

Jesus and Our Future



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

MEMORY VERSE: “For there is no permanent¹ city for us here on earth; we are looking for the city [the New Jerusalem] which is to come” (Hebrews 13:14, TEV).

IMPORTANT THOUGHT: Christians are enjoying the privileges² of being God's people here and now. But their final hope lies in the second coming of Jesus.

HEBREWS FOCUSES MUCH ON THE PAST, such as the earthly sanctuary services and Jesus' death. But Hebrews would not be complete if it stopped there. So Hebrews looks toward the future too. Hebrews especially looks toward Jesus' return. Jesus' return will bring the plan of salvation to a successful close. Without Jesus' return, the Christian hope would be of no use. Maybe that is why the word *hope* is found five times in Hebrews. For Christians, hope is eternity³ with God in a new world. This is the hope His people have been eagerly looking forward to since Adam and Eve sinned in Eden. In Eden, the first promise of salvation was made complete in Jesus.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why does Paul suggest he is living in the last days? Why does the Bible talk about salvation as present truth and at the same time a future hope? How is the sanctuary connected with the second coming of Jesus?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 27.

¹permanent—lasting forever.

²privileges—special benefits.

³eternity—life without end; forever.

SUN THE TIME OF THE END.

What do Hebrews 1:2 and Hebrews 9:26 mean when they talk about the “last days” and “the end of the world”?

Jesus made the greatest sacrifice. He paid the penalty for sin. Jesus took care of all that was needed for salvation through His once-and-for-all sacrifice. This sacrifice had to happen before a new heaven and a new earth could ever become real. So Paul could talk about his time as the “end of the world,” no matter how many more hundreds of years would pass before Jesus returned.

Peter connects the death of Jesus with the “last times” (1 Peter 1:18-20). Why did Jesus have to die before these “last times” could arrive?

Paul wanted to let the readers know that the old ways were gone. Something that would fulfill all their hopes had started with Jesus. Paul seems to be letting his readers know that they were in a new spiritual period.

“With the first coming of Jesus, the new period had broken into the old period. The two periods would continue side by side until the Second Coming. Then the old period would finally be destroyed. So Christians live in two worlds at once. . . . Jesus could even join the two periods together in one sen-

tence: ‘I [Jesus] tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead [people] will hear the voice of the Son of God’ (John 5:25, NIV).” —Adapted from Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End Time* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994), pp. 77, 78.

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

MON ALREADY AND THE NOT-YET.

In Paul’s writings, we find the idea of “already/not-yet.” This means we are already saved, yet we are not finally saved. For example, John 5:24 reads, “I [Jesus] am telling you the truth: Whoever hears my [Jesus’] word and believes in him [God] who sent me [Jesus] has eternal⁴ life. He [whoever hears my voice] will not be judged but has already passed from death to life” (TEV). We already are saved. We have eternal life now. But Matthew 19:29 reads, “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my [Jesus’] sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit [receive] eternal life” (NIV). In other words, final salvation has still not come. (For examples of this difference, read Ephesians 2:6 and Romans 8:22-24.)

⁴eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

In what ways does this already/not-yet difference appear in Hebrews? Hebrews 12:28; Hebrews 11:13-16. How can we solve the problem of this difference? Or should we solve the problem?

The Bible is full of ideas that seem to be opposite from each other. But both ideas are true. For example: (1) While living on earth, Jesus was fully God and fully human. (2) The Bible is written by human authors. But it is God's Word. (3) God is independent of time. But He relates to us in time. (4) There is one Godhead. But the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all called God. (5) We are saved by faith and judged by works.

When it comes to God and His plan of salvation, we have to accept that our mind can understand only part of the big picture. We need to understand that opposites in the Bible do not always fight against each other. Opposites in the Bible are just different parts of a much bigger picture. Trouble comes when we focus too much on just one opposite instead of the whole picture. The whole picture is God's plan of salvation.



We must not focus on just part of God's plan of salvation.

⁵events—things that happen.

Read John 3:14, 15, 36; 1 Timothy 6:12; 1 John 5:12, 13. These verses point out that we have eternal life now. But while we live on this earth, we will still die a physical death. So our eternal life will not be complete until Jesus returns. How do these promises give us comfort and hope for the present? How differently should we live when we know we have eternal life *now*?

TUE FUTURE EVENTS.⁵

The discussion on the “last days” and on the “already/not-yet” shows that Jesus is the center of the end. “When the New Testament is rightly understood, Jesus is what the end is all about.”—Adapted from *What the Bible Says About the End Time*, p. 81.

Which future events that depend on Jesus' second coming does Hebrews mention?

Hebrews 9:28; Hebrews 10:25, 36, 37

Hebrews 6:2; Hebrews 9:27; Hebrews 10:27, 30

Hebrews 11:16; Hebrews 13:14

Hebrews 11:26, 39, 40 _____

Paul does not say when these events will happen. No other part of the Bible tells when these events will happen. It is more important to live a holy life than to know exactly when final events will come to pass. This is probably why the Bible focuses on always being ready for Jesus' second coming.

In Hebrews 10:27, the judgment is what we call "the executive judgment."⁶ This is because the destroying fire is mentioned (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:9, 10). We have not been told when and how the executive judgment happens. But we can learn a little about the executive judgment in Hebrews:

1. God works as Judge (Hebrews 12:23);
2. God is going to punish evil (Hebrews 10:30);
3. He will reward His people (Hebrews 11:26).

Hebrews focuses on Jesus' death and His high-priestly ministry (work) in heaven. But Hebrews also clearly focuses on the executive judgment, the Second Coming, the resurrection of dead people, and the final reward of righteous (holy) people. Why do you think this is so? As you think about your answer, ask yourself this question, What is the pur-

pose of Jesus' death and high-priestly ministry as Hebrews describes it?

WED THE HEAVENLY CITY (THE NEW JERUSALEM).

Three groups of verses in Hebrews talk about the heavenly city. How does each group describe the heavenly city? Hebrews 11:10-16; Hebrews 12:18-24; Hebrews 13:12-14.

Hebrews 11:10-16 describes Abraham and the patriarchs⁷ and pilgrims⁸ heading toward the real homeland, the city of God. *All* of God's people end up in the same place if they will continue patiently unto the end. This is an important theme in Hebrews: Do not give up!

Hebrews 12:18-24 describes the new covenant (agreement) community. Here again, in poetic and powerful language, Paul shows the difference between the old way and the new. He lets the people know that through Jesus they have a better picture of truth than people who lived under the old covenant. In fact, Paul has shown that believers have 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 [sight, showing]

⁶executive judgment—when people who are not saved receive their punishment; when people who are saved receive their reward.

⁷patriarchs—early Bible leaders such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

⁸pilgrims—wanderers. Christians are wanderers on earth until called home to heaven when Jesus comes again.

of the ‘unshakable⁹ kingdom’ (Hebrews 12:28) they are about to receive.” —Adapted from W. L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), pp. 470, 466.



We are already at the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem. We are waiting for Jesus to come.

Hebrews 13:12-14 shows a big difference between the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly Jerusalem. Jesus was forced to leave the earthly Jerusalem. He was crucified outside the gates of Jerusalem. The heavenly Jerusalem is the city to come. God has promised that the heavenly Jerusalem will be the home of all people who follow Him.

What does Paul mean when he says we have “no continuing” city?

⁹unshakable—not able to be destroyed.

¹⁰permanent—lasting forever.

¹¹substitute—someone who takes another person’s place. Jesus took our place on the cross.

Hebrews 13:14. Why do we not have a “continuing” city? Then ask yourself, Do I live as if I really believe I have no “continuing” city? Or am I living as if this earth were my permanent¹⁰ home? Matthew 6:19-21 will help you with your answer.



Do not store up riches on the earth. They decay with time.

THU THE SANCTUARY AND THE SECOND COMING.

We have learned this quarter that understanding the earthly sanctuary helps us to understand the book of Hebrews. It would be hard to understand the plan of salvation and the death of Jesus as our Substitute¹¹ for sin without understanding the Jewish system of sacrifice. The whole plan of salvation is built around the ideas and symbols in the earthly sanctuary. These symbols reach their fulfillment in Jesus.

We also have learned this quarter that Hebrews focuses on the past (Jesus’

death) and on the present (Jesus' work in heaven) and looks toward the future (the Second Coming).

Hebrews connects the Second Coming with the sanctuary, because the sanctuary points to salvation, and salvation is fulfilled in the Second Coming. So as Adventists with a sharp focus on the Second Coming, we have a clear sanctuary message to preach to the world.

How does Paul connect the sanctuary with Jesus' second coming? Hebrews 9:24-28; Hebrews 10:11-13; Hebrews 12:22-24.

Jesus' second coming brings to a close what He has done on the cross and what He is doing as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. Both His death and His high-priestly work would be worth nothing without the Second Coming.

Final salvation will become real when Jesus returns and takes His people to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem. There they can live in God's presence. The teaching about the sanctuary and the teaching about the last days belong together and should not be separated.

Think about the focus and importance the book of Hebrews has put on the sanctuary service in heaven. How does this focus strengthen your faith that as Adventists we are on the right track when it comes to our teaching regarding the sanctuary?

FRI ADDITIONAL STUDY: Study James 5:1-11 and Revelation 22:6-21. Think about our glorious hope and the challenges and promises listed in James 5:1-11 and Revelation 22:6-11. Read also Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, pp. 283–287, 297, 298, 304–306.

“We are heading home. He who loved us so much as to die for us has built a city for us. The New Jerusalem is our place of rest. There will be no sadness in the city of God. No cry of sorrow and no complaints of crushed hopes will be heard there. Soon the clothes of suffering will be changed for the wedding robe. Soon we shall see the crowning of our King. People whose lives have been hidden with Jesus and people who on this earth have fought the good fight of faith will all shine with the Savior's glory in the kingdom of God. It will not be long till we shall see Him. Our hopes of eternal life are centered in Him. And in His presence, all the trials and sufferings of this life will become nothing. ‘Do not lose your courage, then, because it [your courage] brings with it a great reward. You need to be patient, in order to do the will of God and receive what he [God] promises. For as the scripture [Bible] says, “Just a little while longer, and he [Jesus] who is coming will come; he will not delay” (Hebrews 10:35-37, TEV). Look up, look up, and let your faith continually increase. Let this faith guide you along the narrow path. That path leads you through the gates of the city of God. Beyond is the wide, unlimited¹² future of

¹²unlimited—not having any limits.

glory that is for people who are saved.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 287, 288.



Look up!
Let faith be your guide.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why do Hebrews and the rest of the New Testament present such a

strong message about end-time events? Why are end-time events so important to the Christian faith?

2. Ellen G. White writes about people who fought “the good fight of faith.” How does this quote fit in with the basic message of the book of Hebrews?
3. According to some of the verses this week, people who have accepted Jesus have eternal life even now. How would you explain what this means to people who are not Christians and who see Christians go to the grave just as they do?

SUMMARY: As guests and strangers in this world, we are moving toward a goal—the heavenly city (the New Jerusalem). We are on our way to see God face-to-face.