

Lesson 13

*September 20-26

Jesus and Our Future



Sabbath Afternoon

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

MEMORY TEXT: “For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Hebrews 13:14, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: However much Christians are enjoying the privileges of being God’s people here and now, their ultimate hope exists in the final fulfillment of all promises: Christ’s second coming.

HOWEVER MUCH HEBREWS HAS FOCUSED ON THE PAST, such as the earthly-sanctuary service and the death of Christ—the picture would be incomplete if it stopped there. For this reason, Hebrews looks toward the future, as well, particularly to Jesus’ return, which culminates the plan of salvation. Without this dimension, the Christian hope would be in vain. Maybe that’s why the word *hope* is found five times in the book, and for Christians, that hope is eternity with God in a new world, the one that His people have been eagerly anticipating since the fall in Eden and the first promise of salvation, a promise made complete in Jesus.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why does the author of Hebrews imply that he’s living in the last days? Why does the Bible talk about salvation as a present reality and at the same time a future hope? How is the sanctuary tied in with the second coming of Jesus?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 27.

Sunday

September 21

THE TIME OF THE END.

Read Hebrews 1:2 and Hebrews 9:26. What do they mean by talking about the “last days” and “the end of the world” even before the first century A.D. had ended?

How do we understand these words? Perhaps, like this: The first coming of Christ was a climactic event that brought about a change of eras. A whole new spiritual order had been inaugurated by the ministry of Jesus, who had to suffer and die before sin and suffering ever could be over. The supreme sacrifice had been offered; the penalty for sin had been paid. All that was needed to secure salvation had been taken care of with Jesus’ once-and-for-all sacrifice. These things had to happen before the reality of a new heavens and a new earth could ever be realized. In this sense, and from this perspective, the apostle could talk about his time as the “end of the world,” no matter how many more centuries would elapse before Christ returned.

Read 1 Peter 1:18-20. Notice how he ties in the death of Jesus with the “last times.” Why did Jesus have to die before these “last times” could arrive?

The author of Hebrews wanted to let readers know that the old ways are gone and that something new and better, something that will bring to fruition all their hopes, has taken place through Jesus. The author, it seems, wasn’t so much trying to place them in a time line as much as let them know that they were in a new spiritual age.

“With the first advent of Christ, the new age had broken into or overlapped the old. The two ages would continue to exist side by side until the Second Advent, when the old age would finally be destroyed. Christians, therefore, live in two worlds at once. . . .

Jesus even could combine the two concepts together in one sentence: ‘I tell you the truth, a time *is coming* and *has now come* when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God’ (John 5:25, NIV).” —Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End-Time* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994), pp. 77, 78, emphasis author’s.

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

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Texts: Hebrews 13:8, 2 Peter 3:10-13.

Teachers Aims:

1. To explore what caused the author of Hebrews to imply that he was living in the last days.
2. To compare salvation as a present reality versus salvation as a future hope.
3. To define how the sanctuary is tied in with the second coming of Christ.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Time of the End.

- A. The ministry of Jesus created a new era.
- B. The old was washed away, and new opportunities were raised.
- C. We are saved, but this is not the final realization of our salvation.

II. Keeping Perspective.

- A. The Bible is written by human authors but is the Word of God.
- B. There is one Godhead but Three within the trinity, and All are called God.
- C. We are saved by faith but judged by our works.

III. What the Future Holds.

- A. We await the second advent of Christ.
- B. We hold precious the promise of the resurrection of the dead.
- C. Christ shall execute and bestow the final judgment and reward.

Summary: God has invested much in us, and He asks that we take an active part in our future by investing our faith in Him. He wants us to continue to grow and advance by helping those around us. For only by living a life that reflects Him can we draw others to accept the salvation He offers to all.

Commentary.

As we reach the end of these lessons, it is appropriate to talk about Jesus' second coming, expressed here in the faith of those who waited for hope given in the promise of His coming: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

These lives were regulated by the firm conviction God would fulfill

Monday

September 22

THE ALREADY AND THE NOT-YET.

In the New Testament, and especially in Paul's writings, we find the concept of the "already/not-yet." What this means is that we are already saved and yet we are not finally saved. For example, John 5:24 reads, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, *hath* everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is *passed* from death unto life" (emphasis supplied). Thus, we are already saved; we have eternal life, even now. In contrast, Matthew 19:29 reads, "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and *shall inherit* everlasting life" (emphasis supplied). In other words, final salvation is yet to come (for another example of this contrast, see Ephesians 2:6 and Romans 8:22-24).

In what ways does this already/not-yet tension appear in Hebrews? See Hebrews 12:28, 11:13-16. How can we resolve this tension? Or should we?

There are all sorts of tensions in the Bible that, if properly understood, actually harmonize with each other in helping fill in the big picture. The problem comes when we emphasize one aspect at the expense of another; instead, we should attempt to balance them out.

The Bible is full of statements that seem to be opposed to each other and yet both are true: While living on earth, Jesus was fully divine and fully human. The Bible is written by human authors; even so, it is the Word of God. God is independent of time, though He relates to us in time. There is one Godhead, but the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are called God. We are saved by faith and judged by works.

When it comes to God and His plan of salvation, we have to acknowledge that our mind can grasp only part of the reality, a few slices at best. In such a context, we must realize, too, that opposites are not necessarily contradictory but can simply be different parts of a much bigger picture. Trouble comes when we focus too much on a single part at the expense of the whole.

Look up these verses: John 3:15, 36; 1 Timothy 6:12; 1 John 5:12, 13. These, among many others, stress that we have eternal life now. Though the full realization of it wouldn't come until Christ returns, how do these promises give us comfort and assurance for the present? How differently should we live, knowing that we *have* eternal life, even now?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

the promises He had given them, and as they faced death, they continued to look forward (to the future) to the fulfillment of these promises, as is evident from the words in which Isaac and Jacob bestowed their final blessings on their sons or grandsons.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived preeminently as strangers and pilgrims on the earth in a sense that is inapplicable to those Israelites of later generations after the settlement in Canaan. To Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Canaan remained in the future, a Promised Land to the end of their lives; meanwhile, their descendants saw the fulfillment of what was promised to the patriarchs. But to the patriarchs, that promise was sure, because it was God's promise, and they staked everything on its certainty.

The future promise given to those men of the Old Testament is the promise given to those also in the new era, the Christian era. Hebrews 11:16 presents, as in Hebrews 13:14, the notion of a city, the city promised to those who believe in it. Paul clearly explains in those verses their true home was not on earth at all but the better city on which they had set their hearts; that is, the heavenly city. The earthly Canaan and the earthly Jerusalem were temporary object lessons pointing to the saints' everlasting rest, the well-founded city of God.

The example of the patriarchs is intended to guide the readers of the book of Hebrews to a true sense of values. First Peter 2:11 mentioned they are to live in this world as "aliens and exiles" (RSV), and like the Philippians to whom the apostle Paul wrote, their "citizenship" is in heaven (Phil. 3:20, NKJV). This notion has proved too high for many Christians throughout the different centuries of our era.

Yet, those who have shared most truly the promise of a future heavenly city of the patriarchs have not been unpractical, too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use. The three patriarchs mentioned above were not faultless, but God is not ashamed to be called their God, because they took Him at His word.

As expatriates, they sought a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, there was ample opportunity for them to return. But to go back would have been the reversal of the principle of faith and the turning of their backs on the hope that had been set before them.

By their steadfast endurance and perseverance in the midst of every kind of adversity, they make it plain they desire a better city, altogether beyond any country past or present of this fallen world; in other words, a heavenly one, unmarred by any imperfection, glorious forevermore.

The apostle Paul's use of the present tense in verse 16 should be noted; it expresses the desire even now for a better city, and God is not ashamed even now to be called their God.

For these men, then, and for all who tread the same path of faith, God has prepared His city, His commonwealth. There is, obviously, no difference between the heavenly country and the city of God. The

Tuesday

September 23

FUTURE EVENTS.

“But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (Heb. 11:16).

The discussion on the last days and on the already and the not-yet shows that Jesus is at the center of the end. “When the New Testament is rightly understood, Jesus Christ is what the end is all about.”—Paulien, p. 81.

Which events—still future and depending on Jesus’ intervention—are mentioned in Hebrews?

Heb. 9:28; 10:25, 36, 37 _____

Heb. 6:2; 9:27; 10:27, 30 _____

Heb. 11:16; 13:14 _____

Heb. 11:26, 39, 40 _____

Although the apostle refers to Christ’s second coming, the resurrection of the dead, and the judgment, no timetable is given, either in Hebrews or in any part of the Bible. No doubt, it is more important to live a holy life than to know precisely when final events will play out, which is probably why the emphasis on the Bible is to be ready for the return of Christ, whenever it happens.

Future judgment is mentioned quite often in Hebrews. In 10:27, the judgment seems to refer to what we call “the executive judgment,” because the consuming fire is mentioned (see Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:9, 10). Whenever and however it all takes place, we haven’t been told; according to Hebrews, however, a few points come through:

1. God functions as Judge (Heb. 12:23).
2. He is going to recompense evil (Heb. 10:30).
3. He will reward His people (Heb. 11:26).

Though the emphasis in Hebrews is on the death of Christ and on His high-priestly ministry in heaven, there is still a clear focus on the end: judgment, Second Coming, resurrection of the dead, and the final reward. Why do you think that is so? As you ponder your answer, ask yourself this question, What is the purpose of Christ’s death and high-priestly ministry as depicted in Hebrews?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

patriarchs and the other men and women of God who lived before Christ have a share in the same inheritance of glory as is promised to believers in Christ of New Testament times.

Hebrews also gives us examples of those who did not live in this world as “aliens and exiles.” Esau rebelled against God and lost His inheritance, or birthright blessing, even though he did not commit murder or adultery. Nor was it some heinous sin that caused him to lose his birthright; instead, it was a need we all experience and must satisfy, or we die. It is the human need for food, for “a morsel of meat” (Heb.12:16, 17).

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Genesis 4:17; Matthew 24:24, 37; Luke 13:34; Hebrews 12:28; 11:16; 1 Peter 1:13; Revelation 21:2, 3.

1. How important is the second coming of Christ to the author of Hebrews? What part does it play in the message of this book as a whole? Would the book as a whole make sense without any idea of the Second Coming?
2. In some sense, the author of Hebrews believed he was living in the last days. Do you think he realized several thousand years would pass without the end having come? Should this affect our own belief that we are living in the last days? How?
3. Hebrews carefully refrains from giving a detailed chronology of end-time events. Yet, we as Seventh-day Adventists believe in the importance of a somewhat detailed knowledge of what these events will be. Would it be possible to conclude from Hebrews it is not important to be aware of the precise nature of end-time events?
4. What do you think the earthly Jerusalem represented to Hebrews' intended readers? How might their actual experiences have affected or altered these views? Was the earthly Jerusalem possibly a disappointment to them? Do you think they might have been emotionally attached to it nevertheless?
5. How literally are we to take the idea of a heavenly Jerusalem? Is there literally a city in heaven, and how would it differ from earthly cities? Why do you think God chooses to portray His kingdom as a city when cities are shown as a result of the Fall back in the book of Genesis?

Wednesday

September 24

THE HEAVENLY CITY.

Three passages in Hebrews talk about the heavenly city. What are similarities and differences in these passages? Heb. 11:10-16; 12:18-24; 13:12-14.

Old Testament believers, as well as followers of Christ, are on their way to the heavenly city. Hebrews 11:10-16 describes Abraham and the patriarchs as pilgrims heading toward the real homeland, the heavenly fatherland, the city of God. Old Testament times, New Testament times, it makes no difference: All of God's people end up in the same place *if they will endure patiently unto the end*. Again, this is a key theme in Hebrews: Don't give up!

The second passage describes the new-covenant community. The author makes an interesting contrast between Mt. Sinai, with all its fire and darkness and tempest and fear and Mount Zion (a common name for the earthly Jerusalem), the heavenly Jerusalem. Here, again, in a very poetic and powerful manner, he contrasts the old way with the new, letting the people know that thanks to Jesus they have a better revelation of truth than those who lived in the old covenant. In fact, believers are portrayed as having 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 of the 'unshakable kingdom' (v 28) they are about to receive."—W. L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), pp. 470, 466.

Hebrews 13:12-14 presents a contrast between the earthly Jerusalem, which Jesus was forced to leave (He was crucified outside the gates of Jerusalem), and the future city, "the one to come," the one all of God's faithful followers are promised as their home.

Focus especially on Hebrews 13:14. What does the author mean when he says that we have "no continuing" city? What's the point he's making? Why don't we have such a city? Why can't we have one here, even if we wanted one? Once you answer that, ask yourself, Do I live as though I really believe that I have no continuing city? Or am I living as though this were my permanent home? Matthew 6:19-21 will help you find the answer.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Hunger is a legitimate need. The Bible instructs us, however, in feeding our bodies to remember they are the temples of the Holy Ghost and to abstain from polluting them. But Esau did not lose his birthright blessing by eating unhealthful food. He ate neither pork or blood-filled meat, forbidden by the old covenant, or the Old Testament version of Hostess Twinkies. Instead, he sold his birthright blessing for a bowl of nutritious, healthful lentil stew. He lusted for something intrinsically good, but he lusted for it more than he lusted for the approval and blessing of God. This is a cautionary tale for all of us who, in our act of abstaining from patently odious sins—adultery, sexual perversion, gluttony, profanity—place above God the things that seem innocent and good and rob ourselves of our birthright in Jesus.

WITNESSING

When Daniel was born, he received a \$50 savings bond as a gift. Although it is rightfully his, his father is presently holding it. When he turns 18, Daniel will be able to take possession of his savings bond and cash it in.

Similarly, Christ holds for us the priceless gift of immortality and the riches of salvation. “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son . . . to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:4, 5). “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then . . . joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:16, 17). As God’s adopted sons and daughters, we have received an inheritance. We have received eternal life and a heavenly home called the New Jerusalem. Although it is rightfully ours, the Father is presently holding it. When Jesus returns, we will be able to claim it.

The Lord does not want any of us to be left behind, so He delays His coming in order to give us time to choose Him. And He is counting on you and me to help our brothers and sisters get ready. We must tell them of His soon coming and that He is bringing with Him the gift of eternal life. He wants each one of us to be ready to claim our inheritance.

Jesus exhorted us to have the faith and trust of children as a condition for claiming that inheritance. Have you ever observed how excited children become when they anticipate a holiday or a visit? They look forward to it for weeks, their eyes aglow, and talk of nothing else. One little girl, Katy, gets very excited when her grandmother comes to visit. On the day of Grandmother’s arrival, Katy can be found looking through a window watching and waiting for her grandmother to come. When Jesus comes, whom will He find watching and waiting for His return?

Thursday

September 25

THE SANCTUARY AND THE SECOND COMING.

As we've seen, and studied this whole quarter, the book of Hebrews cannot be understood apart from the Hebrew sanctuary service. In fact, it would be hard to understand the plan of salvation, particularly the death of Christ as the substitutionary sacrifice for sin, apart from an understanding of the Jewish sacrificial system. The whole plan of salvation is built around the concepts and symbols first revealed in the Old Testament sanctuary; in Christ, they reach their fulfillment.

We've seen, too, that Hebrews, while focusing on the past (Christ's death) and on the present (Christ's ministry in heaven), also looks toward the future, to the Second Coming and all that it entails.

Thus, Hebrews links the Second Coming with the sanctuary. How could it not? If the sanctuary points to salvation, and salvation is consummated in the Second Coming, then by necessity the sanctuary must be linked to the Second Coming. It's hard to see how one logically could be separated from the other. No wonder, as Adventists with a sharp focus on the Second Coming, we have a distinct sanctuary message to present to the world.

In what ways does the author of Hebrews in the following verses link the sanctuary motif to the second coming of Christ?

Heb. 9:24-28 _____

Heb. 10:11-13 _____

Heb. 12:22-24 _____

The second advent of Christ is the consummation of what Jesus had done on the cross and of what He is doing as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. Both His death and His high-priestly ministry would be of no avail without the Second Coming.

Final salvation will become a reality when Jesus returns and takes His people to Mt. Zion, to the future city, the heavenly Jerusalem, where they can live in the direct presence of God. The teaching about the sanctuary and the teaching about the last things belong together and should not be separated.

Dwell again on the emphasis and importance the book of Hebrews has placed on the sanctuary service in heaven. How does this emphasis strengthen our faith that as Adventists we are on the right track, with strong emphasis on the heavenly sanctuary, as well?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

LIFE-APPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: The typeface most newspapers use for astounding events is called “second coming” type. These are large, bold, heavy, black letters reserved for only the most stupendous, amazing, front-page news. “Second coming” typeface was used to announce the surrenders of Germany and Japan, marking the end of World War II; the assassination of John F. Kennedy; the shooting of President Reagan; and other dramatic events of universal importance. One day the world will witness the great event for which the “second coming” type was named. And that surely will be a “headline event!”—Adapted from *Parson’s Bible Illustrator CD-Rom*.

Thought Questions:

1. Newspapers use large, bold print to announce big news. What methods should the church use to spread the big news of the Second Coming? Why are some methods more effective than others? Why is it important for the church to be the bearer of such news?
2. The inscription on the dome of the U. S. Capitol reads, “One far-off divine event toward which the whole creation moves.” When the dome was erected, some God-fearing official ordered that inscription to be etched, believing the truth of the

Second Coming was vital to the concern of the nation. Many, many years have gone by since the Capitol was built. Even more years have gone by since Christ returned to heaven. In what ways has the passing of time dampened the enthusiasm of the Church? With every year that Jesus’ coming is delayed, do you think Satan gains more of an advantage over the final outcome of the world? Explain.

Application Questions:

1. What are some of your personal experiences that can be given a “second coming” typeface? How do these experiences represent your hope of Jesus’ second coming? What is the role of Jesus in your life as you make future plans? In light of your preparation for Jesus’ second coming, how limited or extensive should your plans on earth be?
2. To the question “What is the secret of your success?” D. L. Moody answered, “For many years I have never given an address without the consciousness that the Lord may come before I have finished.” How can you develop the same kind of intensity and zeal? What are the elements in your life that keep you from developing this kind of an attitude?

Friday

September 26

FURTHER STUDY: Study James 5:1-11 and Revelation 22:6-21 and reflect on our glorious hope, as well as on the challenges and promises listed in these passages. Read also Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, pp. 283–287, 297, 298, 304–306.

Note: “We are homeward bound. He who loved us so much as to die for us hath builded for us a city. The New Jerusalem is our place of rest. There will be no sadness in the city of God. No wail of sorrow, no dirge of crushed hopes and buried affections, will evermore be heard. Soon the garments of heaviness will be changed for the wedding garment. Soon we shall witness the coronation of our King. Those whose lives have been hidden with Christ, those who on this earth have fought the good fight of faith, will shine forth with the Redeemer’s glory in the kingdom of God. It will not be long till we shall see Him in whom our hopes of eternal life are centered. And in His presence, all the trials and sufferings of this life will be as nothingness. ‘Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.’ [Hebrews 10:35-37.] Look up, look up, and let your faith continually increase. Let this faith guide you along the narrow path that leads through the gates of the city of God into the great beyond, the wide, unbounded future of glory that is for the redeemed.” —Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 287, 288.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Why do the New Testament and also Hebrews present such a strong message about end-time events? Why are end-time events, such as the Second Coming, so important to the Christian faith?**
- 2. Look again at the Ellen White quote above. How does her statement about those who fought “the good fight of faith” fit in perfectly with the basic message of the book of Hebrews?**
- 3. According to some of the texts this week, those who have accepted Christ have, even now, eternal life. How would you explain what this means to a non-Christian, who sees Christians go to the grave just as nonbelievers do?**

SUMMARY: As guests and strangers in this world, we are on the move toward a goal, the heavenly city. We are on the way to see God face to face.