

The Book of Hebrews

LESSON
TWO

Content and Structure Discussion Forum



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The Book of Hebrews

Lesson Two: Content and Structure

Discussion Forum

With

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Dr. Peter Walker
Dr. Stephen J. Wellum

Question 1:

In what ways did the author of Hebrews believe that history had reached the last days with the coming of Jesus Christ?

Dr. Barry Joslin

The author of Hebrews believed that history had reached its apex, its last days, in the coming of Christ. Matter of fact, the first sentence of the book of Hebrews, the letter of Hebrews, better yet, the *sermon* to the Hebrews, starts out that way, doesn't it? That in, "Long ago, in many portions and in many different ways, God had spoken through the prophets and to the fathers, but now," and then here it is, "*in these last days* he has spoken in a Son," in *his* Son, the one who had inherited his own name, the divine name, and he rules and reigns at the right hand. And so, that's the first sentence of the book of Hebrews, really the first four verses, the prologue. And so, this familiar New Testament idea is that the last days had been inaugurated with the coming of Christ, the first advent of Christ and would be consummated at his return. And so, whereas the Old Testament looked towards that day of the Messiah, the age of the Messiah — we see that in something like Joel 2:28-32 — Hebrews says, that time is now here. These are the last days because God has now spoken the definitive and final word in his Son. What else does he need to say? What else does he need to do? The redemption that had been anticipated, the redemption that had been promised, has now found its fulfillment, or as Paul would say, it's "Yes and Amen" in Christ.

Dr. D.A. Carson

The epistle to the Hebrews begins with a contrast between earlier times and these last days. "In earlier times, God spoke to the fathers through the prophets in various ways and means, and so forth, but in these last days he has spoken to us" — the expression in the original is subtle — not just by his Son, as if the Son is one more prophet, but he has spoken unto us in the "Son revelation." The climax of all of this anterior revelation is the Lord Jesus himself. It's not that God spoke through the prophets, and now he speaks through Jesus as one more prophet, but Jesus himself is the Word.

That's not the vocabulary that Hebrews uses, but in this respect he's like John's gospel: "In the beginning was the Word" — God's self-expression — "and [this self-expression] was with God, and [this self-expression] was God." Well, in these last days, these climactic days, these consummating days, then God's final revelation has been disclosed, and this Son shows up as the exact radiance of his glory. That's almost saying, "the light of his light." How do you distinguish between radiance and glory? That's partly the point. He's the exact stamp of the very nature and being of God. And so the culminating revelation is in Jesus Christ, and that's what makes this the last days. So, what you have is the coming of the final revelation and there is no more revelation of that order to be given until all that has come because of him is fulfilled. So, that's why we live in the last time, the last hour, the last days, until the culmination comes when Jesus himself returns at the end of the age. ---

Dr. Fredrick Long

The author of Hebrews mentions Jesus as one who is God's Son, and that God has spoken to us in his Son. This is a profound statement because it's contrasted, or set in comparison relationship to the many ways that God has spoken in the past. So, according to the author of Hebrews then, the fact that God has sent his Son means that he's spoken in a final way or in a more complete way, and here I think we need to understand that there is a progression of God's revelation to us and that there's a culmination point with the coming of Jesus in terms of God representing himself directly in his Son. And what this means is that there's going to be an end of a certain way of people relating to God, that is, through a cultic system with a temple. And there's a transformation that's taking place. And so, "last days" can be understood in the sense of a closing down of a certain system of relating to God, while God is also opening up a greater, larger, more expansive way that people can relate to God and experience his presence and his Word. And so, specifically, that Word has come in his Son. So God has spoken directly to us now in a Son, and we had better listen to what he has to say for us to continue in relationship with God and to experience the salvation he has to offer us.

Dr. Mark L. Strauss

The argument of Hebrews is that Christ's life, death and resurrection is superior to the old covenant, and the author clearly argues that Jesus the arrival of Jesus inaugurates God's end time salvation. The very first line in the book says, "In the past God spoke through the prophets." The prophets pointed forward to the coming of the Messiah, to the coming of God's salvation. The next line says, "But in these latter days, in these last days, he has spoken to us through the Son." He clearly views the coming of Jesus as the consummation, as the climax of human history, as the arrival of God's salvation and the beginning of the end times. All the prophets, all the Old Testament sacrificial system, all the Old Testament covenants, the tabernacle, all of this was a model, a shadow pointing forward to God's ultimate fulfillment in Christ. With Christ, God's salvation has arrived. The shadow has become the reality. The end times have arrived.

Question 2:**How did the author of Hebrews affirm the continuing validity of the old covenant for his readers?****Dr. Simon Vibert**

The author to the Hebrews affirms the continued validity of the old covenant in a number of ways. There are a lot of quotations from the Old Testament, all of which point forward, of course, beyond themselves, but in a sense to fulfill and to bring to complete fruition the promises that are made there. So, in particular in chapter 8, for example, the promise for the new covenant is given in a context in which there's an anticipation, a looking forward, that actually the things that had been hoped for are now fulfilled in the coming of Christ.

Dr. Carol Kaminski

The old covenant is important because, really, if you think of the Old Testament from about 1500 B.C. all the way through, the old covenant is the governing covenant. So, but, the writer to the Hebrews also speaks about the new covenant and, which is in contrast to the old, and you have the old, the first, and then the second. But if you think of the writer to the Hebrews, the older categories from the old covenant are used to actually explain about the new covenant and to explain who Jesus is. So, really, I think, first of all, I think you can't understand the new covenant unless you understand the old. Things like the sacrificial system, the tabernacle, the priesthood; all this is really made up of the old covenant. And so, the writer to the Hebrews is drawing a bridge from what people know, and really saying that the old covenant is a shadow; it's pointing forward to Jesus. So, I think it's valid in terms of it being the word of God and providing the context into which we're to understand who Jesus is as the fulfillment of all those old kind of sacrificial systems, priesthood and so on, and really seeing it climax in him. And so he appeals to the Old Testament and to the covenant as a way of showing who Jesus is.

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

The author to the Hebrews affirmed the continuing validity of the old covenant for his new covenant readers in a number of different ways. It might surprise us, because he also emphasizes that the new covenant has come in to show that the old covenant is now obsolete, that the institutions of the old covenant are not nearly as superior as Jesus' sacrifice. And yet, he emphasized from the beginning that, for example, the same God who spoke the old covenant Scriptures has now spoken to us in his Son. He emphasizes, as he quotes from old covenant Scriptures, that God is speaking to us in the present as he addresses us, in the words of Psalm 95 or Psalm 110 or Psalm 40, that God is addressing the new covenant community... And that's connected to the whole theme that he makes, the whole point that he makes, that those Old Testament sacrifices and the sanctuary in which they were offered really are shadows of something better to come, something that has now arrived, shadows that derive their shape and, really, that derive their effectiveness as means of grace for old covenant people from the reality that Christ has now come to offer that final sacrifice and to

enter into the heavenly sanctuary to intercede on our behalf. So, he sees great contrast between old covenant and new, but also great continuity because the same God is working out his redemptive plan in the ancient times and now in these last days.

Dr. Sean McDonough

When we think of the book of Hebrews, we typically, and rightly emphasize the discontinuity between the New Testament and the Old Testament, the new covenant and the old covenant. And that surely is the weight of emphasis in Hebrews, because his people are tempted to go back to the old covenant. But that doesn't mean that the writer of Hebrews suddenly thought we should just jettison the entirety of the Old Testament. This is most evident in the "hall of faith," so called, in chapter 11, where Old Testament exemplars are held out as models for our behavior and, more importantly, models for our faith. So, in addition to all the other aspects of continuity — the exhortation to "love your neighbor," the prohibitions against idolatry, all of which the writer of Hebrews would have assumed — chapter 11 stands as pretty clear testimony to his high regard for the ongoing validity of the personages and the dynamics and the stories of the Old Testament.

Question 3:

In what ways did the author of Hebrews motivate his readers to persevere in the faith?

Dr. Barry Joslin

The author of Hebrews, as a pastor, motivated his people to persevere in a couple of different ways. We can think of it in terms of a positive way and a negative way. First of all, positively by arguing from the Old Testament and proving that this Jesus of Nazareth, the one who is fully man, he's is also the divine eternal Son of God, is indeed the long awaited Messiah. He is the Son. He is the one through whom God has spoken and accomplished final and eternal redemption. He is the guarantor, the mediator of the promised and long awaited new covenant. It had been centuries since God had promised that a new covenant would come to Jeremiah and to the people of Israel, and generations of disobedient Israelites had gone through, and there always was a faithful remnant. We see some of them in chapter 11. So, there's a positive encouragement by showing them what's out in front of them, by whetting their appetite for what's to come, by encouraging them that there are many of those who have run this race before you... But there are so many that he says, time would fail if I told you all these, and this great cloud of witnesses, they surround you, do what they did, follow and obey the promises of God knowing that there is far more out in front of you. And so, there's a positive encouragement, a theological encouragement, an encouragement of witnesses, etc. But also, quite strongly, matter of fact more than anybody else in the New Testament, any other author, he warns with the strongest of language that if they do not they will be eternally damned. There's no other way to put it. So, delight in running the race, casting off all those things that so easily entangle. Run after Christ. You don't have to worry about what happens if you don't.

But then, let me warn you as your pastor what will happen, what *will* happen if you do not persevere until the end. But then, he also gives several areas of great confidence, several ways of arguing, demonstrating that there is great confidence that those who are a part of the new covenant people will not be lost.

Dr. Dan Lacich

In trying to get the readers of Hebrews motivated to persevere in their faith, the author does a couple of things that are, I think, smart psychologically. One is to make note of some of the great saints from the past, you know, what they went through, how they persevered, to use them as examples, specific examples, you know, going through chapter 11, this person and that person, this one, and you can't read that without feeling a sense of inspiration yourself that, "I can do that as well." But then, connected with all that is this phrase that we are "surrounded by ... a great cloud of witnesses." I love the athletic image of that. Almost as if the author is saying to the readers, you're in the game; you're on the field, and there's a whole stadium of people who are cheering you on, and they want you to win, and they want you to press ahead. You know, home field advantage is a pretty important thing in a lot of sports, and so I think he's trying to say we constantly have a home field advantage, we have a crowd cheering for us to motivate us on.

Dr. Edward M. Keazirian

The author of Hebrews was a child of his own time, and he used the same kind of motivational techniques that would have been common in that time period... I think that three probably stand out. The first is that he shows the superiority of Jesus Christ. He looks at conventions in the old covenant, compares them with Jesus, and in every regard, Jesus is superior. And because of that, Jesus is the appropriate one for hope and for faith. And there is this argument underlying this, from the lesser to the greater, and if the old covenant and all the elements of that had a purpose and a role, how much greater is Jesus Christ in the purpose and role of the new covenant? So, that argument from the lesser to the greater, to the superiority of Jesus Christ, is probably the central argument in the whole letter and the motivation for the readers to hold onto their faith. A second motivation comes more on a negative side, and this is to look at the consideration of the covenants themselves. The old covenant was insufficient by itself. It was a shadow of what was to come. The new covenant is the one that really had the power and the ability to bring salvation... There is judgment associated with the old covenant, and if they are not in a position of the new covenant, they will not survive that judgment, they will not inherit the promises. And so, the ineffectual nature of the old covenant is a primary motivation for embracing the new covenant and holding onto their faith. A third motive or strategy that the author uses is one that was very common in the ancient world and a major part of the educational system, major part of training for young men who were going into leadership positions, and that would have been exemplification and imitation. And so, young students would be encouraged to go back and look at the heroes of Greek and Roman history and to do biographies on them, to memorize their speeches, and to develop speeches of their own that would laud the characteristics and virtues of these ancient heroes. And then they were expected to embrace those virtues and try to bring

those virtues into their own lives. Well, this exemplification and imitation is evident at three levels in the letter. First of all, there is the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus was the hero of the faith. He was the author and perfecter of the faith. He was the one that is the leading architect and exemplar of the faith. He went through suffering, and yet he is our hero. He is the perfect example because he was able to see beyond the suffering. He was able to see the joy and the glory that lay beyond it. And that encouraged him and sustained him through the suffering so that he was able to persevere to the end and to inherit all that was to come from his work. So, Jesus Christ is the first example, the example *par excellence*, the one that we should imitate. The second level is the heroes of the faith in the patriarchs, prophets, the people that were noted in Hebrew Scripture for their role in sustaining the covenant, maintaining faith in all kinds of difficult circumstances. And among them is mentioned Abraham, and we're told that Abraham was looking for a city, that he never got to that city, never inherited it, saw it from afar, but persevered to death. And then there was talk about prophets and others who endured the suffering and still held on to their faith. And we are told that they held on to their faith, and they didn't inherit the promise because God had something better in mind for us. And so, for their sake and our own, they are the example for us to follow; they're the motive for us to persevere. And finally, there is the example of their own leaders, their own leaders in the church, the local church, the ones who watch out for them spiritually, the ones whose lives have proven their validity and their truthfulness over the years. And so, the people are enjoined to examine the lives of their leaders, to take a lesson from that and to live according to it, because their lives have had an outcome that proves the quality of their lives. And so, from Jesus Christ, the patriarchs of the faith and the covenants, and their own local leadership are all examples that the people are to imitate, and that is to be the third motivation in their perseverance.-

Dr. Mark L. Strauss

The whole book of Hebrews is the author calling his readers to persevere, to persevere in the face of persecution, of social ostracization, separation; calling them to not go back to their old way, not go back to Judaism unfulfilled, to stick with Judaism fulfilled. And he does so, really, in two ways. In one sense he warns them. There's these five strong warning passages. He warns them that if you depart from Christ, no sacrifice for sins remains. There's no way to be saved apart from Jesus Christ. So, there's these strong and stern warnings of the danger of departing from the faith. That's the negative side of his encouragement to persevere. The positive side is the superiority of Christ in the new covenant. The old covenant was partial. The old covenant never, the sacrifices never took away sins; they only pointed forward to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross. And so, Christ is the fulfillment. The supremacy of Christ, the preeminence of Christ is the central theological theme throughout Hebrews. Because salvation has arrived, don't go back to the *promise* of salvation when you've received the *actual* salvation in Christ.

Question 4:

How should we understand the warnings against apostasy in Hebrews?

Dr. Craig S. Keener

There are a number of warnings against apostasy in Hebrews: You have it in chapter 2 where there's a warning about, if they were judged for rejecting the law of Moses, how much more will we be judged if we neglect so great a salvation; chapter 4, where they turn back, they didn't enter the Promised Land, they fell short of his rest, and it's a warning that we not do the same; chapter 6, those who have experienced life in Christ and they've turned back, it's like crucifying the Son of God afresh; chapter 10 and chapter 12, again, all these warnings against apostasy. So it's a big issue in Hebrews... Now, a couple questions arise: One is, why does the writer of Hebrews keep addressing this, even though he says in chapter 6, "I'm persuaded better things of you." But with each of these, there are exhortations attached. He's saying don't become like this, but rather, persevere. He calls them to persevere in a number of ways. He uses all of the examples in Hebrew 11 and then comes to the ultimate example of the faith in Hebrews 12, Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, and says, "You haven't even yet resisted to the shedding of your blood." So, he uses these to call people to persevere. Another question, though, is the theological question of how we take this. And it's taken different ways by different schools of theology. For example, a Calvinist who would say, well, the elect, those who will be saved, will persevere. And so, if they don't persevere, they were never a part of God's elect. The Arminian would say, well, these people experienced salvation but they fell away, they lost it. And I think one is speaking from the standpoint of God, and one is speaking from the standpoint of human experience. And I think we have texts that address both kinds of perspectives; I think they're both in Scripture. But I think it's a warning to those who hold kind of a cheap version of like, well, I prayed a prayer fifty years ago and, you know, I live however I want to, but now it's my ticket to heaven. That's not what Scripture teaches. Scripture teaches that we need to persevere.

Dr. Barry Joslin

The warnings in the book of Hebrews have been understood in many different ways... So many interpretations of these verses assume that these passages are *descriptive*, that they're describing something that is taking place or that has already happened. But let me ask you, if any of you have children, do you warn your child about something that's already happened or something that is happening? No, a warning, by its very nature, is to *prevent* something. And so, by nature they're not descriptive, they are proscriptive. They're trying to prevent something in the future from occurring ... Warnings are a gift from God. Listen, just think about this question; let me ask you a question. What is worse than receiving a warning about impending danger and impending judgment? The answer, of course, is *not* receiving a warning. So, as an act of kindness, as an act of pastoral love, this writer of Hebrews inspired by the Spirit, warns his community of faith, professing believers, what will happen if they do not cast aside the sin, the things that so easily entangle them, if they do not run with endurance the race that is set before them. If they continue in their

immaturity, in their dullness of heart, if they continue on this path, what will happen? If they fail to persevere, they will be judged; they will face the terrifying judgment of God. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” And so, I would urge you to consider, I think, a better interpretation is that these are real warnings to real believers . . . If I reject Christ, if I pursue Judaism and do not follow after Jesus as the Messiah, fulfillment of the Old Testament and all these old covenant promises, then I will die. Moses is not the way to salvation. Moses and the Levitical priesthood pointed to Jesus, and to disassociate with Jesus means not to have a salvation promised in the new covenant to all those who are of faith accomplished in a redemption that has been eternally accomplished by Christ. And so, all five of these warnings serve as a *means*, a means of mercy to those who are dull of hearing, to awaken them to the dangers that lie ahead if they continue on this track.

Rev. Ric Rodeheaver

Every book has one or two of those passages that everyone kind of zeroes in on, and it becomes the thing they want to talk about in that book. In the book of Hebrews, it’s probably chapter 6 where the author is actually warning about someone tasting of the things of the Spirit and falling away . . . What does all that mean? I think the main point that we need to take away is that it can happen. Now, I wish I could tell you who’s going to be apostate and who’s not, who’s going to fall away and who’s going to remain faithful. I can’t. The author of Hebrews himself says, as a matter of fact, in verse 9, he says, “But I have better things to speak of to you in this regard,” that he’s confident of their salvation. I think the apostasy passages in Hebrews goes along with the general theme of the book in some sense of, don’t neglect, don’t drift away, don’t let your heart get hardened, ultimately, don’t become apostate. Continue to look to Jesus. These things can happen. We’re not all assured that those who are within a church are actually of the church. But rather than focus on, kind of, the interpretive gymnastics of those texts, I think we’ve got to walk away saying, well, what is the author actually getting at here? A: It can happen. B: We need to be focused on the confidence we have in Christ and staying there, continue to looking to Jesus. So I think those passages are real; they’re worth examining. They have to be thought through, but I think we sometimes lose the forest for the trees.

Question 5:

How did the author of Hebrews compare and contrast Jesus with the priesthoods of Aaron and Melchizedek?

Dr. Stephen J. Wellum

One of the most important contributions of the book of Hebrews is to give us how Christ is the Great High Priest. This theme is found in other places throughout the New Testament, but not to the great extent and detail that the author of Hebrews gives to us. In fact, most of the book, other than isolated portions, from chapter 5 through 10 really give in detail how Christ fulfills the Levitical — Aaron’s — role, and the whole Levites, as well as transcends that role by coming in a new order, the order of

Melchizedek. The author does this, I think, in a couple of ways, and both of these ways are rooted in what we call “typology.” Typology speaks of various persons, patterns that ultimately point forward to Christ, so that when you think of the Levitical priest, that office, that person, and particularly the high priest, becomes a typological pattern that is given in the old covenant that points beyond itself to Christ as the Great High Priest who fulfills that role. In 5:1-10 and then particularly it’s picked up a little bit in chapter 8 and then 9 and 10, you have an extended treatment of kind of comparison-contrasting of Levitical priests with Christ so that everything that the Levitical high priest represented, Christ did. So there’s a similarity, but he does it in a greater way. So, that the Levitical high priest was chosen by God, Christ now is chosen and so a number of passages refer to that. The high priest in the Old Testament identified with the people, so Christ identifies with the people in his incarnation, his life, and all of his living ... The author of Hebrews presents Christ as the one who fulfills the Levitical role in every way. Yet, it’s also an important biblical theological point to be made that Christ, because he is not a Levite — he comes from the tribe of Judah — that he also transcends the entire Levitical order. The author goes back to Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 which lays out the foundation for this from the Old Testament itself, where God alongside all of the presentation of the Levites, the giving of the old covenant, God is also anticipating that there will come a priest of a different order, an order that ultimately transcends Levitical order, that is fulfilled in Christ who brings now with him a greater priesthood, a greater covenant, and ultimately eternal and complete salvation.

Dr. Carol Kaminski

Well, it’s so interesting because the writer to the Hebrews is addressing the question, “Is Jesus defined as the high priest?” But the problem is he’s not from the priestly tribe. Well, what’s the background for this? The background is that Jesus is from the tribe of Judah. And if you think of way back in the book of Genesis, Genesis 48 and 49, we have Jacob and his twelve sons, and you have Reuben, Simeon, Levi and then Judah. So, Judah is the royal line and, of course, where we get our famous King David and all the Davidic kings. But Levi... So there are two separate genealogical lines, and promises are given to both of them. And so, the writer to the Hebrews is saying, “Well, how is it that Jesus, who’s from the tribe of Judah, can be a priest even though he’s not from the priestly tribe?” So, he goes back to Melchizedek in Genesis 14, and Melchizedek is just introduced without a genealogical background, which is unusual in Genesis, and he is said to be both a priest, and he’s the king. And so, in that particular story Abraham gives him a tithe. And so, the writer to the Hebrews goes back to that and says that Jesus is like the order of Melchizedek. And Melchizedek is also mentioned in one of the Psalms where it talks about him being a priest forever. So, how does he make the connection then? This is what’s important. He then says that Abraham, when he was giving tithes, that Levi was in his loins. So, it’s as though... So, thinking about genealogical, because he was his descendent, that he was “in his loins” giving a tithe to Melchizedek, and a tithe, giving a tithe, therefore it is Levi who is subordinating himself to Melchizedek. And so, therefore, the writer to the Hebrews says Melchizedek is a greater order of priesthood, and so, Levi was already kind of submitting. So, an interesting way to do it, but it does

underscore that Jesus is both the high priest and the king. And this is picked up in other passages as well. For example, in the prophecies of Zechariah, he sees a priest and king, the two offices coming together, Zerubbabel and Joshua. So, it's a wonderful way of really saying how Jesus is the superior Great High Priest.

Question 6:

How was Jesus' sacrifice for sin superior to the sacrifices offered in the Old Testament?

Dr. Dan Lacich

When we compare the sacrifice of Jesus to the sacrifices in the Old Testament, I think the first thing that stands out is the finality of it all. In the Old Testament it was sacrifice after sacrifice after sacrifice for generations, and it gave, in a sense, a temporary covering, if you will, for the sins of people. When you get to Jesus, the author of Hebrews is very clear, it is the ultimate and final sacrifice. It completes everything; it supersedes everything. There is no need for anything else on a sacrificial level. It, again, gets to the supremacy of Christ, you know, that he is the ultimate, and when it comes to sacrifices, that's the case as well. There is no need to repeat anything else.

Dr. Joel C. Hunter

Jesus' sacrifice for sins was superior to those sacrifices of the Old Testament in several very important ways, but let me just name a couple. First of all, in the Old Testament, there was a design of God that would prepare us ultimately for *the* sacrifice that would take away the sins of the world. We were prepared over and over again with the shedding of blood so that there could be the forgiveness of sins, with the substitutionary sacrifice that was a part of our recognition, our confession, that we had not lived up to Almighty God's demands and expectations in our part of the relationship. And so, therefore, there needed to be an event at which we publically and personally proclaimed that and did something to repair the damaged part of the relationship... You know, always before, it was man's sacrifice to God. Now, in Jesus, it's God's sacrifice on behalf of man. And so, therefore, if it's God's sacrifice, it's perfect. It pays the whole thing. And repetition is not needed because God has satisfied his own mercy and his own holiness. And so, it's a wonderful fulfillment of what he taught us to do for all of those years, but it's his action, and his action is perfect and complete. But the second way of its superiority was that it was done out of sacrificial love. You know, the Bible says that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son," and then we follow Jesus all through the New Testament, and we see his self-sacrificing love that lays down his life, that empties himself, taking on the form of a servant, and ultimately that obedience is unto death... And so, we can't ever miss that, we can't miss the personal side of this and just think of it as a mechanical recompense, you know. We've got to understand that this is about a relationship, and it was about a person who loved us that much.

Dr. Carol Kaminski

If we think of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament, the sacrifices are outlined in Leviticus 1–7, and it goes through a series of sacrifices. It's important to bear in mind, if we want to compare the sacrifices in the old covenant and Jesus' sacrifice, we need to first of all think about what were the sacrifices given for... But you can also think about the quality of the sacrifice that's made. So, the writer to the Hebrews emphasizes about the blood of bulls and goats and it's inadequacy to take away sin, in contrast to Jesus' own blood and his sacrifice that takes away sin. So, there's the quality of the sacrifice. The other interesting thing that comes up is the writer to the Hebrews points out and underscores Jesus' obedience. So, you think about those sacrifices, the animals when they're given, they cannot bring obedience because they like digging in their heels as they go to the altar. And what the writer to the Hebrews says is actually what God always wants is not simply sacrifices but he wants the devotion of the heart of the one who offers the sacrifice. And this is why there's a couple of passages, and one example would be Saul in 1 Samuel 15, where Saul wants to save some of the flock to sacrifice to God but he doesn't obey God, actually. He's meant to totally destroy these people. He keeps the flock. And then Samuel comes to him and says, you know, basically, do you think God wants sacrifices? Is that what he really wants? And he says that it's better to obey than sacrifice. There's also another Psalm that kind of picks up this image as well, and so the writer to the Hebrews says, what does Jesus do? He says, "Sacrifices God does not desire, but," he says, "I have come to do your will." And so, it's really pointing to what the sacrificial system was about, was that it was meant to show the worshiper's devotion to God. So Jesus brings that together, and he actually embodies the devotion to God in his obedience, as well as offer up in his own life as a sacrifice. So, in that sense, there's just this contrast that the writer to the Hebrews is going to say that this is so much better sacrifice. And then the last thing I think I would mention is that the writer to the Hebrews emphasizes that the sacrifices are offered repeatedly. And we might think, well, that's a good thing because atonement's being made. But he says it actually is a reminder of sin, that sin hasn't been completely forgiven. But then he talks about Jesus and his once-for-all sacrifice, that we no longer need to sacrifice today because his once-for-all sacrifice has accomplished what the old covenant could never do.

Dr. David Talley

In order to understand the book of Hebrews, you have to understand what's going on in the Old Testament. And one matter of particular importance is the comparison of Jesus' sacrifice with those sacrifices in the old covenant. And the first point, I think, to be made is that the sacrifices in the old covenant were amazing; the access they provided to God, the fellowship that they maintained, the fact that sins could be forgiven, this was amazing what was going on in the Old Testament. But that's what makes Christ more amazing still. When you compare these two sacrifices, you realize in the old covenant that these sacrifices had to be made daily. They had to be made by a priest who was just like the people for whom he was offering the sacrifice. So there are so many things that contrast with Christ. Christ offered himself once for all. He was done, and then he took that blood, not to the altar, he didn't sprinkle it in various

places around the tabernacle, he took it straight to the throne room of God and he applied it there. And so when you consider the two, there is no comparison. As amazing as these sacrifices were in the old covenant, Jesus is more amazing still. He offers that permanent sacrifice where sins are remembered no more.

Dr. Mark A. Jennings

When we think about the epistle to the Hebrews, one of the constant themes you have is the superiority of Christ in comparison with the elements of the old covenant. Specifically, one of the aspects is the sacrificial system, and the author of Hebrews provides for us a lot of information on this. And he talks about it in chapter 7, he talks about it in chapter 10, but chapter 9, especially verses 6 and following ... This passage really captures how Christ's sacrifice is superior: One, it didn't take place at an earthly tabernacle, it took place at the heavenly tabernacle... Two, Christ didn't offer the blood of heifers or goats. He offered *his* blood. And in this contrast we see that what took a multiplicity of times in the old covenant was established in the singular unique offering of Christ and his blood, so that it wasn't just, as the Hebrews tells us, the external that was purified, but the conscience, or rather the internal, or the heart, if you will, and that that is what makes possible for those who are dead, as Hebrews will tell us, to now worship the living God.

Question 7:

What is the significance of Jesus being both the priest who offers the sacrifice and the sacrificial lamb?

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

When Jesus died on the cross, it was the first time in human history that the priest and the lamb that was sacrificed were the same. The one offering the sacrifice, the priest, was Jesus. And the one offered as the sacrifice was Jesus. They came together on the cross in a profound way. And the radical difference between that priest and that lamb is that that priest needed no sacrifice for his own sin, and that lamb was perfect and blameless, unlike all the other lambs and priests that had come before.

Dr. Simon Vibert

In chapter 10 of Hebrews, there's a long section on the Old Testament sacrifices, and the emphasis is on the priest having to repeat the sacrifices again and again because they do not finally take away sin. But the perfect sacrifice of Christ is also extolled and held up for us to ponder and to consider. For example, here in chapter 10 the contrast is made:

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:11-12).

The great emphasis there is on the finished work of Christ providing full atonement for sin through his saving death on the cross, and therefore his sacrifice never needs to be repeated.

Dr. Jason Oakes

The sacrifice of Jesus ... was the fully-God, fully-man sacrifice that ended all other sacrifices. So the other sacrifices were a way for God to remove sin for a short time, but there was nothing done about the real root of the problem, which is the heart of man. And so that as long as externally we could remove that sin, but yet our hearts still were inclined toward sin, and still we're committing more sins and still desiring more sins, and so what we really needed was a new regenerated heart, which that was only completed by the sacrifice of Jesus... The book of Hebrews tells us Jesus is actually sitting at the right hand of God. And it's actually, I think, an important thing to say from the author of Hebrews, because priests stood while they worked, because there was work to do. In fact, you could say that the work never ended for the priest. But for Jesus, his high priestly ministry is completed, and he's sitting at the right hand of God because that work is now no longer necessary.

Question 8:

What did the author of Hebrews mean in chapter 12 when he said that we have already come to Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem?

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

In Hebrews 12:22 and following, the author to the Hebrews says that we have already come to Mt. Zion, not to Mt. Sinai, which he had described in the verses just before, that terrifying mountain that Moses, even Moses who was invited up to the mountain was fearful about ascending. But we've come to Mt. Zion, a place of joy and celebration. That's a striking thing, because earlier in Hebrews the author has pointed out that we are still a pilgrim people, similar in situation to Israel in the wilderness, freed on the one hand from slavery but not yet fully having entered into all that God has promised to his people. And yet here he says we *have* come to Mt. Zion. He's talking about Christian worship. He's talking about this amazing reality that, as we gather in the name of Jesus, we participate in the worship of just men made perfect, those who he's described in chapter 11 as Old Testament believers, and the celebration of the angels in the presence of God. We don't see it with our physical eyes, but by the presence of the Holy Spirit, we are entering into worship now, and we can do that, as he says in that climax of his description, because we are approaching through Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant. And through his blood, which unlike Abel's blood, cried out for vengeance against Abel's murderer, Cain, Jesus' blood cries out for our forgiveness. That's what we do when we gather in worship. That's why it is so important that as we are called to draw near to God's throne of grace, we're called to draw near together and not to neglect our gathering together, because we have a foretaste of heaven on earth in the midst of the people of God as we gather to worship the King.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Jesus brings in the kingdom of God, the reality of the realm of God's rule in the world, and this Zion imagery is this Jerusalem, city of God place where God is worshipped and his presence dwells, and his kingdom realities are present and active. And so, in Christ, that is the realm we enter. By faith in him we enter into the realities of God's kingdom through the King, who came in Christ.

Dr. Sean McDonough

The question of what's meant by the heavenly Jerusalem or Mt. Zion, clearly not in the desert but up in heaven, raises the interesting question of how Platonic the book of Hebrews is, and my answer to that is, it's not Platonic, but it might be Platon-ish, that there is this distinction throughout Hebrews between the heavenly enduring realities and the earthly transient ones, but it's still rooted in early Jewish and Christian eschatology. So, the writer of Hebrews does believe in the resurrection, and therefore he does believe in the world to come made visible, the kingdom of God on earth. But he also wants to leverage some of these traditional dichotomies to stress that, already, in the Spirit, they are encountering God's ultimate purposes for the world, that it's not simply a matter of washings and rituals, which is clearly his focus. It's not merely a matter of washings and rituals. It's genuine embrace in the presence of God and the believer experiences that already in the Spirit, even as they will experience that in its fullness in the new heavens and new earth.

Question 9:

What did the author of Hebrews mean when he said that the old covenant was made obsolete by the coming of Christ?

Dr. Constantine Campbell

When the author of Hebrews talks about the fact that the old covenant is made obsolete through the coming of Christ, what he means is in Christ a new covenant is established in fulfillment of Jeremiah 31: "I will write a new covenant on your hearts." And Jesus has fulfilled all that the old covenant was pointing to. The old covenant, I think, in the way that the author to the Hebrews speaks about it and the way that, say, the apostle Paul speaks about it in Galatians, is that it was for a time and served a purpose until the coming of Christ. And it points towards Christ. And indeed there are elements of continuity between the old and new covenant as well, but the new covenant is completely new, and Jesus has done away with sin once and for all. He is the only priest that we need, and his law is the law that binds the new covenant because every covenant comes with a law. And the law is the law of Christ, which is the law of love.

Dr. Stephen J. Wellum

When you read the book of Hebrews, there is an incredible statement that people wrestle with, and they have wrestled with over the years, is that in the coming of

Christ and the dawning of the new covenant era, the old covenant has been made obsolete. Now, what does this exactly mean? I think, you know, to give a full answer to that you'd have to spend time sort of unpacking all the biblical covenants and so on, but I think the short answer is, is that the old covenant as a covenant, given as it was to the nation of Israel in its place in redemptive history, has now reached its end or its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, to that to which ultimately it pointed forward to. So, as you go back to the Old Testament and the Old Testament covenants, they point beyond themselves to the coming of Christ. So, in Christ's coming — and what I mean by his coming is in his entire not only conception but his life, his work on the cross, his resurrection, his ascension, pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost — he has brought the old covenant, in terms of what it pointed to, to its end, so that we now, as the people of God, do not live under the old covenant as a covenant. We live under the new covenant, yet we — and we'll come back to just in a moment here in the sense of the old covenant still is instructive for us; it still is Scripture for us, yet it's not a covenant — we're not under that covenant obligation the same way Israel was. That's why the food laws, for instance, and that's why a lot of the sacrifices, all of those have reached their goal, their end, their fulfillment in Jesus Christ who is the final sacrifice, who brings to food laws to their end, and so on. So, in that way, as a covenant, it is obsolete in that that to which it pointed, namely Christ and the new covenant, has now come, and we now as the people of God, as Jews and Gentile, as the new community, the new man, the church, is now living under the new covenant.

Question 10:

Does the book of Hebrews present the new covenant as a covenant renewal or something completely new?

Dr. Sean McDonough

Virtually any time we are pressed theologically to give an either/or answer, it's a sign that we're probably dealing with a complex reality, which is going to have something of both. So, when we come to the question, "Is this a renewed covenant or an entirely new covenant," my inclination, based on my theological predilections, as well as the evidence of Hebrews and the rest of the New Testament, is it's going to be aspects of both, that the very designation "new covenant" shows that there's something new about this, that Jesus is superior to and different from the perpetual animal sacrifices in the temple, that he's got a better priesthood, that the gift of the Spirit — not looming large in Hebrews but throughout the rest of the New Testament — that the gift of the Spirit is a unique blessing of the new covenant. Even if we go back to the writer of Hebrews' prime source text for the new covenant, Jeremiah 31, there is clearly a sense in which that's a renewal of the old covenant. And surely God's purposes and God's wisdom were not lacking in the old covenant, so it would be absurd to think that he'd just want to chuck the entire thing aside. So, when we think, is it new or renewed, as in so many other instances, we need to think that it's going to have aspects of both.

Dr. Alvin Padilla, translation

In Hebrews 8, the author finally introduces the term “covenant,” the covenant ensured by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. Notice that what he says is that Jesus has done a great ministry, because now he is the mediator of a better covenant, which means that the covenant itself is better. This can be understood as a discontinuation of the previous covenant and, therefore, understood as a completely new covenant. But others believe it is a *continuation*, a fulfillment of the Old Testament covenant. The author talks in chapter 8, and following, about the covenant that Jeremiah the prophet mentioned in chapter 31. He says that there will be a time when the Lord establishes a new covenant. Let me make it clear that, for Jeremiah, the new covenant would take place in the future. So, here we are looking at a contrast: Is it a continuation or something completely new? There's the dilemma. As Christians, we think differently about this issue. My personal opinion is that the new covenant is a continuation because, as I see it, the Lord has *always* worked in his people — in his Jewish people and later in his Gentile people — throughout the history of mankind. Salvation has always been by grace. The difference is that in the Old Testament, Jesus had not made his sacrifice yet, so the people of the Old Testament could not look back at it like we can. We have a better covenant now because salvation is already accomplished, and we should not be afraid to fail, because Jesus has already achieved forgiveness for our every sin. Therefore, the covenant is better, but it is also new in the sense that now there are no barriers or limitations imposed by the Law. We don't need the same sacrifices; we don't need the same laws about food; we don't need to have the same celebrations, etcetera. Now everything is through faith, trusting in Jesus. So, at the end of chapter 8, the author says that the new covenant has made the last covenant obsolete, and that that which is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. Therefore, the old covenant is over and the new covenant is its continuation.

Dr. Peter Walker

There's always quite a bit of controversy as one looks at the Bible to discover, is it one big covenant or is it divided up into two halves, or perhaps even more covenants? And, especially this language of the new covenant, which we find first used in Jeremiah, picked up in Matthew's gospel when Jesus talks about the blood of the new covenant, and also especially here in Hebrews 8, when it talks about the new covenant. Is that a brand new covenant, such that everything that happens in the New Testament is something which is completely new, fresh, and in one sense in opposition to the Old? Or is it a renewal of the original covenant? I think it holds the Bible much more closer together if we see it as the renewal of the original covenant. And what's that original covenant with Abraham and with God's people? It is that God is going to remove sin from his people and from his creation. And therefore Jesus comes not to do something entirely new, but to fulfill the original purpose of the covenant. He does that when he dies on the cross, his blood is the blood of the new covenant, and the writer of Hebrews is then showing the benefits of that renewed covenant. Yes, it does mean certain things from the old are to be removed, and he says that in Hebrews 8, that aspects of the old covenant are close to destruction, he says, but the deep underlying theme is one of unity and continuity, a renewal of the covenant.

Question 11:**In Hebrews chapter 13, how does the author describe the final destination of God's people?****Dr. Dan Lacich**

When we get to the end of Hebrews, in chapter 13, the author gives a hint of what the final destination is for God's people, and there's this one verse, in verse 14, where he says that we have a temporary city here, but we are looking forward to a permanent one. So, wrapped up in all of that is, I think, the idea of the stability that is to come, the permanence of it all, the security that comes in that city, that city of God, the communion and fellowship that will be part of that. So, just in one little verse, I think the author is saying to that audience, this life is temporary, the bit that we can hold onto for security in this life, we will have perfection of that in the world to come, that permanent city of peace and of restoration and of fellowship with God.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

In Hebrews 13, the author is trying to frame our lives now in Christ in light of our lives to come in Christ when we get home to glory. This side of that, we'll go outside the camp like Jesus did, and suffer persecution like Jesus did, but that's heading to a time of *shalom*, of peace, of final restoration when the persecution, the tears, the suffering will be no more, and we'll finally rest in that heavenly city.

Rev. Ric Rodeheaver

Hebrews 13 ends in a great way. It talks about, in 13:14, depending on what translation you read, but they all communicate the same kind of concept. Some translations say "a lasting city," some translations say "a permanent city." My favorite is the one that says an unshakable city. I love the images that all those broadcast. You think about the original recipients of Hebrews, life was anything but solid and secure, just like today. I mean, things are shaking up all the time, whether it's the economy, whether it's our individual lives, or whether it's actually the ground beneath us, things are giving, things are uncertain. And the author of Hebrews writes, at the end of the day, what we are inheriting, what we are getting, is something that's permanent. It's not temporal like our lives that just go away. It's something that is lasting. And that's the cry of the human heart, isn't it? I want to mean something; I want to have mattered. Where we're going to go, it's a lasting city and it's unshakeable. People aren't going to come in and pillage; people can't take it away from you. It is an unshakeable city that you will inherit. I love the confidence that that gives, the permanency, and the anchor of hope that that vision at the end of Hebrews gives to God's people. I think it's something we've always got to keep in mind. And especially for the people of the book of Hebrews, just like many of us, when life is uncertain, we have to be able to keep our eye on something that's not going to move, and that's the unshakeable city that God promises to his people.

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

In Hebrews 13 the writer to the Hebrews announces that our final destination is a city that is to come. In fact, what he says is, “Here in this creation we have no enduring city, but we are looking for the one to come.” So, it’s future, but it’s also lasting. And that really ties in with what he’s been saying from the beginning of the book. In chapter 1, he quoted from Psalm 102, and he talked about the fact that the present heaven and earth created by God would eventually wear out, be rolled up like a garment, and in a sense, thrown away. And he talks later on in chapter 12 about an unshakeable kingdom given to us even, that will last beyond that last voice of God that will shake heaven and earth. In chapter 11, he speaks of the patriarchs who, he says, were not looking for an earthly country, really. If they’d looked for that, they could have gone back home to Mesopotamia. But they were looking for a heavenly country and, in fact, God promised to Abraham a city with foundations whose builder and maker is God. It’s a new creation. It’s a new heavens. It’s a new earth and a new city. We could add from Revelation and other places, it’s a city in which all sorrow is eliminated, every tear wiped away from our eyes. But Hebrews gives us that hint that the hope of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, is the same hope that we have for a heavenly country, a new creation that will survive all the judgment that will fall on this present sin-stained universe and, instead, will be a place of complete joy and security.

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