

## Jesus, Higher and Better



### *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Heb. 7:7-26; 11:1-26.

**MEMORY TEXT:** “For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens” (Hebrews 7:26, NRSV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** Christ's superiority paves the way for the foundation of His entire ministry and the blessings that we receive from it.

**F**EW PEOPLE LIKE SNOBS. Snobbishness is difficult to stomach. Do we like being around those who look down their noses at us? Self-superiority, besides being the original sin, is just plain hard to deal with. Yet, the thrust of Hebrews is all about superiority; that is, the superiority of Jesus Christ. In His case, there's nothing offensive, nothing snobbish, nothing that would turn us away.

On the contrary, as we'll see this week, Christ's superiority is manifested in a way that should draw us to Him in faith and obedience, for in that superiority comes the great hope of salvation.

**THE WEEK AT A GLANCE:** In what ways does Hebrews depict Jesus as superior? Why is Jesus superior? What are the results of Christ's superiority, in terms of His life, death, and ministry in our behalf? How do we respond to what Christ has accomplished for us?

\*Please study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 26.

*Sunday*

*July 20*

**JESUS' SUPERIORITY.**

**What does Hebrews tell us about Jesus' superiority?**

**Heb. 1:4** \_\_\_\_\_

**Heb. 3:3** \_\_\_\_\_

**Heb. 7:26** \_\_\_\_\_

**Heb. 12:24** \_\_\_\_\_

**A**lthough Jesus is superior to the angels, to Moses, and to the high priests; although His blood is better than Abel's blood; and although He is higher than the heavens; Jesus never strived for superiority while on earth.

On the contrary. Consider what Hebrews writes about Jesus in contrast to the Jesus depicted in all four Gospels. It's hard to imagine they are talking about the same Person. And yet they are.

According to the Gospels, He lived His life in simplicity and humility, serving others before Himself. There was no self-promotion in Christ, even though He certainly had reasons to boast, as Hebrews clearly shows, had He wanted to.

Look at Jesus' attitude in comparison to so much of what's in the world today, where self-promotion is the key motive behind so many of our actions. How unfortunate, too, that Christians are not immune to these influences, even in the context of our faith. Like the disciples, we may discuss the question of who is the greatest among us (Luke 22:24). Like the Pharisees, we may look down on the tax collector (Luke 18:9-12). We compare ourselves to others, preferably to those who are worse off or "lower" than we are. Then we end up "superior" (at least in our own minds) to them and believe we have the right to climb the ecclesiastical ladder.

In contrast, the texts in Hebrews that we looked at today clearly establish the superiority of Christ to angels, to Moses, and so forth. And yet, when we look at His life on earth and how He expressed His character, we see only humility, self-denial, self-renunciation, all for the good of those who were, without a doubt, inferior to Him. The same One who was superior to Moses was the same One who stooped to wash the feet of His disciples.

**Superior to all yet servant of all. This was Jesus. How do we feel when confronted with His example? How should we feel? Dwell more on the contrast between the Jesus depicted in Hebrews and the Jesus of the Gospels. What message does that send to us?**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

**Key Text: Hebrews 7:15, 16.**

**Teachers Aims:**

1. To discuss the depiction of Jesus in Hebrews.
2. To define Christ's character and ministry in our behalf.
3. To accept what Christ has accomplished, and is still accomplishing, for our salvation.

**Lesson Outline:**

**I. Christ's Greatness Is Manifested in His Superiority.**

- A. Christ set a pattern for humanity.
- B. Christ's life exemplified unparalleled service to others.
- C. He fought openly for those oppressed by the devil and his forces.

**II. A Life Overflowing With Results.**

- A. Through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, we are offered hope and the promise of a renewed covenant with God.
- B. He offers the promise of everlasting life.
- C. We are offered a salvation beyond our comprehension.

**III. Humanity's Reaction to Christ's Superiority.**

- A. God does not use His superior strength to force anyone to partake of what Christ offers.
- B. The choice to obey or reject God remains ours.
- C. The book of Hebrews is a call to those who know Jesus and do not reject what He has done for them.

**Summary:** The book of Hebrews depicts the superiority of Christ. He proved His superiority by living the ideal human life God intended for us to live. However, His superiority serves not as a wedge to drive humanity away from the throne of God but as a cord to draw us to it.

**Commentary.**

The core of the message of the book of Hebrews is that we have a better High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. This idea is important, for the character of our Lord Jesus Christ's intercession has, at times, been grotesquely misrepresented in popular Christian thought.

We need to make clear the new priesthood is better, because the new Priest is Jesus—Jesus, who endured sore temptations on earth; Jesus, who poured out His heart in earnest prayer to God; Jesus, who

*Monday*

*July 21*

**THE REASON FOR JESUS' SUPERIORITY.**

One reason for Jesus' superiority is, of course, that He is God and Creator (one isn't more superior than that). And, no question, Hebrews clearly refers to Him in this capacity. However, His superiority seems not to be derived primarily from His preexistence and deity. Instead, the apostle links His superiority to, interestingly enough, His "inferiority."

**Look at Hebrews 2:9. What does it teach us about the link between "inferiority" and "superiority"? See also Phil. 2:4-9.**

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In Acts 10:36, Peter presents Jesus as Lord of all. But two verses later, He tells us about how the Lord of all acted while in the flesh: He "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (vs. 38, NRSV). This is real greatness, greatness in "inferiority," and this internal greatness becomes manifest in superiority.

**What biblical examples show that true lowliness and humble service are rewarded with exaltation?**

Joseph in Egypt performed his tasks faithfully, whether as a slave or a prisoner. Eventually, he was exalted to leadership. Even after Moses tended the sheep of his father-in-law in Midian, he still did not have any ambitions to become the leader of Israel. "Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3, NRSV). David was a shepherd who later became king. Peter quotes the Old Testament and declares: " 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble' " (1 Pet. 5:5, NRSV). Jesus tells us in Luke 22:26 that " 'the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves' " (NRSV).

Jesus' unparalleled service on earth led to His superiority in status, which led to superiority in His present ministry. In Jesus, both aspects—superiority in status and superiority in ministry—unite. The readers of the letter are encouraged to remain faithful to this Jesus who, although being the King, serves us in a way nobody else can.

**When was the last time you took the role of servant? What does your answer tell you about yourself?**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

interceded for His disciples that their faith might not fail when the hour of testing came.

In contrast to the earthly priesthood, Jesus was one, the Levites were many. Josephus mentions there were 83 high priests from the time of Aaron until the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. (See *Jewish Antiquities* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965], book XX [227], p. 121.) All these priests were mortal human beings (Heb. 7:8), and thus the Levitical priests needed many replacements, in contrast to Christ, who is all we ever need.

The Levitical order could not bring perfection, but the new order, which is better, most surely can. Hebrews 8 to 10 show that it does, because the new Priest is Jesus, who endured in our behalf many painful temptations while on earth.

As we look carefully at the reasoning of Hebrews 7:26, we discern another point in which Jesus Christ, as a better High Priest, breaks the Aaronic pattern. Aaron and his successors, before they presented a sin offering on behalf of the people, had to present one for themselves. Jesus is the better High Priest, who does not need a sacrifice for His sins because He Himself was sinless, without sin or even a taint of sin.

We shall observe, also, that sympathy with temptation does not require the experience of sin. On the contrary, He whose sympathy will be fullest is the One who has known the extremes of temptation, because He has conquered sin in the flesh. Only One who never has succumbed to sin can know fully the lure of sin, because it is always pressing against Him. Had He succumbed, the pressure would have, at least for a while, been taken off. No wonder we are told He can give us power to resist when we are tempted by sin, because He knows not only temptation but how to overcome that temptation.

Thus, Jesus has no need to present a daily sacrifice or, for that matter, a yearly sacrifice for His people's sins. He presented a permanently valid sin offering on their behalf when He offered up His own life. Jesus was the Perfect Offering; His sacrifice was so efficacious it did not need repetition.

Our better High Priest provides the solution to the sin problem. He was, as Hebrews 7:26 says, "separate from sinners." Under the old system, the high priests needed to offer sacrifices, not only for the people but also for themselves, as well; but not Jesus, our High Priest, the One ministering in our behalf in heaven now.

Fully equipped to discharge an intercessory ministry at the right hand of God, this is no high priest subject to all the conditions of earthly frailty; this is the One whom God calls His Son, whose high priesthood is efficacious and eternally suited to meet His people's needs. Jesus Christ's perfect life makes it possible for Him to fulfill to the letter the words from the Psalms, "You are a priest forever" (Ps. 110:4, NKJV).

*Tuesday*

*July 22*

**THE RESULTS OF JESUS' SUPERIOR MINISTRY.**

**What are the results of Christ's superior status and ministry for us as described in Hebrews?**

Heb. 7:19, 22 \_\_\_\_\_

Heb. 8:6 \_\_\_\_\_

Heb. 10:34 \_\_\_\_\_

Heb. 11:16, 35 \_\_\_\_\_

**M**ost results of Jesus' superiority—a better hope, better promises, a better covenant, a better and lasting possession, a better country, and a better resurrection—are oriented toward the future. Jesus provides a bright future for His followers. Included in that future is a better resurrection, the final resurrection. This is different from previous resurrections in both testaments, because in these, the people returned to temporary mortal life. In contrast, the final resurrection is to endless life in a world made new.

However future oriented the promises, they still have force for us today. Even as a prelude to eternity, this life is still important, because it provides the opportunity to gain eternity with Jesus. Thus, the better promises and the better covenant affect us here and now, as well. It is here and now that the Lord puts His law into our minds and gives us the desire to keep it; it is here and now that we receive the power to obey, to love Him, and to reflect His character.

**Read Hebrews 11:13-16. What is the specific point the author is making here? How does it fit in with the gist of his whole letter to the Hebrews? In what ways does it speak even to us now?**

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**God, through Christ, has revealed wonderful truths to His people. However, do they grasp these truths in faith, trusting in the better promises, the better hope, the better country, or do they take their eyes off these things and return to where they once were? This is the challenge to the Hebrews; it's the challenge to us, as well.**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

This same High Priest lowered Himself in order to elevate His subjects. He forsook His throne and took the blood, the skin, the bones, the lungs, the heart, and the face of a fallen race. Stable born, homeless during His ministry, sentenced to die like a murderer, Christ abdicated the throne of heaven not out of personal gain for Himself but out of love for sinners. In a radical role reversal, the King became a Subject. How many rulers ever live, eat, sleep, and serve as Jesus did, among their people?

History, however, does give us the story of a man destined to be king, who abdicated the throne of England for the love of a commoner, and Western literature is not without fanciful examples of role reversal, as in Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper*, in which a prince and his mirror twin, a penniless beggar, change places, so that the pauper is elevated to a princely state and the prince becomes a street urchin. In other examples of role reversal, this idea of sovereign becoming subject is reflected imperfectly in the ancient Babylonian festival called the Sacaea. According to Sir James Frazier, who studied the origins of cultural practices and beliefs worldwide, during the five-

## INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

**Texts for Discovery: Isaiah 55:9; 64:6; John 1:12-14; Romans 2:18, 19; 3:27; 12:1, 2.**

1. When we say Jesus is superior to angels, humans, and other examples of His creation, what do we mean? Is superiority even a meaningful concept when we are discussing such a seemingly unbridgeable gap?
2. Given that Jesus is so far above us in every sense, how is it possible for Him to communicate His intentions to us, or vice versa? Will we ever be capable of fully understanding His nature or intentions?
3. If Jesus is superior to His followers, does this mean His followers are somehow superior to other people? Why, or Why not? What does Jesus' example suggest about how we should interact with people who don't have the knowledge we may have?
4. How precisely should Jesus' promises to bring us closer to Him at some point in the future affect our lives now? What relation does the short life we live in this world bear to the eternal one we will live in the next?
5. What does Jesus' gift of free will to His creation tell us about His character? Why are our individual choices so important in the light of God's overwhelming power and love?
6. Why do you think some people do not acknowledge Christ as Lord, even though they know all the reasons why they should?

*Wednesday*

*July 23*

**OUR REACTION TO CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY: PART 1.**

**H**owever superior Jesus is in all things, however broad, complete, and efficacious the plan of salvation is that centered on Him and His superiority, one thing God does not do: force anyone to obey, force anyone to partake of what Christ offers. The issue, as always, remains our response. “ ‘Choose this day whom you will serve’ ” (Josh. 24:15, NRSV). Even after thousands of years, Joshua’s imperative to the Hebrews back then is the same as to the Hebrews in Paul’s day and to the “Hebrews” today: Choose whom you will serve.

**Though Hebrews has been talking about the superiority of Jesus, it also uses comparisons in regard to people, as well. Read Hebrews 11:4. What is it saying here about Abel? What was his “better” sacrifice? See Genesis 4:1-8.**

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Abel is found twice in Hebrews. Abel honored God in bringing a better sacrifice than what Cain offered (11:4). In Hebrews 12:24, Jesus’ blood is compared to that of Abel, who had a faith relationship to God and is called righteous. And although (in spite of his death) Abel still “speaks,” the blood of Jesus speaks of better things, better than even Abel’s did. Abel is the first hero of faith in Hebrews 11 and the first martyr. Jesus, nevertheless, far surpasses him.

**Read Hebrews 11:25. Here, too, the issue of comparisons arose. What was it? What choice did Moses make between these two options?**

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Similar to Abel, Moses made a decision for Jesus. He rather (lit., “much more”) chose to suffer with God’s people than to enjoy sin. Moses had a clear vision and had his priorities straight. For him the reproach of Christ was greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.

**However different our individual situations are from Abel or Moses, we still face the same choices they did. In what ways, large and small, do we make our choices every day?**



## TEACHERS COMMENTS

day festival of Sacaea “masters and servants changed places, the servants giving orders and the masters obeying them. A prisoner condemned to death was dressed in the king’s robes, seated on the king’s throne, allowed to issue whatever commands he pleased, to eat, drink, and enjoy himself.”—*The Golden Bough* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1922), p. 328. The custom stemmed from a superstitious belief that such actions were necessary in order to ensure crop success and appease local fertility deities and nature gods.

That these ideas even express themselves in our literature and in our culture is significant, because they suggest the basic human need for Someone to rescue us, a radical wish for Someone to transform our state of being. They show the hunger, the thirst, of the world for a Redeemer, a Deliverer. But no earthly example of role reversal, historical or literary, ever can compete with the way Christ condescended to lower Himself in order to elevate us. By doing so He became the perfect High Priest, able to mediate between a fallen, wounded race and a holy, perfect God.

## WITNESSING

We often want that which is newer, easier, faster, or more powerful. Ever advancing technologies place better products and services on the market each day. Many years ago it took days (sometimes weeks) to send messages to loved ones, friends, or business associates who were great distances away. Today, messages can be sent in just a few seconds via email.

The Bible tells us in Genesis, chapter 4, that Abel, the second son of Adam, brought an acceptable sacrifice unto the Lord. But the book of Hebrews tells us that Christ offered a better sacrifice than that of Abel (Heb. 12:24). How is this relevant to those of us who live in the twenty-first century? Abel, like many others after him, offered an animal sacrifice. The animal sacrifice was only a

figure, which represented a Savior to come. Christ, the Lamb of God, is that Savior, the True Sacrifice.

The blood of the animal sacrifice could not save a person from sin. But there is power in the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from our sins. Animal sacrifices had to be offered over and over again. And once the animal was slain, its death was permanent. Christ died once, for all, and now He lives again, to reign as our King forevermore.

As witnesses, let us share the good news that Jesus has made the way of salvation easier. And because of Him, there is a better life than the one here on this earth, hope beyond the grave, and something more than what our eyes can see. There is life everlasting in a newer, better world.

*Thursday*

*July 24*

**OUR REACTION TO CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY: PART 2.**

**Y**esterday's lesson looked at two examples of those who, having to choose between something good and something bad, chose the better of the two. Unfortunately, that's not always the case.

"See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven" (Heb. 12:25). Notice, again, the comparison between something better and something not so good. How much more impressive is it to be spoken to from heaven than from earth?

**Read Hebrews 12:25. What's the point the author is making here? How does it fit in with the whole tenor of the letter to the Hebrews?**

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**"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" (Heb. 10:28, 29).**

**Read these two verses. What point is being made? What lessons are in them for us, particularly as Seventh-day Adventists, who have been given so "much more" than many others?**

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**The human reaction to Jesus' superiority always will be two-fold. Some gladly will accept Him as their Lord. Some will refuse Him, and not always out of ignorance, either. Some know who the Lord is and what He has done in their lives but decide against Him anyway. The book of Hebrews is a call specifically to the latter: to those who know about Jesus to not reject what He has done. All through the book this same pleading occurs: Look at who Jesus is and look at what He has done for us. How, then, can you turn away?**

**If they needed to hear this back then, how much more so do we today?**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

### *LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH*

**Icebreaker:** For a moment, be a Pharisee. What would you think of Jesus? A mere carpenter, who played God? A nobody with an air of superiority? An uneducated know-it-all? The book of Hebrews strives to present Jesus as a “superior” Being. He’s better than the average man, better than men such as Moses, better than the prophets, better than the angels. He’s more than you can imagine. But you have to *katanoein* to even begin to understand His superiority, says the author of Hebrews.

#### **Thought Questions:**

1. The Greek word *katanoein* means “to look,” except that it implies more than just opening your eyes and catching the color of someone’s eyes, height, approximate weight, and special features. When Paul uses the word *katanoein* in Hebrews 3:1, he urges us to “fix [your] thoughts on Jesus” (NIV). Don’t just look at Him; understand Him. Don’t just see Him; know Him. How can an intimate knowledge of Jesus help us? What keeps Jesus’ superiority from intimidating us?
2. Consider the president of a country who has a history of excellence, who is a high achiever, who is goal oriented, focused, and accountable. What kind of people would follow him? What would be the social, economic, and spiritual climate of that country? In what ways would the citizens show support to their president? How is this similar to our response to Jesus? How is it different?

#### **Application Questions:**

1. To help us understand God’s love for us, Jesus uses the same word Paul uses in Hebrews (*katanoein*) when He tells us to look at the ravens (Luke 12:24). He means study/understand/research creation to get a clearer understanding of our Father. How has nature helped you to obtain a deeper understanding of divinity in your pursuit of Christlikeness?
2. Because of Jesus’ superior nature, the disciples were committed and motivated to continue in their Master’s footsteps, even after He left them—even when it cost them their lives. How, then, should that same superior nature fuel our energies today? Why do you think the church makes seemingly little progress when it claims to believe in the power of Jesus’ superiority? What steps can the church take to be refueled by the passion and mission of Jesus?

**FURTHER STUDY:**

Christ was not insensible to ignominy and disgrace. He felt it all most bitterly. He felt it as much more deeply and acutely than we can feel suffering, as His nature was more exalted and pure and holy than that of the sinful race for whom He suffered. He was the Majesty of heaven, He was equal with the Father, He was the Commander of the hosts of angels, yet He died for man the death that was, above all others, clothed with ignominy and reproach. O that the haughty hearts of men might realize this! O that they might enter into the meaning of redemption and seek to learn the meekness and lowliness of Jesus!”—Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 339.

“The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. It speaketh better things than the blood of Abel, for Christ ever liveth to make intercession for us. We need to keep ever before us the efficacy of the blood of Jesus. That life-cleansing, life-sustaining blood, appropriated by living faith, is our hope. We need to grow in appreciation of its inestimable value, for it speaks for us only as we by faith claim its virtue, keeping the conscience clean and at peace with God.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 947.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- 1. Tuesday’s study mentioned that the results from Christ’s superiority are future oriented. How do we react when people accuse us of thinking only in terms of the future and forgetting social and political involvement here and now?**
- 2. In the context of Jesus’ superiority being linked to His “inferiority”; that is, in His role of being “lower than the angels,” what can we learn about the servant-leader concept? What does Mark 10:44 add to this idea?**
- 3. In what subtle ways can even faithful Christians be caught up in the trap of self-superiority? What’s the only answer to protect ourselves against this deception?**

**SUMMARY:** Christ’s superior ministry breaks down in His better sacrifice on earth and His superior ministry in heaven as our High Priest. The results for us are a better covenant, a better hope, a better country, and a better resurrection. We commit ourselves to Him who has brought about so great a salvation.