do before an operation?* I thought. I opened my Bible.

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

"Yes," I said.

She then wanted to know which church I went to. I didn't want to be mocked for being a Seventh-day Adventist. Many Russians belong to another Christian denomination and dismiss Adventists as members of a sect. "I'm a Protestant," I said.

The woman wasn't satisfied. "Which Protestant church do you belong to?" she said.

What could I say? "I'm a Seventh-day Adventist," I said.

"Wow, a Seventh-day Adventist!" she exclaimed. "I know Adventists! They are the best people!"

The woman spoke enthusiastically about the church, its work, and Zaoksky Adventist University located outside Tula. The two other patients listened silently. They had never heard about the Adventist Church.

"Adventists are good Christians!" the woman said. "My father knows some nice Adventists."

As she spoke, the physician entered the room. He was surprised to see her. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" she replied.

"I ordered you to be discharged yesterday," he said. "You should already be at home."

Her husband picked her up within 30 minutes.

God had answered my prayers in an unexpected way. He revealed Himself on His own in my hospital room. God had done everything. As a result, the other patients knew I was an Adventist and that Adventists love Jesus. If you long to share Him, He can arrange it. He will do everything for you.



*This mission story illustrates Mission Objective Number 1 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: "To revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life involving not only pastors but every church member, young and old, in the joy of witnessing for Christ and making disciples." Learn more at [IWillGo2020.org](http://IWillGo2020.org).*

## *Part I: Overview*

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**Key Texts:** *Heb. 9:24; Exod. 19:3, 4; Heb. 12:18–21; Lev. 16:1, 2; Heb. 10:19–24; Col. 3:1.*

**Lesson Themes:** In Hebrews, the ascension of Christ marks the beginning of His rule and the beginning of His high-priestly ministry in heaven. When Christ ascended into heaven, He appeared in the presence of God in our behalf (*Heb. 9:24*). In Old Testament times, every male was required to appear in God’s presence three times a year. The pilgrim festivals were Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths (*Exod. 23:14–17*). Their purpose was to appear before God (*Ps. 42:2*).

Christ appeared in heaven in the presence of God in our behalf. In accordance with the Old Testament feasts, Christ died on Passover. Then after His resurrection, He ascended initially to His Father at the time when the priests waved their sheaf of barley (*see John 20:17; Eph. 4:8*). Christ ascended again a final time after 40 days to sit at the right hand of God. As the inauguration of Christ as our High Priest took place in heaven, the Holy Spirit was poured out during Pentecost on Christ’s followers on the earth.

When God appeared to the Israelites at Mount Sinai, they were fearful of God’s presence. Moses became their intermediary. All through the history of Israel, priests were the mediators. But even they were prohibited from going whenever they wanted into the Most Holy apartment of the tabernacle. The veils functioned both as boundaries and protection for the priests when ministering in the sanctuary. Hebrews invites its audience, and by implication us, to approach the sanctuary through the veil; that is, through the flesh of Christ (*Heb. 10:20*).

## *Part II: Commentary*

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**“The Spirits of the Righteous Made Perfect”:** In Hebrews 12:22, 23, Paul addresses his audience with these words: “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (*NRSV*). The question that we will pursue in regard to this passage is: Who are “the spirits of the righteous made perfect”? That is, what kind of beings are they?

In preparing to answer this question, let us look at the context of Hebrews 12:22, 23, which is Hebrews 11. In Hebrews 11, Paul offers

praises in honor of the heroes of faith, followed by a strong exhortation at the beginning of Hebrews 12 to fix our gaze upon “Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (*Heb. 12:2, NRSV*). Then the section that follows in Hebrews 12 deals with God’s discipline in the Christian life. The fact that righteous people suffer is not a sign of divine displeasure but of God’s parental affection. That is why Paul states, “For the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts” (*Heb. 12:6, NRSV*).

Next follows a double exhortation to peace and holiness: “Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (*Heb. 12:14, NRSV*). To reinforce the warning, Paul brings forward the illustration of Esau, described as an “immoral and godless” person—the very antithesis of the example of faith in Hebrews 11—who traded off his firstborn-inheritance rights for the immediate gratification of a meal (*Heb. 12:16, NRSV*). Finally, Paul compares the Exodus generation with his own audience. The former was confronted with a theophany on Mount Sinai. Moses recalled the scene and declared: “ ‘I [trembled] with fear’ ” (*Heb. 12:21, NRSV*). In contrast, the audience of Hebrews has not come to this terrifying mountain, but to the heavenly dwelling place of God, the “heavenly Jerusalem” (*Heb. 12:22, NRSV*). They have access to “God, the judge of all,” to “the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven,” and to the “spirits of the righteous made perfect” (*Heb. 12:23, NRSV*).

Who are the “spirits of the righteous made perfect”? Most scholars of the book of Hebrews employ Jewish apocalyptic literature (*e.g., Jub. 23:30, 31; 1 Enoch 22:9; 1 Enoch 102:4; 1 Enoch 103:3, 4; 2 Apoc. Bar. 30:2*) to understand the phrase “spirits of the righteous made perfect.” On this basis, they conclude that these spirits must be immaterial souls, devoid of the body, who are dwelling in heaven. Such a conclusion needs to be challenged by the data presented in the book of Hebrews itself. To that end, we will analyze the noun “spirits,” the adjective “righteous,” and the adjectival verb (participle) “made perfect.”

The noun “spirits,” or “spirit,” has three different uses in the letter to the Hebrews. First, “spirits” is used to designate angels who are ministering spirits (*Heb. 1:7, 14*). Second, “spirit” designates the Holy Spirit who gives gifts, speaks about the new covenant, and bears witness to it (*Heb. 2:4; Heb. 3:7; Heb. 6:4; Heb. 9:8; Heb. 10:15*). Sometimes the Holy Spirit seems to be described as the “Spirit of grace” (*Heb. 10:29*), or the “eternal Spirit” (*Heb. 9:14*). Third, “spirits” refers to human beings who are alive and who are subject to the piercing penetration of the Living Word of God (*Heb. 4:12*). Similarly, when Paul talks about God disciplining His children, he says “We have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be

subject to the Father of spirits and live?” (*Heb. 12:9, ESV*). Thus, we can conclude that the “spirits” in the phrase “the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (*Heb. 12:23, NRSV*) are not angels, nor the Holy Spirit, but human beings who by faith have approached Mount Zion, the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (*Heb. 12:22*).

In Hebrews, the adjective “righteous” appears only two times outside of the passage under investigation. The first time that it appears, it is used in the context of endurance: “My righteous one will live by faith” (*Heb. 10:38, NRSV*). God has no pleasure in those who shrink back in doubt or unbelief. The second time, the adjective is used in the context of Abel offering a better sacrifice than Cain offers. Because of that better sacrifice, Abel receives the testimony that he is “righteous” (*Heb. 11:4*). Both instances refer to persons when they were alive, not dead or in a bodiless state of being. Thus, these individuals are not depicted as immaterial souls. So, we may conclude that the “righteous” are those people who live by faith and express their faith by the sacrifices they make.

The term “made perfect” appears several times in Hebrews, yielding three uses. First, Christ was made perfect through sufferings and becomes the Source of eternal salvation (*Heb. 2:10; Heb. 5:9; Heb. 7:28*). Second, the law cannot make perfect the conscience of the worshiper (*Heb. 7:19; Heb. 9:9; Heb. 10:1*). Third, human beings are perfected. In Hebrews 10:14, Paul states, “For by a single offering he [Christ] has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (*NRSV*), and in Hebrews 12:23 the “spirits of the righteous” are perfected. Thus, the objects of perfection are Christ and human beings, not bodiless beings in a metaphysical sphere.

Finally, the phrase “assembly of the firstborn” seems to be part of a parallelism, synonymous with the phrase that follows it: “who are enrolled in heaven” (*Heb. 12:23, NRSV*). The image of righteous people being enrolled in the heavenly books is common in Scripture (*Exod. 32:32; Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Luke 10:20; Rev. 13:8; Rev. 17:8; compare Phil. 3:20*). Moses contended with God either to forgive Israel’s sin or blot out his own name from the book of life. Consequently, the “spirits of the righteous made perfect” should be interpreted as human beings rather than bodiless souls of people who died.

In sum, the textual evidence points to the fact that the noun “spirits” is used for angels, the Holy Spirit, and humans. The adjective “righteous” is used for faithful people such as Abel and the audience of Hebrews. The term “made perfect” is used to describe Jesus being made perfect, the inability of the law to make anything perfect, and humans who have been made perfect by Christ’s sacrifice. Thus, we can safely conclude that the “spirits of the righteous made perfect”

are not immaterial souls, devoid of corporeal form, who are dwelling in heaven after their earthly sojourn and subsequent death, and who are now enjoying heavenly peace. Rather, the “spirits of the righteous made perfect” are human beings whose names have been registered in heaven. Through faith, the addressees of Hebrews approach God, Jesus the Mediator of a new covenant, the heavenly Jerusalem, the innumerable angels, and these human beings who have been made perfect by faith and whose names are recorded in heaven. This passage should be understood as an exhortation to believers, similar to the author’s exhortation to his audience when he says: “Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness” (*Heb. 4:16, NRSV*).

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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As Seventh-day Adventists, we hold many beliefs in common with other Christian denominations, such as prayer, righteousness by faith, sanctification, the Godhead, tithing, et cetera. Besides distinctive Adventist beliefs, such as those connected with the sanctuary doctrine and our self-understanding as the end-time remnant of Revelation, some denominations can be found within Christianity that share our beliefs in the Sabbath, the Second Coming, the gift of prophecy, and the state of the dead. During this week’s lesson, we looked at the state of the dead through the passage of Hebrews 12:22, 23. As Seventh-day Adventists, we are distinguished from other Christian groups, though not exclusively, in believing that the soul is not immortal. We believe that God created Adam “from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (*Gen. 2:7, NRSV*). Other translations render the phrase “living being” as “living soul.” With death, the living being ceases to exist. Through the influence of Greek philosophy, most Christians throughout history have believed that humans are born immortal and that when one dies, his or her spirit goes to heaven or hell to live with God or to burn eternally.

1. What dangers arise when we superimpose our presuppositions onto the biblical text instead of permitting the Bible to speak for itself?
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2. Can we indeed be completely objective and free of presuppositions? Why, or why not?
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