

STUDY 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO HEBREWS

A UNIQUE AND BETTER SAVIOUR

All references are from the Revised Authorised Version of the Bible (1982) [NKJV]

EXPOSITION

SPIRITUAL DECLINE IN HEBREWS

The subject of spiritual decline is not an easy one for any preacher to deal with, as it brings discomfort to many in the congregation. It is a subject that touches our consciences, and causes us to examine our spiritual and moral life. It makes a judgement as to where we stand in relation to Jesus Christ.

It is sadly true that some Christians decline, and others are constantly struggling against a tendency to decline spiritually. In the Old Testament, we read of the remedy – **'I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely'**. (Hosea 14:4) The word 'backsliding(s)' is found 16 times in the Bible, but only in the Old Testament. However, such an important theme is worked out in detail in several passages in Hebrews.

The apostle Paul describes how the Christian finds himself fighting continually against a downward force in his life. This reveals the presence of remnants of his old nature. Paul declares – **'I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the person who wills to do good.'** (Romans 7:21) In order to overcome this force, the Christian needs to make great efforts each day to resist this downward pull, and set his **'mind on things above, not on things on the earth'**. (Colossians 3:2)

How do we fight this tendency to decline spiritually? That is why God inspired the writer to the Hebrews to put pen to paper, and caused this wonderful book to be preserved. It addresses the theme of going away from the gospel. How can pastors live with the fact that there are those who were once in the Church for a period then they disappeared? They might have been very regular in their attendance, but they slipped away gradually so that they were hardly noticed. The writer rebukes them with these words – **'And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another'**. (Hebrews 10:24-25) He insists that it is important for Christians to go on in the faith, to be built up with teaching, and to be strengthened and encouraged.

But the most important argument that he uses, and which appears throughout the letter, is simply this – 'Christ is better.' On five occasions, the writer points out that whenever Christ is left out of the Christian experience and thinking, the spiritual life declines. The very heart and centre of the Christian life is Jesus. The writer says further, **'Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we should drift away.'** (Hebrews 2:1) We must look where we are going – down a slippery slope. And the further down the slope we go, the faster we slide away.

THE SUPERIORITY OF JESUS CHRIST

Now, to overcome this ever-present danger, we must, as gospel preachers, direct our congregations to look to Jesus – ‘... **looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith**’. (Hebrews 12:2) Here is the secret of spiritual advancement. If they did not grasp hold of Christ, they were never Christians. The experience of a true Christian is firmly rooted in the person and work of the Jesus Christ, who was dead but is risen, who is alive and is interceding for us in heaven – ‘**Therefore he is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him, since he ever lives to make intercession for them.**’ (Hebrews 7:25) He knows how frail we are. He knows when we stumble. He knows when we sometimes fall. He knows that we are continually fighting the downward pull of sin and self. He knows all this; so he intercedes for us. He alone can bring us to God. Aaron the high priest failed to bring one sinner to God for he was weak and sinful. Christ, however, does not fail in one instance to bring his followers to heaven. ‘... **there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.**’ (Hebrews 7:18-19) Christ prayed for Peter before his fall into sin and denial (Luke 22:32), so he continues to pray for us at the Father’s right hand.

We are called to look to him who is the author (the beginner) and the finisher (polisher) of our faith. He was there when we began our race, and it is into his arms we will surely fall at the end of the race. The writer encourages us, then, to ‘**lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us**’. (Hebrews 12:1).

He too ran that race. He became a man although he was God. He knows what it is like to struggle against the formidable power of the evil one and sin, although there was no sin in him. ‘**For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**’ (Hebrews 4:15-16) He was delivered into the hands of wicked men to die on the Cross. ‘... **who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**’ (Hebrews 12:2)

Here, in Christ, we discover the means of rising above the crippling power of sin, so that we may no longer be subject to it, and, eventually, be rid of it in eternity. Christ is the only Saviour; therefore he is better: superior to the state into which we have fallen; superior to any other remedies we may have tried to make ourselves into better people and better Christians. Christ is better.

His superiority is stated plainly in Hebrews 1:3-4 – ‘... **when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as he has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.**’

The ten others sections in Hebrews we will be considering on the theme that Christ is better are: 6:9; 7:7; 7:19; 7:22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16; 11:40; 12:24.

1. The powerful ministry of angels

Many today are looking to spiritual forces to help them to live successful and prosperous lives. They look to the occult powers of the stars and the planets. They look to supernatural spirits to help them, even angels, for there are some who believe in the power of angels,

and firmly believe in their supernatural intervention in the course of events and human lives. The Bible makes it clear that there are mighty angels doing God's work in the world today – **'who makes his angels spirits and his ministers a flame of fire.'** (Hebrews 1:7; Psalm 104:4) They are powerful. They even have a ministry for all believers – **'Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?'** (Hebrews 1:14)

How often the angels came to help Jesus: after his temptations (Matthew 4:11), and in the garden of Gethsemane on the night he was betrayed and went to the Cross (Luke 22:43)! Yet, despite the fact that the angels possess powers beyond our imagination, nonetheless, Christ is superior to the angels.

SAVED SOULS, AND THE ANGELS

Christ is better than the angels. How can they compare in greatness with the un-created Son of God? Christ is better than the angels. Why did he inherit a name that is better than theirs? Because he made a cleansing for our sin. Because he came to shed his blood. Angels do not possess blood, for although they are created, they are spiritual beings. Sometimes they appeared in human form, sometimes not; but essentially, they are spiritual beings being nearest in the creation to the spiritual nature of God.

Now, one day, believers will be like the angels, but higher than they, for they have something that the angels do not have – a saved soul. They are saved by grace. Their sins are cleansed. How so? Certainly not through angelic activity. Did an angel go to the cross? Did an angel offer himself up as a sacrifice? Does an angel have the power to turn our lives round from sin and bring us to repentance and saving faith? Indeed not! Only Jesus can cleanse from sin. **'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'** (1 John 1:9).

Well, what should we gospel preachers tell our congregations about these things? We must challenge them, and say:

You hear these things, but what are you going to do about them? You know that spiritual powers exist all round us. You are not surprised to hear that there are great angelic forces at work in the world, yet you know nothing of the cleansing of the blood of Christ because you have never been to the One who died on the Cross. You have never repented of your sins, and asked him for the forgiveness of your sins. You do not know the power of Christ to lift you up, and guard you against this backsliding power that ever seeks to pull you down.

Come to Jesus, for he is better. Come to him; trust in him; entrust your heart and life to him. Become an inheritor of salvation through faith in him. He is indeed better. That is where your exciting spiritual, adventure, the 'race set before you' will begin.

Without such a dependence on Christ and his Cross, his followers will fall away. (See John 6:53-54, 66) As Pastors and preachers, we have experienced great sadness when people in our church initially grew very excited at the preaching of gospel, and the things concerning the gospel. But their commitment to Jesus Christ was very small. The result is, that they are no longer with us. They came and listened, and then eventually they left. The power of sin pulled them down. But Christ is better. He is the remedy; he is better than the angels.

2. Jesus is King

Hebrews 7:7 comes as a comment on a very difficult story – **‘Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better.’**

Here is a brief but complicated story found in Genesis 14:18-20. It concerns Abram (later, Abraham) the future founder of the Hebrew nation, and a King-priest of Jerusalem named Melchisedek. Not only was he King of Salem (meaning peace), but he was also King of ‘zedek’ (meaning righteousness). He was a mysterious figure appearing briefly in history, who just as quickly disappeared, but who provides us with a wonderful picture of the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

Abraham was revered above all by the Jews as the great and faithful founder of their race. He was the man who would later believe God, whose faith would be counted to him for righteousness. (Genesis 15:6) Let us imagine Abram coming to this majestic figure, Melchisedek, the King-priest of Jerusalem, offering him a tenth of all his possessions. From this great personage he receives a great blessing, a blessing from God himself.

Just as Melchisedek was great and mysterious to Abraham (who was blessed by ‘the better’), so Jesus Christ is ‘the better’, says the writer to the Hebrews – **‘And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchisedek, there arises another priest... according to the power of an endless life.’** (Hebrews 7:15-16) Melchisedek was an early picture of Christ in the Old Testament. So consider verse 7, where you read this – ‘... **beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better.**’ Abraham was blessed by Melchisedek, which means that Melchisedek was ‘better than’ (that is, greater than, or superior to) Abraham. Pointing this out to his Jewish readers, the writer says in effect, ‘If Abraham, whom you revere, received a blessing from the greater Melchisedek, how much more is the One who is of the order of Melchisedek, the true King of Peace, and the true King of Righteousness?’

There is an implied appeal here to his readers not to desert Christ, for then they would lose his blessing. Abraham could so easily have lost heart, lost his faith, and fallen away in to his old idolatry. He had left his own country, responding to the voice of God to go and seek another country where God would sustain him and his family. He must leave the idolatry of Babylon, and make a new life that would be more suitable for further revelations of God. When Abraham arrived in that country, he met this figure of a priest-King.

Jesus Christ is the priest-King of all Christians. We must not confuse our hearers by saying that he was Melchisedek, but we can say that Christ more than fulfilled everything that Melchisedek stood for. Melchisedek pre-figured Christ.

Melchisedek, as a priest, offered sacrifices. So did Christ, who offered himself as a sacrifice for sin. (Hebrews 7:27) Melchisedek was king. So is Jesus Christ. Did not Pilate ask him, **‘Are you a king?’**, to which question Jesus replied in effect, ‘Yes; but my kingdom is not of this world.’ (John 18:33-36)

Here Jesus speaks of himself as the King over all the world. No wonder his followers are so devoted and dedicated to their Saviour, willing to be persecuted for his name, and willing even to die for him. Like Abraham and Moses, they are willing to be deprived of many things in this world for the sake of Christ. He is the King; they are his loyal subjects, serving and obeying their beloved King, It is in that obedience that we learn how to advance in the Christian life. Even Jesus had to learn obedience in his sufferings. (Hebrews 5:8)

3. A better covenant

Then just as Melchisedek was better than Abraham, so Christ is better than Melchisedek. How so? In Melchisedek we find all the elements concerning the Messianic office. Christ is the fulfilment of all that Melchisedek represented. Consider Hebrews 7:22 – ‘... **by so much**

more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.' Here we have mention of a 'better' (that is, superior) covenant! The old covenant God made with Israel promised the descendants of Abraham eternal life if they kept his laws. Obey the law and live; disobey the law and come under a curse. That was the Old Covenant; a covenant of blessing which no one could benefit by, for no sinner could keep its terms. Instead, it exposed men as sinners, and as the breakers of God's Law; estranged from God, and enemies of God.

The old covenant was useless. It could save no one. It had sacrifices, but they never cleansed from sin. It had ritual washings, but it never made clean a single conscience. (Hebrews 10:4, 11) These are all arguments the writer to the Hebrews hammers home over and over again to show the superiority of Jesus Christ. At the Last Supper, Jesus declared, **'This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.'** (Matthew 26:28)

We find in Christ the One who brings us a better covenant, a covenant not based on works, not assuming that we try to please God, not offering to God something good in the hope of acceptance with God.

What better covenant exists than this new one, a covenant that demands that all we need to do is to believe in Jesus Christ. It is a better covenant because it does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. It is a 'better' covenant because, in the Old Testament the law interposed itself between God, the giver of the Law, and men who must keep that law perfectly. But when we come to Jesus as our Saviour, we come to God. When we come to him, we have a full revelation of God in him, for he is God

4. The mediator of a better covenant

Then in Hebrews 8:6, we read this – **'But now he has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as he is also mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.'** This is really a continuation of the argument in the previous section. He is the only mediator – **'For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.'** (1 Timothy 2:5). God cannot be a mediator, for his perfect Law failed in the sense that sinners could not keep it. When Jesus came, he not only kept the Law perfectly, but he made God fully known. He declared, **'He who has seen me has seen the Father.'** (John 14:9) There is no other way to come to God except through him. The Law of Moses proved only to be a pattern – a pattern that did not work, and is now out of date and obsolete.

That pattern given on Mount Sinai, a pattern of Law, and the doing of works of righteousness, turned out to be useless for sinners. But Jesus came with **'a more excellent ministry'**. Here is the only ministry that could bring us to God. He brought in a better covenant **'established on better promises'**. And God's promise can be found in Ephesians 1:3 – **'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.'** Now, what do we lack in our lives? We acknowledge that we continually fail. We are subject to a downward force. Well, here in Christ is the remedy. The remedy is a better covenant, which Jesus established by signing and sealing it with his own blood on the Cross. It is now in force, giving us the authority to become the children of God. How so? By believing in him. (John 1:12-13)

There is a question with which we must challenge our hearers: 'Have you done that? Have you taken the path of faith?' It is a step of faith based on what God has revealed. It is a life of faith based on the promises of God. Sometimes, there are steppingstones across a river. When the river rises, you cannot see the steppingstones. We trust they are there because the Bible describes them. The steppingstones are God's promises, and all the promises of God are in Christ 'Yes and amen!' (2 Corinthians 1:20) Search the Scriptures for them, and

you will find them; and in finding them, you will find eternal life. Step out upon the promises of God.

5. The sacrifice of Christ, and its effect in heaven

Finally, Hebrews 9:23 states – ‘**Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.**’ The Jews trusted in the Law, and the sacrifices of the Law, to deal with their sins and moral failures. But they were disappointed. I mean, that these things failed everyone who trusted in them. They failed, as they were bound to, because they were based on human works, and on human effort. But Christ brings a better sacrifice, an effective sacrifice, a finished sacrifice, whose effects are still available today for anyone who will receive them.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 1

A. QUESTIONS ON THE VERSES QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Hosea 14:4

1. Who is the ‘**their**’ and ‘**them**’ in this verse? (See verse 1)
2. What is backsliding? (See the sermon transcript)
3. What does backsliding always lead to? (See verse 8)
4. What is the cure for backsliding? (See verse 7)

Read Romans 7:1

5. Why is every Christian subject to backsliding?
6. Does a true believer want to do good?
7. What are the two laws at war in the believer?

Read Colossians 3:1-2

8. Which verse in Hebrews 1 speaks of Christ sitting at God’s right hand?
9. Why should a Christian set his ‘mind on things above’?

Read Matthew 4:11

10. After which event did the angels minister to Christ?
11. In contrast, who disobeyed God while being tempted in the wilderness. (Hebrews 3)

Read Luke 22:43

12. Where did an angel strengthen Jesus?
13. Which two verses in Hebrews chapter 1 speak of ministering angels?

Read 1 John 1:9

14. Has an angel anything to do with the forgiveness of sins? (See the Exposition)
15. Who is the ‘**he**’ in this verse? (See verse 7)
16. What will cleanse from sin? (See verse 7)
17. What must we do about our sin?

Read John 6:53-54, 66

18. What are the three effects of ‘**eating the flesh of the Son of man**’? (See verses 54, 56, 58)
19. Does Jesus mean eating his flesh and drinking his blood literally?
20. What does he mean?

Read Genesis 14:18-20

21. Who paid tithes to the priest-king Melchisedek?
22. Why did the Jews respect the one who paid tithes?
23. Who does Melchisedek represent as a kind of picture?

Read Genesis 15:6

24. How did Abram become righteous?
25. How did he obtain righteousness?

Read John 18:33-36

26. Who referred to Jesus as the 'King of the Jews'?
27. Was he right?
28. Where is Jesus' kingdom not? (See verse 32)

Read Matthew 26:28

29. What brings about the remission of sins?
30. Where would you find the blood in the old covenant?
31. On what occasion did Jesus give this important saying?

Read 1 Timothy 2:5-6

32. Who is the mediator between God and man?
33. What is a mediator?
34. What did God's mediator do? (See verse 6)

Read Ephesians 1:3

35. What promise did God fulfil in his Son?
36. Name four promises God makes for every believer in verses 4-6.

Read John 1:12-13

37. What right does God promise to every believer?
38. Who causes us to be born again? (See verse 13)

Read 2 Corinthians 1:20

39. Who is the 'him' in 'in him'?
40. Name four promises God make us 'in him'? (See verses 21-22)

B & C QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION AND PRACTICAL

1. Explain in no more than 250 words (about a page) about Christians and backsliding.

- (1) Describe what backsliding is.
- (2) State some causes of backsliding.
- (3) Describe one case of backsliding in your church.
- (4) What would you preach to help backsliders in your church?

2. From Hebrews 6:9; 7:7; 7:19; 7:22; 8:6; and 9:23; show how Christ is better.

STUDY 2

AN INTRODUCTION TO HEBREWS

CHRIST BRINGS BETTER THINGS

EXPOSITION

AN INTRODUCTION TO THIS SECOND PART ON BACKSLIDING

Christ brought in a covenant that is better than that represented by the priest-king Melchizedek and his sacrifices, and of the Law of Moses, which also contained sacrifices of blood. Christ brought in a better covenant than that of the Law, for the Law condemns us for our sin. He brought in a totally new covenant: a covenant of his own shed blood, which covers all our iniquities, and makes us clean from all our sin. He is the true priest-King, after the order of Melchisedek. His covenant is based on better promises, on which we may firmly place feet **'shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace'**. (Ephesians 6:15)

Hebrews 9:23 indicates that **'... it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these [sacrifices of the old covenant], but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.'** The reason for this is found in the nature of the Cross, where Christ offered the 'better sacrifices'. These sacrifices were acceptable to God, whereas our sacrifices of good works and righteous deeds are useless, for they are corrupted and defiled with sin. But Christ was sinless. He was like us, but without sin. (Hebrews 4:15) Therefore, by his sacrifice on the Cross, he bore our sin, dying in our place, and thus delivering us from condemnation and judgement.

Christ, then, is better. Christians seek all kinds of things to advance them in their spiritual life and experience. Some of them are extraordinary, and some are plainly ridiculous. It is true to say that all are ineffective. But Christ is pure in all his works. He is the only 'author and finisher of our faith'. (Hebrews 12:2)

We preachers may be asked from time to time, 'What is the next step in my Christian life?' The answer must be always, 'With Christ.' Or again, 'How can I grow in my Christian life and experience?' Again, the answer must be, 'Look unto Jesus.' There is great assurance in the words of Hebrews 12:2 – **'Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.'** The One who saved us at the start will be the One to welcome us home at the end. He will never leave us or desert us at any time. (See Joshua 1:5).

That brings us to look closely at our growth in the Christian life. Success lies in the fact that we not only have a better Saviour, but, through him, we have a better and surer future.

6. Things that accompany salvation

Turning to Hebrews 6:9, we read – **'But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.'** There were a number of people among the Jewish communities to whom the writer directed his letter for whom he had a deep concern. They were falling away from the

faith. He felt deeply for them because once they walked with the Lord, but now they had little desire to continue. Once they were loud in their praises for the Lord, now they were not even found in the meetings of the Church. How quickly Christians discover within themselves a force that pulls them down. They are like the beasts of the earth, stuck to mud on the surface, when the Lord desires to give them eagle's wings that they might soar! (Isaiah 40:31)

How can Christians learn to conquer this force, and not be bowed down with the concerns and cares of life? How can they soar to better and higher things? The answer is: 'Look unto Jesus.'

So what of the future for every Christian? Well, the future for some of the readers of this letter was not good. Once, they were fruitful, once they were faithful, but now they are barren. Their garden was once productive, but **'...if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.'** (Hebrews 6:8)

Thus we must look to ourselves. The preacher is looking for fruit in the lives of those who profess saving faith under the preaching of the gospel? But we have no assurance that they will continue. For surely no confidence can be placed in works. Our assurance is in Jesus Christ alone. Salvation is from Jesus Christ, and him crucified; not on our works. How easy it is for Christians to fall into legalism! Preachers can so easily fall into the trap of proclaiming mere morals, saying, 'You must have this experience. You must come this way. You must do this. You must not do that.'

This is not a true gospel appeal, and it is certainly not the Christian life. Real faith means resting in Jesus and trusting in him from one day to the next. Until our last breath, our salvation rests on Jesus Christ. If, in some way, we are trying to please God by our works, then we will be judged by those works. Do we want to stand with all our sinful works before a holy God **'who is a consuming fire'** (Hebrews 12:29). Indeed not! When the believer gets to heaven, he will find there a book that is blank. His life, with all its sins and failures, has been wiped clean through the precious blood of Christ. His name has been transferred out of the book of life into the Lamb's Book of Life. His name has been written there by Christ; and that is his passport to heaven.

THE HORRIBLE SIN OF BACKSLIDING

Now, concerning those who were falling back in their faith into the terrible sin of backsliding, the writer says many things. We too know of some who, as the writer puts it, are, from time to time, in danger of crucifying again the Son of God, and putting him to open shame, by their falling back into the old ways. These latter sins are worse than the former because they have been committed by those who profess to be Christians.

These sins of Christians add extra hammer blows to the hands of Christ as the Romans nailed them to the Cross. And it is our sins that hold us back from soaring to our rightful destiny, and rising higher in the Lord. Our destination toward which our soul is flying is heaven, upwards towards the lover of our souls, who, in heaven, is preparing a place for us.

So, we return to Hebrews 6:9 – **'But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you'**. 'Better things'! Which better things? Already our writer has described some of his readers as hardened failures. As in the Old Testament (for example Isaiah 5:1-7), the ground God so carefully cultivated went back to the wild. But to the genuine Christians, the writer makes an appeal, encouraging them with his belief that better things are in store for them. Some may have fallen back, but there is still hope for them. Some Christians fall into the most grievous of sins, some known and others kept secret. But there is a better way, which concerns **'things that accompany salvation.'**

Salvation takes us onward and upward. **'We speak in this manner'**, says the writer, as if to say, 'Excuse me for addressing you in this way.' Thank God he does! How much we need to be reprov'd! How much we need to face our own sins! How we need God, through his Holy Spirit, to examine our hearts, and root out our sins that drag us away from the right path! Thank God for the precious blood of Christ that cleanses us of them all! This is the 'better way'; it is through Jesus Christ that we will surely arrive at our destination. And **'when we see him, we shall be like him'**. (1 John 3:2)

7. A better country

Hebrews 11:16 states – **'But now they desire a better [country], that is a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.'** A better country – an undiscovered future, the Christian's destiny. Here is his future, in the hand of an almighty and sovereign God, who draws us there by his grace. To stand still is to go back.

As gospel preachers, we may appeal to our hearers in this way

Christian friends, has the Lord brought you here to draw you on? To take you further? To challenge you? To encourage you? Yes, indeed! For you have a better country.

When Abram left Ur of the Chaldees, God promised that he would take him safely to a far country where he would be safe from the idolatries of the land, which he had once imitated. (Genesis 12:1-3; Joshua 24:2) God drew him and his family away to where they could be separated from the sinful influences of idolatry. This call Abraham responded to in faith. (Hebrews 11:8-9) And he draws us on also like Abraham. Like Abraham, our journey began by believing God, and it was accounted to us for righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

But more was required of Abram. He arrived in the land where God provided for all his needs, but he could never be satisfied. He had a land; he had an extensive family; he had flocks and herds; and was very rich. But still he was not satisfied. Why? Because for Abram there existed a better country. That better country is mentioned in Hebrews 11:10 – '[he lived in tents for] **for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.**' The Christian destination is found in Hebrews 12:22-24

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are registered in heaven, to God the judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

Abraham, the man of faith, was seeking a heavenly country. And the Christian is never happy with this world. He is looking for a better country. Great assurance came to the readers of his letter, when our writer reminded them of the times when they were persecuted, and when their worldly goods were confiscated

But recall the former days in which after you were enlightened, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.' (Hebrews 10:32-35)

As gospel preachers, we must appeal to our hearers to look for this better country by saying something like this:

If you are satisfied with the things of this world, you are not Christians. John warned, 'Little children, keep yourselves from idols.' (1 John 5:21) Earthly idols will drag you down. They will destroy your life. They will ruin your spiritual experience. They will separate you from God. So, then, look instead unto Jesus. Look to where he is, and where he ever lives to make intercession for you. And where does he intercede? In heaven, at God's right hand. This is his present work. His work of salvation is completed. His work on the cross is finished. But his work draws you on, and helps you soar upward and onward. He intercedes for you at the Father's right hand. He protects and sustains you as he draws you to a better country.

8. Something better for us

Hebrews 11:40 states – **'God having provided something better for us, so that they should not be made perfect apart from us.'** Chapter 11 has often been described as 'the portrait gallery of faithful saints'. It contains the names and exploits of many of the saints under the old covenant, providing some very inspiring reading. It is surprising to discover how some of them fell very low in their lives: Abraham was an idolater, David an adulterer and murderer, Noah a drunkard and twice guilty of incest, Jacob a deceiver, Moses a manslayer, Rahab a prostitute, and so the list goes on. Why are they presented, then, as being faithful? Because God made them so. We are what we are by the grace of God. (1 Corinthians 15:10) Each day, God is doing something more in us – from faith to faith, and from one degree of glory to another. God draws us on, and he draws us upward. There are better things to come for us. What a privilege to be a Christian! Here are these believers of the old covenant who rose so high, yet they never knew Jesus. They were the faithful of God, and they were accepted by him; yet there was something missing, because there were better things to come.

And what things were they? We are provided with a clue in Hebrews 12:2 – **'looking unto Jesus ...'** The saints under the old covenant knew of Jesus only as One who would come in the future. Their prophets spoke of One who would come, who would come as their Messiah, and come to die for their sins and bring them to God. However, they looked unto an unknown Jesus, whereas we look back to the One who has been fully revealed to us. That is why our lot is 'something better'. The believing world was longing for the coming of Christ. Not only for the coming of their Saviour, but that the faithful saints of both the Old and the New Testament could stand together around the throne in heaven, and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. (Revelation 15:3)

The writer then says to those who are falling away, 'Think what you are leaving behind. You have fallen into the sin of backsliding. Think of the grace you are falling from. (Hebrews 12:15) Now, consider the Old Testament saints who were so tenacious in their faith, yet they possessed so little. And you have so much in Christ, and are so blessed! So why are you leaving now? How can you desert a better for a worse?' The writer appeals to them; he exhorts them; he argues with them; he reasons with them. The voice of the writer to the Hebrews is God's voice to the backslider. There are better things to come for us. How can we disappoint the faithful of the Old Testament who take careful note of our progress – **'... since we also are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.'** (Hebrews 12:1) How dare we bring dishonour on their names by going back on our faith?

9. Better things than the blood of Abel

Lastly, we come to Hebrews 12:24. We have already noted previously (in verse 22-23) that the Christian's destination is heaven. How can we go back on that? How can we turn away from such a glorious vision? **'We come ... to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better than that of Abel.'**

Now, Abel offered a sacrifice that was acceptable to God. (Genesis 4:4) He brought a blood sacrifice of an animal, and he offered it to God as an outward sign of his repentance, and as a reminder that the wages of sin is death. He offered his sacrifice, and it was accepted. The unbelieving world, in the form of his brother Cain, offered to God a wrong sacrifice, the work of his own hands, and this was rejected. This evil brother took hold of his righteous brother, and slew him with a knife.

The world still takes hold of believers today, and does just the same; that is, it kills them – **'We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter'**, declared Paul. (Romans 8:36; Psalm 44:22) To attack a Christian is like attacking a lion, for we belong to the Lion of the tribe of Judah. We have a great defender. He who touches the Lord's anointed touches the Lord. He who touches Jesus' people, touches Jesus, as Paul discovered on the Damascus road.

However much we feel that we are unworthy servants of the Lord, and however much we feel our failure as Christians, we will arrive safely at our heavenly destination, as Abel did his. But we must fix our eyes on Jesus. Let us do this. Let us fix our eyes where Jesus is, on the heavenly Jerusalem. Then backsliding will cease, and we will soar to all of eternity.

Praise be to God!

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 2

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Ephesians 6:15

1. How should a Christian walk?
2. There are five other pieces of the Christian's armour in verses 14-17. Name them, and say what they mean.

Read Joshua 1:5

3. What promise from God did Joshua speak to the people?
4. In whose life did Joshua say this promise came true?
5. What similar promise did Joshua give in verse 9?

Read Isaiah 40:31

6. What three things happen to youths and young men who rely on their own strength? (See verse 30)
7. What four things happen to those who trust in the Lord?
8. To which bird are believers compared in their spiritual progress?

Read Isaiah 5:1-7

9. Who owned the vineyard?
10. Who was the vineyard?
11. What went tragically wrong?
12. What five things had God done?
13. What three things did God say he would do?
14. What has this to do with backsliding?

Read 1 John 3:2

15. Does John know what Christian's will be like?
16. What will Christians be like when they see Jesus?
17. Explain your answer to question 14.

Read Genesis 12:1-3

18. To whom were these promises made?
19. What command did God make?
20. What are the four promises God made?
21. Which families will be blessed through him?
22. Explain your answer to question 19.

Read 1 John 5:21

23. What terrible sin can Christian's fall into?
24. Exactly what sort of sin is this?
25. In view of this Study, what does this sin lead to?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:10

26. Why was Paul ashamed of his life? (See verse 9)
27. By what means did he become such a great apostle?
28. What did Paul do more than anyone else?

Read Revelation 15:3-4

29. Whose song is sung in heaven?
30. What does it say about God's works and ways?
31. What great and unique attribute of God is mentioned here in verse 4?

Read Genesis 4:3-10

32. Who were the two brothers?
33. What sacrifice was acceptable to God?
34. What terrible peril lay at the door of one of them?
35. What terrible event took place?
36. What has this to do with Christians today? (See the sermon transcript)

Read Romans 8:36 (Psalm 44:22)

37. What connection does this verse have with your answer to question 33?
38. In Psalm 44:20, what sin did they resist?
39. What does the world want to do to such believers?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

1. Explain the meaning of the '**better things**' to be found in Hebrews 6:9; 11:6; 11:40; 12:24
2. Show how the writer uses these verses to encourage Christians either to avoid backsliding or to return from backsliding.

C. PRACTICAL

1. From Study 1 and Study 2, make a list of the nine passages that speak of 'better things' concerning Christ and the things of Christ.

2. Preach a sermon on these nine verses entitled:

THE FOOLISHNESS OF BACKSLIDING.

(1) Write out fully your introduction and conclusion.

(2) Make a list of other verses in the Old and New Testaments you used to illustrate these nine passages.

(3) Describe the reactions of your congregation, and any remarks they made. If no one said anything, ask your elders or deacons for their comments.

STUDY 3

GOD HAS SPOKEN

HEBREWS 1: 1-3

EXPOSITION

For our third study in the Letter to the Hebrews, we desire to impress on our congregations these vitally important words – **‘God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son whom he has appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself made purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.’**

Now, Hebrews chapter 1:1-3 begins by showing how much better Jesus Christ is to anything below the rank of God himself. The word **better** is a characteristic of Hebrews, appearing twelve times in all. Here is a complete list of some most memorable phrases:

- his Son ... having become so much better than the angels (1:4)
- we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation (6:9)
- the lesser is blessed by the better (7:7)
- a better hope, through which we draw near to God (7:19)
- Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant (7:22)
- mediator of a better covenant (8:6)
- better sacrifices than these (9:23)
- a better and an enduring possession in heaven (10:34)
- they desire a better, that is a
- heavenly country (11:16)
- that they might obtain a better resurrection (11:35)
- God having provided something better for us (11:40)

- the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel (12:24)

Now then, that is the theme of the letter. Christ is **better**. The letter is a warning to Christian Jews never to go back to their old life in Judaism; never to leave the freedom of their new faith in Jesus Christ. This is a theme that we meet in Paul's earlier Letter to the Galatians. And we meet it again here in the Letter to the Hebrews.

These opening verses (1-3) provide the authority for what is said later. Certain questions can be raised: 'Is it true that Christ is better, superior?' Is he indeed God's word?' And, 'How can we recognise what comes from false teachers?'

Well, here is a further question: 'If God has spoken and revealed the truth, what has he said? And particularly, about the Jesus Christ?' When we are examining any teaching, from whatever source, we must first of all ascertain what is taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the way to find out who teach the true doctrines of the Apostles. Do they believe what the Bible teaches about Christ? Do they teach that he is God, come in the flesh? That he has supernatural power? That he died for sin on the cross? That he literally and bodily rose from the dead? That he is now in heaven? And finally, that he is coming again to judge the world?

No what has God said about Jesus Christ? We have it here in the opening words of Hebrews – '**God ... has in these last days spoken to us.**' Now, how interesting it is to discover a very similar opening in John 1:1-4: '**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.**' And, although we have different words which are written in a different way, what the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews is saying is precisely what John says. Over a long period of time, God spoke through the Old Testament prophets, so it says here. But now God's first and final word has come through his Son, whom John describes as **the Word**.

In Hebrews 1:1-3, we notice three things:

Firstly, that God did indeed speak in the Old Testament through his prophets. (1) Peter puts it like this – '**Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.**' (2 Peter 1:21)

Secondly, God's last and final word is Jesus Christ (2). '**In these last days God has spoken to us in His Son.**'

And **thirdly**, this very last and final word of God is the saving work of Jesus Christ. '**When he [Jesus] had by himself purged our sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.**'(3) So we can put it like this: there are three parts to God's revelation – God spoke in the Old Testament through the prophets; his last word is Jesus Christ; and this last word is about the saving work of Christ.

1. The Word of God in the old covenant (1)

Now, notice that the word of God was in the context of the old covenant – '**God ... spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets.**' (1) Now, consider the miracle of this! God, the eternal One, actually spoke in time. Truth alone comes from God, not man. The word

comes from God, not man. False religions and cults say, 'Come and listen to our teaching, read our books, study our magazines.' But God says, 'Come and study my word, which I have given you.' The prophets declared, 'Thus says the Lord.' If we wish to know the truth, we must always come to God's word. The Lord Jesus prayed concerning his disciples, **'Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth.'** (John 17:17)

God spoke. Why did he speak? Because God's word is a disclosure of his will. This occurred right at the beginning of time in order to bring the universe into being. **'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.'** (Genesis 1:1) How did he create them? Look at the third verse of Genesis – Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. (We find the same form of words in verse 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29) What did God say? A word of command, and an expression of his will. God said, **'Let there be ...'** [a word], and the world as we know it came into being.

As we follow the story on through Genesis, we discover that men wilfully disobeyed God. They fell into sin. This brought both physical and spiritual death to all men. Indeed, God's word was specific – **'For in the day you eat the fruit of it you shall surely die.'** (Genesis 2:17) The result of eating that forbidden fruit, and disobeying God's word, was that man became separated from God. The prophet declared – **'But your iniquities have separated you from your God.'** (Isaiah 59:2)

So a further word was needed from God, not to do with the old creation but of a new creation; not to do with birth but of the new birth; a word concerning salvation from sin. He told it to his people the Hebrews over a long period of time – **'God ... spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets.'**

Let us consider a few examples. God told Noah that he would not destroy the world again by flood, but he saved eight persons in the ark. Then you will remember how God told Abraham that he would bring him to a land for himself and his children, and through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Also, you will recall how God told Moses that a prophet, greater than himself would come. To David, he revealed David that the Messiah would come and sit on his eternal throne. To Isaiah, he said that One would come who would make his soul an offering for sin; he would be despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Now, this word of God, this word of salvation, came through the Hebrew writers **at 'various times and in different ways.'** It came in fragments; but now it all came together at the time of a coming in of a new covenant, a new dispensation, in the person of God's very own Son. God's word is his Son.

2. The final Word of God in the New Covenant (2-3)

What is the word of God in this new dispensation? **'In these last days, God has spoken to us in his Son.'** 'These last days' is a very interesting expression. With the coming of Christ, the view of history has been greatly altered for Christians. The former days were before his coming; but now salvation has come. This is God's final act. This is what history was waiting for. But God postpones the end in order to allow men to repent and **'not neglect so great a salvation.'** (Hebrews 2:3)

These days, we live in are the last days. The end is when Christ returns to judge the world. These last days provide an opportunity for men to repent of their sins and turn to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. These are also days of the activity of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, Peter, quoting from Joel 2:28, declared, **'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour forth out of my Spirit on all flesh.'** (Acts 2:17) All Christians are living 'in these last days' because it is the final age of salvation. We have God's word, and nothing can be added to it, for it is final. God has nothing else to say. Salvation is complete.

THE WORD IN THE CREATION

Notice what part the Son, the Word, played in the creation. 'In these last days, God has spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.' Jesus was God's word in creation. The word that is used here is 'appointed'. 'His Son whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the worlds.' (2) You will notice that the word is 'appointed' and not 'created'. Jesus Christ was not created. He was the Creator. The universe was created for him and by him. (Colossians 1:16) He is the purpose, and he is the heir.

There is a wonderful vision of the uncountable multitude in heaven before the Lamb (Jesus), declaring, **'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing!'** (Revelation 5:12) Indeed, Jesus is the heir of all things, as well as the originator of all things.

We should take note of the phrase **'through whom'**, indicating that he is not part of the creation. The creation came into being through him. Creation cannot produce creation; only God can create. The expression **'through whom he made the worlds'** is difficult. The New International Version translates 'the worlds' as 'the universe'. That is not correct. The New Authorised Version (NKJV) is correct in translating 'the worlds': that is, using the plural. The Greek word is **'AIONAS'** which comes into English as the 'aeons' or 'eras' (ages). It refers to periods of time and what they contain. Now, the Lord Jesus cannot belong to time because he created it. He created 'the eras' (ages). As God the Creator, he is outside of time; he is eternal. He is the eternal Word of God, the Son of God, the eternal One, un-created God himself

Adam and his descendants were put on the earth, but it was not theirs. And Adam sinned and, in Adam, we have all sinned. But in Christ **'we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ'**, declares the apostle Paul. (Romans 8:17) What does this mean?

Well, we too who believe in Christ inherit the earth. We are fellow heirs with Christ and Christ has always had the world in his hand. This is declared by Christ himself – **'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.'** (Matthew 28:18) He has that authority because he is the Word in the creation and in the new creation. He is the only-begotten Son of God, and he is the only Saviour. Because the Son was instrumental in the creation of the ages, they are his by right – **'The Word was God ... all things were made through Him.'** (John 1:1, 3) So Jesus was God's Word in creation.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE SON OF GOD (3)

Then we notice how the Son is described – **'the brightness of his [God's] glory and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of His power.'** Christ is unique in his relationship with the Father. No angel, no man, has ever been so described as Christ is in this verse. There are three important phrases here. **First**, he is described as **'the brightness of God's glory'**, the radiance of God's glory. Yet, again this is not a sufficient translation, for the Greek word gives us the uncommon English word 'effulgence', which means 'the outshining'. Jesus is no mere reflection of God, but he shines out the glory of God in his own right.

The linking of the words 'outshining' and 'glory' calls to mind the Hebrew word 'Shekinah' (pronounced SHECK-EYE-NAH) – the 'glory' of God which appeared many times in the Old Testament period – in the Burning Bush, in the Tabernacle, in the pillar of fire, and in the Temple. 'Glory' is a word John uses to describe the coming of Jesus – **'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.'** (John 1:14) Thus he is the very outshining, the very

radiance of God's glory. John Calvin comments – **'When you hear that the Son is the glory of the Father's glory, bear in mind that the glory of the Father is invisible to you until it shines forth in Christ: and that he is called the very image of his substance because the majesty of the Father is hidden, until it shows itself as impressed on his image.'**

Second, we must preach Christ in relation to this expression **'upholding all things by the word of his power.'** He upholds, meaning that he bears it up. This again refers to the extent of Christ's authority over the earth. He is not only the Word who brought the world into existence, but he keeps it in being; for if Jesus ceased to exist, the universe would cease to exist too. It is in this description that we have the security of our existence. So long as Christ exists, so do we. He is there in heaven, and we have no greater proof for the living Christ in heaven than to look around and see the creation. It is there because Christ exists in heaven. He upholds all things by the word of his power. And Christ is not only powerful; he is the All-powerful, omnipotent, God. 'Power' in the Greek means built-in power, the sheer raw energy that is needed to keep the world, the sky, the stars, the universe together and in existence. Christ has this power. He upholds all things because he is God.

We also have this **third** striking phrase – **'the express image of his [God's] person.'** This is supported by the apostle Paul – **'He [Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation.'** (Colossians 1:15) Now, this word 'first-born' has proved a difficulty to many people. But think of it in terms of the first-born's right of inheritance. He is the first-born, the inheritor, of all creation.

But I believe it means something more than that. For if there is to be a first-born, there is to be a second-born and a third-born and a fourth-born and so on. What Paul is saying here is that with Jesus Christ the First-born as the head of a new race, believers are the next to be born. He is the head of a new race who will inherit the creation. We share in that inheritance with Christ.

Christ is **'the express image of God's person.'** Here we have the strongest declaration in the Bible of the deity of Christ. He is the exact representation of God's being. Literally, these words 'express image' is the Greek word 'character' (pronounced CHA-RACK-TEAR), which has also come into the English language. It means an exact copy. It was used, in the first century to describe the stamp of the seal's mark in the wax. In other words, the writer is saying that the Son is equal with the Father, and particularly in creation, in glory, and in representation. Now these are the statements of God's Spirit in this Letter to the Hebrews. Anyone who denies them is denying the truth of God's word, and is to be put away for speaking lies.

A SUMMARY OF WHO JESUS CHRIST IS

Let us sum up, then, our first study in the Letter to the Hebrews. Like Paul, we desire only to preach Christ, and him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:2) Here, the Lord Jesus Christ is set forth and declared to be the eternal Son of God, the creator of the world, and its sustainer. But, finally, at the end of verse 3, the writer goes on to describe the Lord Jesus as Saviour – **'When he had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.'** He is the only Saviour. He alone can set us free, cleansing us from all sin, and making us pure before God. This is what gospel preachers love to proclaim – 'Jesus is truly the Saviour'. He alone has the power to create and sustain the universe, and he alone has the power to re-create our lives, and deliver us from our sins, making us new creatures in him, and preserving us before the Judgement Seat of God.

John Calvin concludes with this glorious thought – **'this description "majesty on high" shows that Christ is placed on the highest throne from which the majesty of God**

shines forth. As he is to be loved because of his redemption, so he is also to be worshipped in this majesty.'

Are we, then, not bound to declare to our congregation that he is the Son of God, and that he is our own personal Saviour; and that we desire above all that he should be our hearers' Saviour too?

QUESTIONS ON STUDY 3

A. QUESTIONS ON THE BIBLE VERSES QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read John 1:1-4

1. Who is the Word? (See verse 14)
2. Is this Word God?
3. Through whom did the world come into existence?
4. What comes from the Word? (See verse 4)

Read 2 Peter 1:21

5. Where does prophecy not come from?
6. What sort of men were the prophets?
7. Who inspired them?

Read John 17:17

8. What is the means of making Christians holy?
9. Where can this be found?

Read Genesis 2:17

10. What did God command the pair to do? (See verse 16)
11. Why did God command the pair not to eat of the tree of knowledge?

Read Isaiah 59:2

12. What are the three effects of man's sin on God?
13. What is hopeful about sinful man? (See verse 1)

Read Hebrews 2:2

14. What was the message of Jesus Christ (in one word)?
15. Who continued with his message?
16. What may be neglected?

Read Colossians 1:15-16

17. Who is the 'he' in verse 15?
18. Who has made the invisible God known?
19. What is his connection with the creation?

Read Revelation 5:12

20. Three groups were involved in the praise. Name them.
21. Who is the Lamb?
22. Why is he worthy?

Read Romans 8:17

23. What are children entitled to receive?
24. Through whom comes blessing upon the children of God?

Read Matthew 28:18

25. Who possesses all authority?
26. Where does he exercise that authority?
27. What are the three things he commands with authority? (see verses 19-20)

Read John 1:14

28. When did the Word become flesh?
29. What word is used by John to describe his coming?
30. What is his title?
31. What two things does he possess?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

- (1) 'Better' is a word often found in the Letter to the Hebrews.
 - (a) Take each of the 12 verses given in the sermon, and explain briefly the meaning of each of the verses.
 - (b) Say how each of the verses contributes to our understanding of the gospel.
- (2) What was the message that 'God spoke in times past by the prophets'?
- (3) What are the three great truths concerning the person and work of Christ we discover in Hebrews 1:2-3?

C. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Find in the exposition two quotations taken from John Calvin's Commentary on the Hebrews.

- (1) Read them again carefully, and explain what Calvin is saying in your own words.
- (2) Give a brief explanation of these words found in the two quotations, and provide at least one verse from the Bible that supports the truths concerning Christ in the following words:
 - glory
 - Christ
 - image
 - majesty
 - throne
 - redemption
 - worshipped
- (3) Choose one the Bible verses you provided in (2), and preach a sermon on it.
 - (a) Give a title for your sermon.
 - (b) Send in your sermon outline.
 - (c) Write out in full your conclusion and gospel appeal.
 - (d) Speak to at least three persons who listened to your preaching, and ask them for their comments on your sermon.

Write down their comments, and send them in.

STUDY 4

BETTER THAN THE ANGELS

HEBREWS 1:4-14

EXPOSITION

In the first three verses, we saw why the Lord Jesus is better than (superior to) the Old Testament prophets for the simple reason that he was the fulfilment of their prophecies. They prophesied concerning him. These Old Testament prophets spoke of his coming, and of his death on the Cross. The writer of the Letter pointed out in the first three verses that Christ is better in seven ways.

The writer obviously chose seven for a particular reason, and that reason is not very hard to find; for the perfect number of Jewish culture was seven. So the writer deliberately chose seven ways in which Christ is seen to be perfect.

First – he was appointed by the Father to be the heir of all things.

Second – he was the one through whom the Father made the world (or the ages).

Third – he is the radiance of God's glory.

Fourth – he is the exact representation of God's nature.

Fifth – he upholds all things by the word of his power, or, the power of his word.

Sixth – he made purification for sins.

Seventh – he sat down at God's right hand.

CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY OVER THE ANGELS IN HIS WORK AND POSITION

Here, then, are seven ways in which Christ is shown to be superior to the prophets of the Old Testament. But the writer goes further, for he uses the phrase –

'... having become so much better than the angels'. (4) Not only is he better than the prophets, but he is greater than the angels. Now, no angel can compete against these seven qualifications which the writer has stated previously. Indeed, no one can compete.

In verses 4-14 of chapter 1, we are shown how Christ is better than the angels. And he quotes a considerable number of verses from the Old Testament in order to prove the point. No angel can make purification for our sins. No angel can save. No angel can sit in God's presence. Yet Jesus does. So, again, continuing this theme, the writer selects seven texts from the Old Testament in order to show that Christ is superior to all angelic beings.

CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY OVER THE ANGELS IS SEEN IN SCRIPTURE

In the first quotation, he uses a Psalm; in his second, 2 Samuel 32; in his third, Deuteronomy; in his fourth, he goes back to the Psalms; in his fifth, another Psalm; in his sixth, Psalm 102; and finally, in his seventh, he uses Psalm 110. Five of these quotations come from the following Psalms – Psalm 45, Psalm 102, Psalm 104, and Psalm 110. Another comes from 2 Samuel, and another from Deuteronomy.

Now, we must make four comments before we look more closely at these Old Testament verses.

A HIGH VIEW OF THE BIBLE

My **first** comment must be this: our Lord Jesus had a very high view of Scripture. Some might ask, 'What did Jesus think of the Bible?' Well, we should say that he appealed to the authority of the Bible in the same way the writer to the Hebrews does. Their view of the Bible is identical. Jesus declared that every word written in the Bible is true. Indeed, he expresses this in John 17:17 – **'Your word [that is, God's Word] is truth.'** No words in the Bible can be excluded from that description. Every word in the Bible is true. So essential are all the words in the Bible that Jesus declared – **'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'** (Matthew 4:4; and a direct quotation from Deuteronomy 8:3).

Our Lord referred to Old Testament stories and people in the Bible as if they were real. He pointed to Abraham, Moses, Lot's wife who became a pillar of salt, Jonah who was swallowed by a great sea monster, King Solomon and the visit by the Queen of Sheba. These were not myths or legends. They were not made-up stories. In Jesus' eyes, these were true accounts of real people. Nowhere does Jesus cast any doubt on any word in the Bible. Indeed, he showed the Bible to be without error in every part; whether referring to doctrine, to history, or to personalities. Everything is the very word of God. Indeed, Jesus not only knew and believed the Bible, but he used it frequently. He used it to attack and conquer the Devil. There is power in the word of God to overcome temptation.

We must also bear in mind the most important thing that Jesus said about the Bible. That is, that it is all about himself. Whatever part of the Bible we go to, we are soon brought face to face with the Lord Jesus Christ.

We recall a Bible study the Lord had with two disciples on the Emmaus road – **'Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.'** (Luke 24:27) On a later occasion (described in verses 44-45), Jesus declared – **'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning me. And he opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.'**

Jesus also said – ‘**For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote about me.**’ (John 5:46) That is the meaning of the Bible; it is about the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus our Lord had a high view of the Scriptures. We too need to challenge the members of our congregation concerning their view of the Scriptures. We could ask such questions as ‘Have you opened your Bible this week? Have you read the Scriptures? Have you prayed over them? Have you taken the Scriptures and set them in your heart? And have you used them, as Jesus did, to overcome the devil and to worship the Lord?’ Without this basis, and an appeal to authority, we cannot preach and apply the gospel.

USING TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE

The **second** comment we must make is this: refuse to argue with anybody unless he agrees to the final authority of the Bible. If you get into an argument or a discussion about spiritual matters, or anything to do with our faith, argue on no other grounds than that of the Bible. When you use the Bible, you are on firm ground when you are defending your faith. You do not have to defend the Bible. The Bible will take care of itself. The last of the great Puritan preachers – Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1837-1892) – when asked to defend the Bible, replied, ‘I would just as soon defend a lion!’

The Bible can take care of itself, for it is the very word of God. It is ‘**the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**’ (Ephesians 6:17) The Bible alone is the infallible word of God and the only certain ground for defending our faith. The great catchword of the Reformation was ‘Sola Scriptura’ which, means in the Latin, ‘The Bible alone’.

The **third** comment we must make is this: do not hesitate in your use of translations of the Bible. Your translation is also the word of God.

The writer to the Hebrews quoted from the Bible not from its original Hebrew, but from a Greek translation called the Septuagint. (The ‘Septuagint’ simply refers to the seventy or more scholars who worked together to translate the Old Testament into Greek before the time of Christ) This Bible in Greek was the Authorised Version of first Century; and the writer to the Hebrews quotes from it. He had no hesitation in trusting his translation. Our versions, too, may be used.

Indeed, this translation of the Bible, we call the Septuagint, the writer quotes word for word seven times in chapter 1, and thirty times in chapters 2-13. That makes in all 37 quotations from the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Twenty of those 37 quotations come from the Psalms. This shows how well he knew his hymnbook!

If you go very quickly through the chapters in Hebrews, you will find none without at least one quotation from the Old Testament. You will find quotations from Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Proverbs, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk and Haggai. That is a useful spread of Scripture.

Apart from chapter 1, which we will now consider in detail, the writer quotes often from the Psalms and other Old Testament books:

QUOTATIONS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT IN HEBREWS 2-13

Chapter

Quotations and Verses

2

Psalm 8:4-6 (6-8); Psalm 22:22 (12); Isaiah 8:17-18 (13)

3	Psalm 95:7-11 (7-11, 15)
4	Psalm 95:11 (3); Genesis 2:2, Psalm 95:7 (4-5)
5	Psalm 2:7 (5); Psalm 110:4 (6)
6	Genesis 22:17.
7	Psalm 110:4 (17, 21)
8	Exodus 25:40 (5); Jeremiah 31:31-34 (8-12)
9	Exodus 24:8 (20)
10	Psalm 40:6-7 (5-9); Psalm 110:1 (13); Jeremiah 31:33-34 (16-17); Isaiah 26:11 (27); Deuteronomy 32:35-36 (30); Habakkuk 2:3 (37-38)
11	Genesis 15:5 (12); Genesis 21:12 (18)
12	Proverbs 3:11-12 (5-6); Exodus 19:12 (20); Deuteronomy 9:19 (21); Haggai 2:6 (26)
13	Deuteronomy 31:6 (5); Psalm 118:6 (6)

PROOF TEXTS FOR TEACHING

My last comment is as follows: it is a very good idea to go through the Bible from time to time using proof texts for a particular point of doctrine. The writer to the Hebrews uses this method in order to show that Christ is superior to the angels in chapter 1.

You see, the Bible is not a textbook of doctrine. You have to search systematically through the Bible in order to prove a particular teaching. In fact it is a very good idea to go through the Bible looking for special themes. I have just such a Bible that does that. It is called THOMPSON'S CHAIN REFERENCE BIBLE. I think it is a very good Bible in order to consider many doctrinal themes.

THE BIBLE VERSES USED BY THE WRITER TO THE HEBREWS

Now, having made these four comments, let us have a look at the proof-texts used by the writer to the Hebrews in verses 4-14. He is showing that Christ is better than the angels. In verse 2, he shows that Christ is superior to the angels because he is the Son of God. The other verses show other ways in which Christ is better than the angels.

There are three sections in 4-14. In verse 5, he continues to show that Christ is superior to the angels because he is God's Son. In verses 6-13, he proves that Christ is greater than the angels from Old Testament texts. Lastly, in verse 14, he answers the question 'What, then, are the angels for?'

CHRIST IS SUPERIOR TO THE ANGELS BECAUSE HE IS GOD'S SON

'For to which of the angels did he ever say: You are my Son, today I have begotten you?' (5) Now, this belief that Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God raises two problems in people's minds, which we must deal with very briefly here. They are both important.

The first is this. To the Jews, the idea of Jesus as the Son of God seemed, somehow, to destroy the unity of God. If the Father, Jehovah, is God and the Son is God, doesn't that make two Gods? Deuteronomy 6:4 stands as a creed for Jewish belief beginning with the words – SHEMA YISRAEL ('Hear, O Israel'). Here are a few words that follow – **'The LORD [Jehovah] our God, the LORD, is one!'** As gospel preachers, we must affirm that the doctrine of the trinity – the belief that God is one in three Persons – does not destroy the unity of God. Indeed, Jesus said, **'I and the Father are one.'** (John 10:30)

Now, this word **one** is a neutral word referring to God's being, his essence, his existence, and his life. And life or existence or being can never be divided. God revealed many times throughout the Scriptures plurality in unity exists in the Trinity – three Persons, but one God. As an example, consider Matthew 28:19. There, the Lord Jesus commands his disciples to make disciples of all nations and then to go out **'baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'** (Matthew 28:19-20) You will notice that the singular 'name' is used here; not, 'the name of the Father and the name of the Son and the name of the Holy Spirit'. One name means one being, one God, but three Persons of the Godhead.

Another problem arises with regard to the origin of the Son. Some argue, 'Does not the very idea of a Son indicate a beginning when the Son was begotten? First, there is a father, then comes a son. The father, therefore, comes before the son. When the Son was born, his existence began.'

Well, the Bible does teach clearly that this Person, Jesus Christ, stands, in relation to God the Father as a son to the father. We cannot dispute that. But we should remember that this is only explaining a spiritual reality in our language, in our terms, and according to our experience. That is the nearest we may approach to the indescribable mystery of the Trinity.

But the Bible also clearly states that the Son always existed as the Son in relation to the Father, and the Father always existed as the Father in relation to the Son. If the Father always existed, then the Son always existed. It is very important that we should realise this, that the Lord Jesus existed as the Son of God for eternity. Christ has the same attributes and the same nature as the Father. Just read through the Bible, and you will find that whatever is said of the Father is also said of the Son.

Jesus said to the Pharisees – **'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.'** (John 8:58) That description 'I AM' is the Hebrew name for God, JEHOVAH. You will find it in Exodus 3:14, when Moses was commanded to go to Israel to bring them out of slavery in Egypt. He asked, **'When they say to me, "What is his name?", what shall I say to them? And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you."'**' This name in the Hebrew is Yah (Jah) or Yahweh (or Jahweh), the sacred name for God. Thus, when Jesus said that **'Before Abraham was, I am'**, he was claiming to be Jehovah.

How do we know that that was what Jesus meant? Well, consider carefully the reaction of the religious teachers in John 10:31 – **'Then the Jews took up stones to stone him'**. The reason is given in verse 33 – **'The Jews answered him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy, and because you, being a man, make yourself God."'** They knew what Jesus was claiming, although they would not believe that it was true. They believed that Jesus was claiming to be God; and they were right. Jesus never denied it. He affirmed it.

(1) From Psalm 2:7

Having looked briefly at these two problems connected with the claim that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, let us now look at the first two Old Testament quotations. The first is Psalm 2:7 – **‘For to which of the angels did he ever say, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you.”’** Does this word ‘today’ seem to imply that Jesus had a beginning in time, and that he was begotten in time? But this does not refer to his Person, but to his work; to what Jesus came to do, not what he was. He is the Saviour, the Lord, the coming judge. This word ‘today’ is used six times in Hebrews. We will not look at all six of them – just three – to find out exactly what he meant when it says that it was ‘today’ when Christ was begotten. Look first at Hebrews 13:7-8 – **‘Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.’** He is referring to this present age in which we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, where we can claim Jesus is the Lord of our lives. ‘Today’ is this present age.

Then, again, consider Hebrews 3:7-10 – **‘Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation.”’** When is ‘today’ now? It is a time when people harden their hearts against the Holy Spirit; hardening themselves against the conviction of sin that the Holy Spirit brings. And they harden their hearts against Christ. It is a time when they harden their hearts because they will not have faith in God and trust him for the future. It is a time when men resist the Holy Spirit and fall into disobedience.

As gospel preachers, we have a duty to give a warning concerning what is happening now. ‘Today’ is now; it is this present age. The Lord calls us to bring a warning to those in our congregations who are resisting the working of the Holy Spirit: young people today who resist the working of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, and will not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; older people too. Then there are Christians present who are resisting the Holy Spirit in the way of faith and trust and obedience.

And thirdly, today is an opportunity to be saved from the power and the penalty of sin. Consider Hebrews 3:14-15 – **‘For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end; while it is said: Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.’**

We have **‘become partakers of Christ’**. What a phrase with which to challenge our hearers! Are they partakers of Christ? **‘How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?’** warns the writer (2:3). They must not let the opportunity slip away while the Holy Spirit is working in conviction in their hearts. When they see their need of Christ, they should turn to him – **‘looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith’** (12:2). They should do it today, before it is too late. ‘Today’ is the gospel age. It is an age when great things may be done in our lives by a great God and a great Saviour.

When did all this start? When Christ rose from the dead. That is when Christ was begotten, in the eyes of the writer to the Hebrews. When he rose from the dead, when he had finished his work of salvation on the cross, and when God raised him from the dead declaring the victorious Saviour.

He was declared the Saviour from sin and displayed to the conqueror of death – the reward of sin. That is when ‘today’ began. That is how Paul saw it. Consider Acts 13:32, where Paul actually quotes Psalm 2 verse 7. This is what Paul declared – **‘And we declare to you the good tidings – that promise which was made to the fathers God had fulfilled this for us. As it is also written in the second Psalm: “You are my Son, today I have begotten**

you.” When Christ rose from the dead he brought with him salvation. This begetting, this raising of the Son, was God showing that Christ’s death on the cross was entirely effective for all those who trust in him. Christ triumphed over sin and death. After Jesus rose, he ascended to the Father, and, as was his right, he sat at God’s right hand as an equal. (See Hebrews 1:3)

(2) 2 Samuel 7:14

Now we come to the second quotation in verse 5 concerning the sonship of Christ: 2 Samuel 7:14 – **‘And again, ‘I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son.’** David had wanted to build a house for God, a temple, but God would not permit him. He called him a man of blood. Instead, God promised David a descendant (the Messiah) of his line. The context of this verse is as follows – **‘He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his Father, and he shall be my son.’** Now this, I believe, refers not only to the later kings, and particularly Solomon at the head of them who built the temple, but it most importantly refers to Jesus Christ, the perfect fulfilment of the one who would come of the line of David, and who would be called the Son of God.

Do you remember the words of Zechariah as he served in the temple, and to whom came God’s angel to reveal to him that he would have a son who would be the forerunner of the Messiah? Here are his words – **‘Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.’** (Luke 1:68) This ‘horn of salvation’ we declare in every gospel sermon, for it is the Lord Jesus, David’s descendant according to the promise, and God’s Son. That is what is being declared here in Hebrews 1:5.

Now, let us consider briefly the last verses (6-13), where the superiority of Christ is more than proved from the Old Testament.

(3) Psalm 97:7 (Deuteronomy 32:43 in the Hebrew original)

The first is Psalm 97:7 (Deuteronomy 32:43). We read in Hebrews 1:6 – **‘But when he again brings the first-born into the world, he says, “Let all the angels of God worship Him.”**’ This is actually referring to the life, death, and triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ. John Calvin states, **‘If you go through the whole Psalm (97), you will find nothing but the reign of Christ, which begins with the proclamation of the gospel; the theme of the Psalm is simply the solemn mission on which Christ is sent to take possession of his kingdom.’**

Another problem here is the use of the title **‘first-born’**. Does that not seem to imply that Jesus had a beginning? No; it does not. But what it does is to remind us of the Christmas story. When Mary came to give birth to Jesus, we read – **‘She brought forth her first-born son’**. (Luke 2:7) It is the same word.

Then note also the word ‘worship’ in relation to the angels. In Luke 2:13 we read – **‘And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God ...’** What sort of Saviour had been born at Bethlehem? One whom the angels worshipped, says the writer to the Hebrews. You will also remember the second commandment – **‘You shall have no other gods before me ... you shall not bow down to them [worship them] nor serve them’**. God alone is to be worshipped, yet the angels worshipped Christ. Therefore Christ must be God.

**(4) Psalm 104:4;
(5) Psalm 45:6-7**

Next, comes Psalm 104:4. We read in verse 7 – **‘And of the angels he says, ‘Who makes his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.’** Here we have described the very nature of angels. Yet however wonderful, however beautiful, however powerful, however great and exalted, they are mere servants of the enthroned King. And Christ is King. Hallelujah!

The quotation continues in verse 8-9 – **‘But to the Son he says: “Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever; sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness more than your companions.”**’ (Psalm 45:6-7) You will notice that Jesus is actually called ‘God’: **‘To the Son he says ‘Your throne, O God ...’** To those who demand a verse in the Bible where Jesus is called God, here is one of them. Another is when doubting Thomas fell down at the feet of Jesus and declared, **‘My Lord and my God!’** (John 20:28) Jesus accepted that description of himself, for he is God. And he is King.

We have a picture here of the Lord Jesus sitting in all his kingly power and authority and judgement. The word ‘sceptre’ is the staff held by the monarch, and it represents his supreme authority to rule and judge.

Then in verse 9, you will notice Jesus is placed above his companions. Jesus Christ is unique. There is no one like him, or to be compared with him. **‘Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.’** (Acts 4:12) No man can save; no spiritual leader can save: only Jesus. Yet although he was God, he became a man ‘above his companions’ in order to become the only Saviour.

(6) Psalm 102:25-27

In verses 10-12, we have a quotation from Psalm 102:25-27 – **‘You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak you will fold them up, and they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will not fail.’**

Here is proof of the eternity of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is really a further commentary on verse 2, is it not, where Christ was declared to be the creator of all the worlds? ‘They are like old clothes’, says the psalmist, ‘old and worn out, which are about to be rolled up and put away.’ That is what God will do with the universe. But Christ remains. When this old universe comes to an end, Christ will be there as he was in the beginning. He is its creator.

(7) Psalm 110:1

Finally, in verse 13, he quotes Psalm 110:1 – **‘But to which of the angels has he ever said: “Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool?”’**

Here is a text that supremely proves that Jesus Christ is superior to all the angels. It is also a commentary on Hebrews 1:3 – **‘When He had made a purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.’** Have we ever read of an angel sitting in God’s presence? Does a servant sit down in the presence of his master, the king? No. But Jesus sat down in the presence of God, which no angel could ever do, for his work was finished. That can never be said concerning the work of the angels. Their work is to praise God and obey him; an ever unfinished work. Christ is on the throne. He has a kingdom. The angels

are part of his kingdom over which he rules as king. They are mere citizens; and that is true of all believers also.

A FINAL WORD ABOUT ANGELS (14)

Lastly, then, we ask what the angels are for? Verse 14 tells us – ‘**Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?**’ The angels can never save. They play no active part in God’s plan of salvation. All that was completed by our Jesus. So what are the angels for in God’s plan of salvation? Well, the writer tells us. They stand in order to serve. The name of one of the greatest and most powerful of the angels was Gabriel. He was the messenger sent from God to bring the good news concerning Christ’s birth. It is interesting that the name **Gabriel** means ‘one who stands in the presence of God’ (Luke 1:19). The angels stand, for they have work to do.

They serve as **spirits**; they are not men. Believers are not transformed into angels when they enter heaven, as some people believe. We do not die and go to heaven to become angels. The Bible never teaches such a thing. Angels do not have bodies. Men were made in the image of God; angels are the nearest in nature to God. Yet they are ministering spirits, serving – ‘**sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation.**’ They protect believers from evil influences, from demons, from injury, and from accidents.

When we preach such a positive and triumphant gospel, we must emphasise this word **inherit**. What a joyful and expectant word! What do Christians inherit? If the angels guard us like precious jewels, what is it we inherit that makes us so valuable? The answer is **salvation**. We do not earn this by right, but it is granted us by grace, making us heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. (Romans 8:17) In Christ, believers become unimaginably rich. What a fortune we possess in Jesus Christ! And what is the greatest of our possessions? Is it not our salvation, which we have not neglected? Is it not the forgiveness of our sin which we pleaded for, our new birth by the Holy Spirit of God, our assurance of heaven to which we look forward, the protection of God in all our circumstances, and the love of our Saviour Jesus Christ which never fails us?

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 4

A. QUESTIONS ON THE VERSES QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read John 17:17

1. What is the word of God?
2. What effect does the word of God have on believers?

Read Matthew 4:14

3. What did the devil try to tempt Jesus into doing? (See verse 3)
4. What is more important than food?

Read Deuteronomy 8:3

5. What was the bread God gave Israel in the wilderness?
6. What is better than bread in giving life?

Read Luke 24:27, 44-45

7. What does the word ‘expounded’ mean?
8. What were the Scriptures pointing to?
9. What does Jesus do to help us comprehend the Bible?
10. What three things concerning Christ do the Scriptures point to?

Read John 5:46-47

11. Who wrote about Christ?
12. Who are the 'you' who neither believed Moses nor Christ? (See verse 16)

Read Ephesians 6:17

13. What is 'the sword of the Spirit'?
14. How do you think Christians can use this 'sword'?

Read John 10:30

15. What name is used to describe the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Tri_____.
16. Why did the Jews object so strongly to this statement? (See verse 33)

Read John 8:58-59

17. What did Jesus mean when he called himself 'I AM'?
(Read the sermon transcript again on this verse)
18. What did the Jews do when Jesus declared himself to be greater than father Abraham?
19. What was his name that God revealed to Moses?
20. How long will this name last? (See Genesis 3:15)

Read John 10:31, 33

21. What did the Jews want to do to Jesus?
22. What did they think Jesus was doing to deserve the name of blasphemer?

Read Luke 1:68

23. Who said this?
24. What did he do?
25. What three things did God do in Jesus Christ? (See verse 68-69)

Read Luke 2:7

26. Why does it say 'firstborn son' and not 'only begotten son'?

Read Acts 4:12

27. Who said this?
28. Why is there 'no other name'?
29. Why is this such a good verse to preach the gospel from?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

1. From Hebrews chapter 1, show how Christ is different from men and angels.
2. Look at the list of Old Testament verses in the table entitled: 'QUOTATIONS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT IN HEBREWS 2-13'.
 - (a) Explain why the writer uses the Old Testament so often.
 - (b) For each of the 27 texts quoted, write a reason why you think these Old Testament verses were used by the writer, and what he was attempting to prove.

C. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Preach a sermon on The Ministry Of Angels during which you will show to your congregation how Jesus Christ is superior to the angels.

- (1) Send in your outline with all the Bible verses that you quoted.**
- (2) Write out in full your introduction and conclusion.**
- (3) Afterwards, ask three members of your congregation what new things they learned from your sermon, plus any other comments they might wish to make. Write out their replies, and state their names.**

STUDY 5

THE FIRST EXHORTATION AND WARNING

HEBREWS 2:1-4

EXPOSITION

A great problem today, as it was in the early Church, is that of spiritual backsliding. As gospel preachers, we soon become aware that there are two kinds of people among our hearers: those who are truly saved, and those who, sadly, remain unsaved. How our hearts rejoice when we see those whose lives glow with the presence of their Saviour! How sad we feel when we see those who seek faith, but do not find it, and those whose endless questions continually flow before they will commit themselves.

Even more difficult for preachers, is what to say to help and encourage a middle group whose spiritual condition can only be guessed at. This middle group consists of two groups:

(1) Those who would not be ashamed to claim that they are saved, but who do not live like Christians. Their thoughts and expectations are all bound up with the things of this world. It is a Sunday Christianity and nothing else. These people are definitely not Christians.

(2) Those who appear to be Christians, but are always on the edge of Church life. Sometimes they wander around other churches and fellowships, but never settle and give their loyalty to one church, and treat it like their spiritual home. It would appear that they have no appetite for Christian hospitality in their homes, nor do they desire to pray as a family there. You might say that they have an aversion for regular company with other Christians. They might have professed faith in Christ in earlier years, but today they are cold to spiritual things. If they ever had a love for Christ, they have lost it now. Read Christ's words to the Church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:4 – **'Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.'** Here is the main characteristic of spiritual decline.

Concerning these two puzzling groups, we may say this – they are either backslidden Christians who will eventually be recovered, or that they were never saved in the first place. The writer to the Hebrews faithfully addresses this problem either with heart-rending appeals or with stern warnings. So great a burden does the writer find this problem that he deals with it in seven passages throughout his letter.

THE PROBLEM OF BACKSLIDING

Before we examine the first of these exhortations and warnings, we need to know the answer to this vital question: 'Why do Christians backslide?'

The answer is a simple one, and a personal one: 'Because while we are in this life, we will continue to be sinners. But if we are true believers, we will be sinners saved by grace. That this is true to the teaching of the Word and our own personal experience, we are directed to the words of the apostle Paul

'For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practise. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.'

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the person who wills to do good.'
(Romans 7:19-21)

In this very important passage on Christian experience, we are introduced to what the Puritan preachers called 'the doctrine of indwelling sin', or 'the remnants (remainders) of sin left in the believers. [Two very helpful books – **TEMPTATION, AND SIN** by John Owen – which you can view if you wish on this website, under [owen.temptation](#), and [owen.indwelling sin](#), at the end of this sermon.

In Revelation 2:4, quoted earlier, the entire Ephesian Church had declined spiritually and lost her first love of Christ. This can so often happen when an entire fellowship can be dragged down by the backsliding of one or more of its members. When Jesus Christ no longer occupies the central place in the life of any Christian or in any Christian fellowship, you may be sure to expect spiritual decline and backsliding.

There are many warnings against backsliding in the letters of the apostles. Here are three examples

'Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.'
(Galatians 6:1)

'Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.' (1 Corinthians 10:12)

'... beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' (2 Peter 3:17-18)

There are many other warnings like these in the Bible against the great sin of backsliding. The Old Testament is a commentary on the backsliding of the nation of Israel. However, there is this tremendous promise of hope for the people of God – **'I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for my anger has turned away from him. I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall grow like the lily.'** (Hosea 14:4)

The seven appeals we will be looking at in later Studies in greater detail are as follows:

1. 2:1-3. Do not drift away. Lay hold of God's salvation.
2. 3:7-14. Listen to the Holy Spirit as he speaks to you in your conscience.
3. 4:11-13. Persevere in your struggle to get to heaven.
4. 5:11-6:20. Grow up in your knowledge of God's Word.
5. 10:19-39. Do not neglect Christ and Christian fellowship. Exercise your faith.
6. 12:25-29. Listen to the heavenly voice, and live in the light of God's holiness.
7. 13:9-15. Leave the old life far behind, and embrace the new.

THE FIRST EXHORTATION AND WARNING (2:1-4)

The emphasis here is upon salvation. ‘... **how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation**’. (3) The challenge is, ‘Do not ignore this salvation.’

In chapter 1, we took note of **two** things:

(1) Jesus Christ is God himself, infinitely superior to the Old Testament Prophets, and even the angels of God. Christ is the supreme and final revelation of God's Word to a sinful world.

(2) This revelation of God's Word is about the salvation of sinful mankind through Jesus Christ alone. It is a salvation which is accomplished by the purifying of sin through the shed blood of Christ on the Cross. God accepted this sacrifice by lifting up Christ on high.

‘**Therefore**’, our writer declares, ‘**we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard**’. (1) Why so? Because it leads to ‘**so great a salvation**’. (3)

In this first section, then, on backsliding, we are commanded to pay careful regard to the preaching of the gospel, which came from the very lips of our Lord Jesus himself – ‘... **which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord**’. (3)

The message of salvation was so important, that God also entrusted to his angels to announce – ‘**Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.”**’ (Luke 2:10-11) The angels are intensely interested in the salvation of men. ‘...**things which have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things which angels desire to look into.**’ (1 Peter 1:12) Angels also guard those who are saved. ‘**Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?**’ (Hebrews 1:14) A natural comment that might spring to our mind at this point would be: ‘If we are to inherit salvation, then we should give the more earnest heed to it.’

1. We must pay attention to so great a salvation (1)

Although our writer addresses us (the ‘**we**’) in the Church, his main target are those associated with the Church but who are unconverted and uncommitted to Christ. They are those who, in the end, will inevitably fall away.

Here are some chilling words – ‘... **lest we should drift away.**’ What a commentary of the sad ability of the soul to be pulled down by sin and weakness! Spiritual decline does not occur suddenly, but over a period of time. To drift means to do nothing to remedy the situation – either slipping away from the faith, or letting slip in the memory. Listen to King Solomon's warning – ‘**My son, let them not depart [slip away] from your eyes – keep sound wisdom and discretion.**’ (Proverbs 3:21) Not to improve means to do nothing.

Therefore the remedy, according to our writer, is to ‘**give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard**’. Listen hard to the preaching, believe in your heart and act on what you hear. What do you hear? The very words of God in the Scriptures; the gospel message of the preacher; the words of invitation from the Lord Jesus himself, as he cries, ‘**Come to me ... and I will give you rest.**’ (Matthew 11:28)

2. We must not neglect so great a salvation (2-3)

The reward from God for neglecting his Word does not bear thinking about – **‘For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward ...’** (2) The word spoken by angels refers to the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. In his sermon before the Jewish Council, Stephen declared – **‘... who received the law by the direction of angels’** (Acts 7:53), and Peter wrote, **‘...[the law] was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.’** (Galatians 3:19) Moses himself mentions the presence of angels at the giving of the Law – **‘The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; he shone forth from Mount Paran, and he came with ten thousand of his holy ones; from his right hand came a fiery law’.** (Deuteronomy 33:2)

The giving of the Law was an awe-inspiring and supernatural event, but it brought death to the people, for they were sinners, and were totally unable to keep the Law perfectly. Jesus is the only one who can deliver us from the condemnation of the Law through his own righteousness – **‘There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus ... for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.’** (Romans 8:1-2) The gospel of Christ, interposes itself between the righteous demands of a holy God and his sinful people, just as the Law of Moses did long ago. The Law failed to save, but the gospel is entirely successful. So great was this salvation-event, that it was surrounded by powerful witnesses.

3. There are great witnesses to such a great salvation (4)

When we preach the gospel, how can we prove that salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ is so great? The writer gives three reasons.

(1) Because Jesus said so. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus declared

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.’ (Luke 4:18; Isaiah 61:1)

(2) Because of the eyewitnesses of Jesus’ ministry. Each disciple could say how great salvation was to him: Mary Magdalene who was set free from seven devils; Lazarus who was raised from the dead; Nicodemus who was delivered from spiritual blindness; Bartimaeus from his physical blindness; Zacchaeus from his greed for money; the Samaritan from leprosy; and the dying thief from his fear of death and hell.

(3) Because God bore witness too. This he did in four supernatural ways. First, **with signs**. This is a word found often in John’s Gospel, and means ‘miracles’, pointing to the divine person and power of Jesus Christ, and in particular his work of salvation. Secondly, **wonders**. This is another word for miracles. The disciples were empowered and authorised by Jesus to perform them as a sign that they were preaching the true Gospel. Thirdly, **with various miracles**. Literally, ‘works of power’. That is, power over demons, evil powers, sickness, and even death. Fourthly, **gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will**. The gifts pointed to the victory of a conquering king. **‘When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’** (Ephesians 4:8; Psalm 68:18) Notice that he give gifts according to his will, not on the demands of men. When we receive them, we rejoice, and give all praise and glory to the Saviour who is the Giver.

Here is an extract from TEMPTATION AND SIN by John Owen. He is often called ‘the prince of the Puritan preachers’. Certainly, he was the deepest and most thorough of all the Puritan theologians. For a copy of this book, go to the files TEMPTATION and SIN.

‘The great purpose of the apostle in Romans 7 is to show that indwelling sin remains in believers after their conversion to God, in all its power and effectiveness and effects. I take it for granted that the apostle shows and proves that it is the condition of a regenerate Christian to experience the remaining power of indwelling sin.’

Read again the words of verse 21 – **‘I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the person who wills to do good.’** There are four things to notice here.

Firstly, the name he gives to indwelling sin, describing its power and effectiveness: it is **‘a law’**. For what he calls ‘a law’ here, he called in the previous verse, ‘sin that dwells in me’.

Secondly, the way in which he came to discover this law, not as a law with its own particular properties, but in himself – **‘I find then a law’**.

Thirdly, the desire of his soul and inward man when he discovered this law of sin within him – **‘the person who wills to do good’**.

Fourthly, the state and activity of this ‘law’ when his soul willed to do good – **‘evil is present with me’**.

Sin is a law in believers. It is a law even in them, though not of them. Though its rule has been broken, its strength weakened and impaired, its root mortified, yet it remains a law still with great force and effectiveness. Where it is least felt, it is at its most powerful ... Those who do not discover its power are under its dominion. Whoever fights against it shall know and find that it is present in them, and that is powerful in them ... The law in them is not a law unto them, as it is in unbelievers. Grace has the sovereignty in their souls: this gives them a will to do good.

In believers, there is a will to do good, and habitual disposition and inclination in their wills to that which is spiritually good. To this, indwelling sin as a law is opposed, to the gracious principle residing in the will inclining us to do good. These are the opposing principles and contrary operations within him. These both are most fully expressed by the apostle in Galatians 5:17 – **‘For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.’** And here lie the springs of the whole course of our obedience.

Awake, therefore, all of you in whose heart is anything of the ways of God! Your enemy is not only upon you, as on Samson of old, but is in you also. He is at work in the full force of his craft, as we shall see. Would you dishonour God and his gospel? Would you scandalise the saints and the ways of God? Would you wound your consciences and endanger your souls? Would you grieve the good and Holy Spirit of God, the author of all your comforts? Would you keep your garments undefiled, and escape the woeful temptations and pollutions of the days in which we live? Would you be preserved from the ever-growing number of apostates in these latter days? Awake to consider this cursed enemy, which is the spring of all these and many other uncountable evils, and the ruin of all the souls that perish in this world!

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 5

A. QUESTIONS ON THE BIBLE VERSES QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Revelation 2:4

1. Who are being criticised here?
2. What is being criticised by the Lord Jesus
3. What does Paul say about them in Ephesians 1:15?
4. What did Paul pray for them in Ephesians 1:17-19?

Read Romans 7:19-21

5. What made Paul very dissatisfied about his Christian life? (19)
6. What made him do wrong things? (20)
7. What spiritual law did Paul discover? (21)

Read Galatians 6:1

8. Does Paul recognise that Christians sin?
9. What should other Christians do about this?
10. What warning does Paul give here?

Read 1 Corinthians 10:12

11. What warning is given here?
12. What two encouragements are given in verse 13?

Read 2 Peter 3:17-18

13. Peter speaks of '**these things**'. What four things are mentioned which should warn them against backsliding in verses 10, 13, 17.

Read Hosea 14:4

14. What appeal does Hosea make to Israel? (1)
15. What had they committed? (2)
16. What terrible sin had they committed? (3)
17. What are the two promises God makes to them?
18. How could you use this verse in your gospel preaching?

Read Luke 2:10-11

19. How do we know that angels are interested in salvation?
20. What effect did the angels expect salvation to make on the people?
21. What title did the angels give to the Saviour?

Read 1 Peter 1:12

22. Who first knew of the gospel? (10-11)
23. What were the apostles now preaching?
24. What is unusual about the Gospel and the angels?

Read Proverbs 3:21

25. What three things should not depart from their eyes? (19-20)
26. What two things should they keep carefully? (21)

Read Acts 7:53

27. Who assisted Moses in the receiving of the Law? (See Acts 7:38)
28. Who directed the people to keep the Law? (verse 53)

Read Deuteronomy 33:2

29. What is another name for Mount Sinai?
30. How many angels accompanied God at Sinai?

Read Romans 8:1-2

31. The Law of Moses activated another law. Name it. (See verse 2)
32. What does the Law do to sinners? (1)
33. Who sets us free from the law in question 31?
34. What is the law of Christ called in verse 2?

Read Luke 4:18-19

35. From which book did Jesus read the lesson? Give its exact reference.
36. To which five groups of people did Jesus specially preach the gospel?
37. When is the acceptable year of the Lord?

Read Ephesians 4:8

38. Give the Old Testament reference for this quotation.
39. When did he ascend on high?
40. Apart from salvation, which five gifts did he give to the church? (See verse 11)

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

The Puritan preacher John Owen was mentioned in the sermon. At the conclusion of the sermon, you will find a 597-word extract from his book **TEMPTATION AND SIN**. Read it carefully, then, in the light of Romans 7:21-22 (the second passage quoted in the questions of Section A), write the following:

- (1) In your own estimation, how correct are John Owen's comments compared with other verses in the Bible, and in the light of your own experience?
- (2) Put the long quotation from John Owen into a few sentences of simple English.

C. PRACTICAL

In the sermon, Revelation 2:1-7 was quoted as a description of the Church in Ephesus towards the end of the first century after Christ.

Preach a sermon to your church on this passage.

Include in your sermon the following:

- (1) **What good things are said about this church?**
- (2) **Why was Jesus not pleased with this church?**
- (3) **What is the meaning of the promises to the church in verse 7?**

Send in the outline of your sermon, and all the Bible verses you quoted.

Describe any special reactions you received to this sermon on backsliding, or any comments.

Remember that you are seeking to warn your hearers against the sin of backsliding.

STUDY 6

CHRIST DEFEATS SIN, DEATH, AND THE DEVIL

HEBREWS 2:5-18

EXPOSITION

There are several important areas of doctrine concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ which, at a certain point, it is not permitted to go further, for they lie outside the boundary of truth set in the Word of God. The writer to the Hebrews says so. There are two areas in particular:

(1) Whenever the blood of Christ, which he shed freely, is set aside for something else, which, it is claimed, brings salvation.

(2) Whenever Christ is no longer proclaimed as God, and the only way to God, and the final revelation of God.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the writer to the Hebrews declares that Christ is very God (1:3a), the only Saviour from sin (1:3b), and a greater revelation of God and his purposes than that of men, prophets, and angels (1:4). The work of Christ has brought to sinners what our writer calls '**so great a salvation**'. At last, something to take the place of the Law and its condemnation of sinful men, providing a suitable reward to '**every transgression and disobedience**'! (2:2) The coming of this great salvation was so great an event that God showed his approval with his own witness and a host of supernatural miracles. (2:4) The believer in Christ has nothing more to fear, for '**the author of their salvation**' has brought '**many sons to glory**' (2:10), and has, through death, destroyed '**him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.**' (2:14)

Due to this salvation, the devil and all the fallen angels have been defeated. They are defeated because sinners who were in their grasp have been redeemed through the purifying and precious blood of Christ, and set free. Christ has given the devil a mortal wound from which he will never recover through all eternity, and plundered him of his people. He has saved his chosen people, and made them his own Church forever. The final end draws near when Christ will be '**the finisher of their faith.**' (12:2).

Is this not a great salvation? Indeed it is! 'Well then', he says to his readers, 'pay close attention to it.' (2:1). 'Do not let salvation slip away from you by neglecting it.' (2:3) In 2:10, Christ is called the 'author' of our salvation; in 12:2, he is called 'the finisher' of our faith.

In these verses (2:5-18), we note Christ's superiority and victory over the powers of evil, darkness, and the devil. This whole section is a commentary on two words found in 2:3 – '**escape**' and '**salvation**'.

1. Mankind in the purposes of God (5-8)

1. We see first of all the importance of the world to come, as compared with this present age, in verse 5. We also notice that the angels are excluded from God's saving purposes

both in this age and in the age to come – **‘For he has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels.’**

Note also the emphasis on the words **‘the world to come’**, a phrase used on three other occasions in Hebrews

6:5 – **...and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.**

10:1 – **For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come ...**

13:14 – **For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.**

It is impossible to enter this age to come without being saved. The final destination and state of the believer in salvation is called GLORIFICATION. **‘Moreover, whom he predestined, these he also called; whom he called, these he also justified; and whom he justified, these he also glorified.’** (Romans 8:30) This will occur at the Second Coming of Christ – **‘Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those whom eagerly wait for him he will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.’** (Hebrews 9:28)

Salvation has three aspects: first, the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, commonly called JUSTIFICATION; the putting to death of the remnants of sin in the believer, commonly called SANCTIFICATION (holiness); total deliverance from all sin in the glories of heaven, commonly called GLORIFICATION.

However, some of that future glory may be experienced now by the believer in this present age. It is interesting how Paul speaks three times in his letter to the Ephesians of **‘the heavenlies’** in the present experience of the Christian. (Ephesians 1:3; 2:6; 3:10) The writer to the Hebrews is convinced that the powers of the future age are experienced now – **‘For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come ...’** (6:4)

2. Here, the writer states the purpose of Man at the beginning of the world. (6-8) The following testimony our writer quotes is from Psalm 8:5-6

**‘What is man that you are mindful of him,
Or the son of man that you take care of him?
You made him a little lower than the angels;
You crowned him with glory and honour,
And set him over the works of your hands.
You have put all things in subjection under his feet.’**

Man does not have the powers of the angels – he was made **‘a little lower than the angels’** (7) – but he was granted this glorious mandate – **‘Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.”’** For one thing, the angels did not marry nor reproduce. (Mark 12:25)

Instead of fulfilling the responsibility of tending the earth, sinful man has tended to destroy it. In its turn, the creation, bound up with the sin of man, has tended to destroy him by disease, flood, earthquake, fire, and famine.

So much now is no longer under man’s control. God’s final purpose for man lies in the future, and is connected with God’s work of salvation – **‘For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not see all things put under him.’** The final end for nature and for mankind is described in Romans 8:19-21, 23-24

'For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God ... even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope.'

2. Jesus Christ and the purposes of God (9-18)

Our writer devotes a great part of his letter to answering the question, 'Why did Jesus come?'

We also have three further questions inferred here in verse 9:

Why would Jesus wish to make himself lower than the angels?

Why did he suffer?

Why did he taste death?

Jesus lowered himself, suffered, and died, to do what no other man could do – he succeeded in living his life on earth entirely for the glory of God. God made Man to glorify him. In the WESTMINSTER CATECHISM, the reply to the question, 'What is the chief end of man?' is: 'The chief end of man is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.'

The perfect Man who suffered and died has made it possible for all those whom he saves to achieve this wonderful end.

Verse 10 explains that Christ not only glorified God by living a sinless life, but, by becoming a man, and by suffering and dying on the Cross, he was able to do something indescribably wonderful for sinners – **'For it was fitting for him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things** (an echo of Colossians 1:16) **in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.'**

How did he complete his saving work? In five ways (10-13):

1. By living a perfect life – **'... perfect through suffering'** (10)
2. By offering a perfect sacrifice for sin – **'... he who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one'** (11)
3. By succeeding in adopting believers into God's family – **'... he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare your name to my brethren; In the midst of the congregation I will sing praise to you.'** (11-12; containing a quotation from Psalm 22:22)
4. By responding to our saving faith – **'And again, "I will put my trust in him."'** (13; with a quotation from Isaiah 8:17)
5. By interceding for sinners – **'And again, "Here am I and the children whom God has given me."'** (13; with a quotation from Isaiah 8:18)

Here, then, is a handful of reasons why Christ became a man.

Verses 14-15 describe the purpose of Christ's suffering. In a totally unexpected way, he entered the realm of the devil, and defeated him. Sin, the result of demonic interference at the beginning, brought into the world death, disobedience to God's Law, and unbelief. But Christ, by bearing sin, and dying on the Cross, effectively dealt with sin, and set sinners free from these things.

1. Christ broke the hold of death. 'Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared in the same, that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil'. (14)

This is most graphically seen in the raising of Lazarus in John 11, when Jesus said, **'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, even though he dies, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.'** (John 11:25-26)

There should be little grief at the funeral service of a believer. **'The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'** (1 Corinthians 15:56-57)

2. Christ broke the fear of death. '... and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.' (15) We gospel preachers may be called upon to visit the dying at home or in hospital. It is not long before we see that some people are afraid to die. They are fearful of the coming judgement of God. **'And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgement ...'** (Hebrews 9:27) All believers are set free from the fear of condemnation. They have no fear of death, for they are going to their Saviour, not their Judge. **'... so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. (28)**

How triumphant are the words of Paul to the young preacher Timothy! **'... for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to him until that day.'** (2 Timothy 1:12)

3. The results of Christ's suffering. (16-18) Our writer sees three major results of the participation of Christ in human suffering. This passage has, through the centuries, been of immense comfort to countless generations of Christians.

The **first** result is seen in the fact that Christ came not to save angels but men and women – **'For indeed he does not give aid to angels, but he does give aid to the seed of Abraham.'** (16) Notice the double emphasis on the words **does (or does not) give aid**, focusing upon the recipients of Christ's saving work. The unfallen angels do not need salvation; for the fallen angels there is no means of salvation. Only men benefit from Christ's salvation.

What a privilege that is!

The **second** result was that Christ became like us. **'Therefore, in all things he had to be made like his brothers, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.'** (17) He experienced on the cross separation from God, desolation, and the heavy judgement of God – all things to be experienced by the unsaved throughout eternity. John Calvin comments – **'In a priest, whose office is to appease the anger of God, to help the unfortunate, to restore the fallen, to relieve the oppressed, the first and foremost requirement is mercy, such a sense of fellowship creates in us. It was not because the Son of God needed to experience it [misfortune] to become accustomed to the emotion of mercy, but because he could not persuade us that he is kind and ready to help us, unless he had been tested by our misfortunes.'**

The word **propitiation** is an important one. It means to appease, to pacify, to satisfy the righteous judgement of a holy God who has been offended by our sin, and must punish it. The Authorised Version of the Bible translates – **‘to make reconciliation for the sins of the people’**. John Owen the Puritan writer helpfully sees four elements in propitiation:

- (a) An offence, crime, guilt, or debt to be taken away.
- (b) A person offended to be pacified, atoned, reconciled.
- (c) A person offending to be pardoned and accepted.
- (d) A sacrifice, or other means of making atonement.

John Owen’s final comment is this: **‘The Jews knew the great work of the high priest was to make atonement, and the Apostle now instructs them in the substance of what before they had attended to in types and shadows.’**

The **third** result assures us that Jesus understands us fully. **‘For in that he himself has suffered, being tempted, he is able to aid those who are tempted.’** (18)

Christ suffered, thirsted, was rejected and despised. Because he experienced these things, he understands. Thus he is able to help those who draw near to him. What a great gospel appeal here! **‘For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.’** (Hebrews 4:15-16)

These simple words of a hymn by Rev. William Edensor Littlewood (1831–1886) are appropriate here:

1
**There is no love like the love of Jesus,
Never to fade or fall,
Till into the fold of the peace of God
He has gathered us all**

2
**Jesus’ love, precious love,
Boundless and pure and free!
Oh turn to that love, weary wandering soul,
Jesus pleadeth for thee!**

3
**There is no heart like the heart of Jesus,
Filled with a tender love;
No throb nor throe that our hearts can know,
But he feels it above.**

4
**Oh, let us hark to the voice of Jesus,
Oh, may we never roam,
Till safe we rest on his loving breast
In the dear heavenly home!**

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 6

A. QUESTIONS ON THE VERSES QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Romans 8:30

1. Who is the 'he' in this verse?
2. What are the four steps in salvation in order here?
3. Where will this last step take place?

Read Ephesians 1:3; 2:6; 3:10

4. What do we receive in heavenly places?
5. What are we doing in the heavenly places?
6. What is revealed in the Church in heavenly places?

Read Psalm 8:5-6

7. What position do men occupy in this life?
8. Which two things has God given to man?
9. What five things are put under his feet?
10. Where do you find these verses quoted in Hebrews?
11. What important sad statement about the creation does the writer make after quoting these verses in Hebrews 2:8?

Read Mark 12:25

12. What absurd story prompted this statement by Jesus?
13. What state will married people be in heaven?
14. How do we know that angels do not marry and have children?

Read Romans 8:19-21, 23-25

15. What does the sermon transcript say about these verses?
16. What is the creation looking for? (See verse 19)
17. Which word describes the condition of God's children in verse 21?
18. What are Christians looking for? (See verse 23)
19. What causes Christians to persevere? (See verse 24-25)

Read Psalm 22:22

20. What did Jesus declare to his people?
21. What does Jesus do among his people?
22. Where is this verse quoted in Hebrews?

Hebrews 2:12

23. Which word, then, describes Christ's followers?

Read Isaiah 8:17-18

24. Where are these verses quoted in Hebrews?
25. What does Jesus do with God's children?

Read John 11:25-26

26. Who is the resurrection and the life?
27. How is possible to live after death?
28. Who was asked if she believed this?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:56-57

29. What is the sting of death?
30. What is the strength of sin?
31. Who gives us the victory over these two things?
32. In Hebrews 2:14-15, what two things did Christ destroy?
33. In the same passage, whom did he release?

Read 2 Timothy 1:12

34. What three things caused Paul to suffer? (See verse 11-12)
35. Whom did Paul rely on to keep him strong till death and beyond?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

- (1) In the section [2. Jesus Christ and the purposes of God (Hebrews 2:9-18)] of the transcript, you will find three questions in italics.
 - (a) Write out those three questions.
 - (b) Answer the questions from what the writer to the Hebrews says in these verses.
- (2) Write briefly in your own words what John Owen and John Calvin comment on these verses, as quoted in the exposition.

C. PRACTICAL

Preach a sermon on Hebrews 2:14-15 on the subject:

THE FEAR OF DEATH IS DESTROYED.

- (1) **Write out in full your introduction and conclusion, bearing in mind that this is a gospel sermon ending with an evangelistic appeal.**
- (2) **Write out the headings of your various points, and references for any Scriptures that you used.**
- (3) **Report any special comments that you received from members of your congregation. If there are no immediate comments, ask two or three of them.**

Here is a dramatic sermon by the greatest of all English gospel preachers. Note how Christ-centred it is. And notice particularly the gospel appeal at the end.

There are no questions on this sermon. Just enjoy it, and learn from it.

THE DESTROYER DESTROYED.

A SERMON BY

CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON

(In adapted English by Geoffrey Stonier)

**'... that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death,
that is, the devil'** (Hebrews 2:14)

In God's original empire, everything was happiness and joy and peace. If there is any evil, any suffering and pain, that is not God's work. God may permit it, overrule it, and out of it bring much good; but the evil does not come from God. He himself stands pure and perfect, the clean fountain out of which pours out for evermore sweet and pure waters. The devil's reign, on the contrary, contains nothing of good; **'the devil has sinned from the beginning'** (1 John 3:8), and his dominion has been one uniform course of temptation to evil and the inflicting of misery. Death is a part of Satan's dominion. He brought sin into the world when he tempted our mother Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit, and with sin he also brought death into the world, with all its train of woes. There would likely have been no death, if there had been no devil. If Satan had not tempted, maybe man would not have revolted, and if he had not revolted, he would have lived forever without having to undergo the painful change, which is caused by death. I think death is the devil's masterpiece.

With the sole exception of hell, death is certainly the most Satanic mischief that sin has accomplished. Nothing ever delighted the heart of the devil so much as when he found that God's threat would be fulfilled, **'... for in the day that you eat the fruit of it you shall surely die.'** (Genesis 2:17) And never was his malicious heart, so full of hellish joy as when he saw Abel stretched out on the earth, slain by the club of his brother. 'Aha!' said Satan, 'this is the first of all intelligent creatures to die. Oh how I rejoice! This is the crowning hour of my dominion. It is true that I have marred the glory of this earth by my crafty temptation; it is true the whole creation groans and travails in pain by reason of the evil that I have brought into it; but this, this is my masterpiece. I have killed man; I have brought death into him, and here lies the first – the first dead man.' Since that time, Satan has ever gloated over the death of the human race, and he has had some reason to glory, for death has been universal. All have died. Though they might be as wise as Solomon, their wisdom could not spare their head; though they might be as virtuous as Moses, yet their virtue could not avert the axe. All have died; and therefore the devil boasts in his triumph. Only twice has he been defeated; only two have entered heaven without dying. But the mass of mankind have had to feel the scythe of death; and the devil has rejoiced because this, his mightiest work, has foundations as broad as the earth, and a summit that stretches as high as the virtues of mankind could climb.

There is something fearful in death. It is frightening even to the one who has the strongest faith. It is only coating death with gold to think of the after-life, the heaven, the harp, the glory, that makes death bearable even to the Christian. Death in itself must ever be an unutterably fearful thing to the sons of men. And oh, what ruin it brings! It darkens the windows of the eyes; it pulls down the polished pillars of the divine architecture of the body; it turns the inhabitant, the soul, out of its door, and bids it fly to worlds unknown; and it leaves in place of a living man a corpse whose appearance is so wretched that none can look upon it without emotions of horror. Now, this is Satan's delight. He thinks of death as his masterpiece because of its terror, and because of the ruin it produces. The greater the evil, the better he delights in it. No doubt he gloats over our sicknesses; he rejoices in our sin; but death is to him a theme of as much delight as he can be capable of in his eternal misery. He, as far as he can, shouts for joy when he witnesses how, by one dread deed of

his, one piece of treachery, he has swept the world with the broom of destruction, and hurried all men to the tomb.

And death is very lovely to the devil for another reason – not only because it is his chief work on earth, but because it gives him the greatest opportunity in the world to display his malice and his craft. The devil is a coward, the greatest of cowards, as most wicked creatures are. A Christian in health he will seldom attack; a Christian who has been living near his Master, and is strong in grace, the devil will leave alone, because he knows he will meet his match then. But if he can find a Christian either weak in faith, or weak in body, then he thinks it a fair opportunity for attack.

Now, when death comes with all its terrors, it is usual for Satan to make a fierce inroad into the soul. Usually with many of the saints, if not in the last moment of death, yet some little time before it, there is a ferocious onslaught made by the great enemy of souls. And then he loves death, because death weakens the mind. The approach of death destroys some of our mental powers, and takes away from us for a season some of those spirits by which we have been cheered in better days. It makes us lie there, weak and faint and weary. 'Now is my opportunity', says the evil one; and he steals in upon us. Hence I believe that for this reason he is said to have '**the power of death**'; for I cannot conceive that the devil has the power of death in any other sense but this, that it was originated by him, and that he, at such a time, generally displays most of his malice and of his power. For it is certain, my brothers, that the devil has not the power over death so as to cause death. All the devils in hell could not take away the life of the smallest infant in the world; and though we lie gasping and sick, so that the physician despairs of us, it is nothing but the fiat of the Almighty that can cause us to die, even in the extremity of our weakness. As far as the cause is concerned, the devil is not the cause of death. We rejoice to believe with Dr. Young, that an angel's arm cannot hurl us to the grave, even though it is the arm of that fallen archangel Lucifer. And we rejoice to know that afterwards a million angels cannot confine us there. So that neither for the unlocking of the door, nor for the securing of it afterwards, has the devil any power whatever over the Christian in death.

Why, there are many present here who have such a notion of religion that they think it a thing of happiness and pleasure and delight, and, living near the fountain of all bliss, that is, their God, their path is filled with sunshine, and their eye sparkles with perpetual happiness. They bear the trials of this life manfully as Christians should; they take afflictions from the hand of God with all resignation and patience. Now, the devil says, 'It is of no use my meddling with that one with doubting thoughts; he is too powerful for me; he is powerful on his knees, and he is powerful with his God.' 'Hands off!' says the Christian to the devil.' But when we begin to be weak, when our mind, through the influence of the body, begins to be sad, when we have either been starving ourselves by some silly religious belief, or when the rod of God has bruised us, then, in our evil plight, the foe will attack us. And for this reason the devil loves death, and has the power over it, because it is the time of nature's extremity, and therefore is the tune of the devil's opportunity.

The subject of our sermon this morning is this: Jesus Christ through his death has destroyed what power the devil has over death. Yes; and to add a second truth, which will be our second heading, he has not only by his death destroyed the power which the devil had over death, but he has destroyed the devil's power entirely in every respect by the death which he himself died.

Let us begin, then, at the beginning.

1. BY THE DEATH OF CHRIST, THE DEVIL'S POWER OVER DEATH IS, TO THE CHRISTIAN, UTTERLY DESTROYED.

The devil's power over death lies in three places, and we must look at it in three aspects. Sometimes the devil has power in death over the Christian by tempting him to doubt his resurrection, and leading him to look into the black future with the dread of annihilation. We will look at that first, and we will try to show you that by the death of Christ that peculiar form of the devil's power in death is entirely removed. When the poor spirit trembles on the brink of eternity, if faith is weak, and if the eye-sight of hope is dim, the Christian will most likely look forward into what? Into a world unknown; and the language of even an infidel sometimes pours out the lips of the most faithful child of God.

**'My soul looks down on what?
A dread eternity; a dreary gulf.'**

You may tell him of the promises; you may try to cheer him up by reminding him of the certain revelations of the future; but, apart from the death of Christ, I say that even the Christian himself would look forward to death as being a dreary goal, a dark cloudy end to a life of weariness and woe. Where am I speeding? An arrow shot from the bow of God's creation! Where am I speeding? And the answer comes back, 'From blank nothingness you came, and you are speeding to the same. You are nothing; when you die, you are lost.' Or, if reason has been well tutored, it may perhaps reply to him, 'Yes; there is another world, but reason can only tell him that it thinks so. It dreams of it; but what that other world will be like, what are its tremendous mysteries, what are its gorgeous splendours, or what are its horrible terrors, reason cannot tell.' And the sting of death would be to such a man, who has no view of immortality in Christ, the thought that he was to be annihilated – not to exist – or if to exist, he knew not how or where. But, beloved, by the death of Christ, all this is taken away.

If I lie dying, and Satan comes to me and says, 'You are to be annihilated, you are now sinking under the waves of time, and you shall lie in the caverns of nothingness for ever; you living, leaping spirit, is to cease for ever and be no longer', I reply to him, 'No, not so; I have no fear of that. O Satan, your power to tempt me here fails utterly and entirely. See there my Saviour! He died – he died really and actually, for his heart was pierced. He was buried; he lay in his grave three days; but, O Devil, he was not annihilated, for he rose again from the tomb on the third day, and in the glories of the resurrection he appeared to many witnesses, and gave infallible proofs that he was risen from the dead. And now, O Satan, I tell you, you cannot put an end to my existence, for you could not put an end to the existence of my Lord. As the Lord the Saviour rose, so all his followers must. **For I know that my Redeemer lives**, and therefore I know that **after my skin is destroyed ... that in my flesh I shall see God**' (Job 19:25-26), you tell me, O Satan, that I am to be swallowed up, and become nothing, and sink into the bottomless pit of nonentity. I reply to you, 'You lie!'

'My Saviour was not swallowed up, and yet he died; he died, but could not be held long a prisoner in the tomb. Come, death, and bind me; but you cannot destroy me. Come on, O grave; open your ghastly mouth and swallow me up; but I will burst your bonds another day. When that all-glorious morning dawns, I, having a dew like the dew of herbs upon me, will be raised up, and will live in his sight. Because he lives, I shall live also. (John 14:19)' So, you see, Christ, by being a witness to the fact of the resurrection, has broken the power of the devil in death. In this respect, he has prevented him from tempting us to fear annihilation; because, as Christians, we believe that because Christ rose again from the dead, even so those who sleep in Jesus will the Lord bring with him.

But now for a more common temptation – another phase of the devil's power in death. How often the devil comes to us in our life-time, and tempts us by telling us that our guilt will

certainly prevail against us, that the sins of our youth and our former transgressions are still in our bones, and that when we sleep in the grave our sins will rise up against us! 'They have many of them', says he, 'gone before you to judgement, and others will follow after.' When the Christian becomes weak, and his heart and his flesh fail him, were it not, I say for the great doctrine of the death of Christ, the devil would be able to tempt him in this way.

'You are about to die; I dare not tell you that there is no future state, for, if I do, you will reply to me, "There is, for Christ rose from the dead, and therefore I shall." But I will tempt you in another way. You have made a fine profession, but I charge you with being a hypocrite. You pretend that you are one of the Lord's beloved: now look back on your sins. Remember on such-a-day how your rebellious lusts arose, and you were led if not quite to indulge in a transgression, yet to long after it. Recollect how often you provoked him in the wilderness, how frequently you made his anger wax hot against thee.'

The devil takes up our diary, and he turns over the page, and with black finger points to our sins; and he reads scornfully with a sneer on his face. 'See here, saint', he says. 'Saint! Aha! A fine saint you were! There, Sabbath breaking. There, evil thoughts of unbelief There, a departure from the living God.' And he turns over page after page, and he peers over some very black page, and says, 'See here!' And he mocks the Christian with the thing. 'Ah!' says he, 'David, remember Bathsheba; Lot, remember Sodom and the cave; Noah, remember the vineyard and the drunkenness.'

Ah! it makes even the saint quiver when sin stares him in the face – when the ghosts of his old sins rise up and stare at him. He is a man who has great faith indeed who can look sin in the face and still say, 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses me from sin.' But were it not for that blood, were it not for the death of Christ, we can easily conceive what power the devil would have over us in the hour of death, because he would fling all our sins in our teeth, just as we came to die. But now, see how, through death, Christ has taken away the devil's power to do that. We reply to the temptation to sin, 'In truth O Satan you are right! I have rebelled, and I will not falsify my conscience and my memory. I own up to having transgressed. O Satan, turn to the blackest page of my history; I confess it all.'

**'Should he send my soul to hell,
His righteous law approves it well.'**

'But, O fiend, let me tell you, my sins were numbered on the scapegoat's head of old. Go, O Satan, to Calvary's Cross and see my substitute bleeding there. Behold, my sins are not mine; they are laid on his eternal shoulders, and he has eased them from his own shoulders into the depths of the sea. Depart, hell-hound! Why do you worry me? Go and satisfy yourself with a sight of that Man who entered the gloomy dungeons of death, and slept awhile there, and then wrenched the bars away, and led captivity captive as a proof that he was justified by God the Father, and that I also am justified in him.' Oh, yes; this is the way that Christ's death destroys the power of the devil! We can tell the devil that we do not care for him, for all our sins are passed away, covered in the thick cloud, and will not be brought against us any more for ever.'

Ah! said an aged saint once who had been much vexed by Satan, 'at last I got rid of my temptations, sir, and I enjoyed much peace.' 'How did you do that?' asked a Christian friend who visited him. 'I showed him blood, sir; I showed him the blood of Christ.' That is a thing the devil cannot endure. You may tell the devil, 'Oh, but I prayed so many times!' He will sniff at your prayers. You may tell him, 'Ah, but I was a preacher!' He will laugh in your face and tell you that you preached your own damnation. You may tell him that you did some good works, and he will lift them up and say, 'These are your good works – filthy rags: no one would have them as a gift.' You may tell him, 'Ah, but I have repented.' He will mock at your repentance. You may tell him what you like, he will scoff at you, till at last you say,

**'Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling.'**

And it is all over with the devil then; there is nothing now he can do, for the death of Christ has destroyed the power that the devil has over us to tempt us on account of our guilt.' **'The sting of death is sin'**. (1 Corinthians 15:56) Our Jesus took the sting away, and now death is harmless to us because it is not succeeded by condemnation.

Once more, you may imagine a Christian who has firm confidence in a future state. The evil one has another temptation for him. 'It may be very true', says Satan, 'that you are to live for ever, and that your sins have been pardoned; but you have found it very hard work so far to persevere, and now you are about to die, you will be sure to fail. When you had troubles, you know you were half inclined to go back again to Egypt. Why, the little hornets that you have met have worried you, and now this death is the prince of dragons. It will be all over with you now. You know that when you bumped over a cart-rut you were crying for fear of being drowned! What will you do now that you have got **'into the flooding of Jordan'**? (Jeremiah 12:5) Ah!' continues the devil, 'you were afraid of the lions when they were chained. What will you do with this unchained lion? How will you come off now? When you were a strong man and had marrow in your bones, and your sinews were full of strength, even then you trembled at me. Now I will have at you when I get you in your dying-time, and your strength fails, and I get my grip on you.'

**'That desperate tug your soul shall feel,
Through bars of brass and triple-steel.'**

Ah! you will then be overcome', says the devil. And sometimes the poor faint-hearted Christian thinks that is true, and says, 'I will surely fall one day by the hand of the enemy.' Up gets the Arminian theologian, and says, 'That is a very normal sort of feeling, my friend; God often does desert his children and cast them away.' To which we reply, 'You lie, Arminian; shut your mouth. God never did desert his children, neither can he, nor will he.'

And having answered the Arminian, we turn to answer the devil, and say to him, 'O fiend, you tempt us to think that you will conquer us. Remember Satan, that the strength that has preserved us against you has not been our own; the arm that has delivered us has not been this arm of flesh and blood, else we would long since have been overcome. Look there, fiend, at him who is Omnipotent. His almighty power will preserve us to the end; and, therefore, though we are very weak, when we are weak then we are strong (2 Corinthians 12:10), and in our last hour of peril we will yet overcome you.'

But please notice that this answer arises from Christ's death. Let us just picture the scene. When the Lord Jesus came down to earth, Satan knew his mission. He knew that the Lord Jesus was the Son of God; and when he saw him an infant in the manger, he thought if only he could kill him and get him in the bonds of death, what a fine thing it would be! So he stirred up the spirit of Herod to slay him; but Herod missed his mark. And many a time did Satan strive to put the personal existence of Christ in danger so that he might get Christ to die. Poor fool that he was, he did not know that when Christ died he would bruise the devil's head. Once, you remember, when Christ was in the synagogue, the devil stirred up the people and made them angry; and he thought, 'Oh, what a glorious thing it would be if I could kill this man. Then there would be an end of him, and I should reign supreme for ever.' So he got the people to take Jesus to the brow of the hill, and he gloated over the thought that now surely he would be cast down headlong. But Christ escaped.

He tried to starve him, he tried to drown him; he was in the desert without food, and he was on the sea in a storm; but there was no starving or drowning him, and Satan, no doubt,

panted for his blood, and longed that he should die. At last the day arrived; it was telegraphed to the court of hell that at last Christ would die. They rang their bells with hellish mirth and joy. 'He will die now', said he; 'Judas has taken the thirty pieces of silver. Let those Scribes and Pharisees get him, they will no more let him go than the spider will with a poor unfortunate fly. He is safe enough now.' And the devil laughed for very glee when he saw the Saviour stand before Pilate's bar. And when it was said, 'Let him be crucified', then his joy scarce knew bounds, except that bound which his own misery must ever set to it. As far as he could, he revelled in what was, to him, a delightful thought, that the Lord of glory was about to die. In death, as Christ was seen by angels, he was seen by devils too; and that dreary march from Pilate's palace to the Cross was one which devils observed with extraordinary interest. And when they saw him on the cross, there stood the exulting fiend, smiling to himself. 'Ah, I have the King of Glory now in my dominion; I have the power of death, and I have the power over the Lord Jesus.' He exerted that power till the Lord Jesus had to cry out in bitter anguish, 'My God, my God, why have you deserted me?' But ah, how short-lived was that hellish victory! How brief was that Satanic triumph! He died; but 'It is finished!' shook the gates of hell. Down from the cross the conqueror leapt, pursuing the fiend with thunderbolts of wrath. Swift to the shades of hell the fiend flew, and swift descending went the conqueror after him; and we may imagine him exclaiming,

**'Traitor! this bolt shall find and pierce thee through,
Though under bell's profoundest wave thou divest,
To find a sheltering grave.'**

And seize him he did – chained him to his chariot wheel; dragged him up the steeps of glory; angels shouting all the while, 'He has led captivity captive, and received gifts for men.' (Ephesians 4:8)

'Now, devil, you said that you would overcome me when I came to die. Satan I defy you, and laugh you to scorn. My Master overcame you, and I shall overcome you yet. You say that you will overcome the saint, do you? You could not overcome the saint's Master, and you will not overcome him. You once thought you had conquered Jesus. You were bitterly deceived. Ah, Satan, you may think that you will overcome the little faith and the faint heart! But you are terribly mistaken – for we shall assuredly tread Satan under our feet shortly, and even in our last extremity, with fearful odds against us, we shall be 'more than conquerors through him that loved us.' (Romans 8:37)

You see, my brothers, that Christ's death has taken away from Satan the advantage which he has over the saint in the hour of death; so that we may joyfully descend the shelving banks of Jordan, or may even, if God calls us to a sudden death, glide from its abrupt cliffs; for Christ is with us, and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:21)

But now, I want just a moment or two, while I try to show you that not only has Christ by his death taken away the devil's power in death; but,

2. HE HAS TAKEN AWAY THE DEVIL'S POWER EVERYWHERE ELSE OVER A CHRISTIAN.

He has 'destroyed', or, 'overcome' him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.' Death was the devil's chief weapon. Christ bearded the lion in his den, and fought him on his own territory. And when he took death from him, and dismantled that once impregnable fortress, he took away from him not only that, but every other advantage that he had over the saint. And now Satan is a conquered foe, not only in the hour of death, but in every other hour, and in every other place. He is an enemy, both cruel and mighty; but he is a foe who shivers and shakes when a Christian enters the lists against him; for he knows that though

the fight may waver for a little while, the balance of victory must fall on the side of the saint because Christ, by his death, destroyed the devil's power.

My brothers, Satan may tomorrow get much power over you by tempting you to indulge in the lusts of the flesh, or in the pride of life. He may come to you and say, 'Do such-and-such a thing that would be dishonest, and I will make you rich; indulge in such-and-such a pleasure, and I will make you happy. Come', says Satan, 'yield to my blandishments; I will give you wine to drink that will be richer than ever came from the wine-vats of Holy Scripture. I will give you bread to eat that you do not know. Eat the tempting fruit; it is sweet; it will make you like a god.'

'Ah!' says the Christian to Satan, 'My Master died when he had to do with you, and therefore I will have nothing to do with you. If you killed my Lord, you will kill me too if you can, and therefore away with thee! But inasmuch as you lay down silver before me, and tell me that I can have it if I do wrong, no, Satan, I can cover your silver with gold, and have ten times as much to spare afterwards. You say that I will get great gain if I sin. No; but the treasures of Christ are greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. (Hebrews 11:26) Why, Satan, if you were to bring me a crown, and say, 'There! You will have that if you sin', I would say, 'Poor crown! Why, Satan, I have got a better one than that laid up in heaven. I could not sin for that; that is a bribe too small.' Then he brings his bags of gold; and he says, 'Now, Christian, sin for them.' The Christian says, 'Why, fiend, that stuff is not worth looking at! I have an inheritance in a city where the streets are paved with solid gold, so, then, what are these poor chinking bits to me? Take them back!' Then he brings in loveliness, and tempts us by it. But we say to him, 'Why, devil, what are you up to? What is that loveliness to me? My eyes have seen the King in his beauty, and the land that is very far off; and by faith I know that I shall go where beauty, even in her perfection, is excelled – where I shall see my Saviour, who is **"the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely."** (Song of Solomon 5:10, 16) That is no temptation to me! Christ has died, and I count all these things as loss, that I may win Christ and be found in him.' (Philippians 3:7-8) So you see, that even in temptation, the death of Christ has destroyed the devil's power.

'You will not yield, will you?' says the devil.' 'You cannot be tempted! Ah well', says he, 'if you cannot be drawn aside, I'll pull you aside. What are you, that you should stand against me? A poor puny man! Why, I have made angels fall, and I am not afraid of you. Come on!' And he puts his foot to our foot, and with his dragon roar he frightens the very echoes so they do not dare to reply. He lifts his blazing sword and thinks to smite us to the ground. You know, my brothers, what the shield is that must catch the blow. It is the shield of faith in Christ who died for us. He hurls his darts, but his darts do no harm, for lo, we catch them also on this all-powerful shield, Christ and his cross. So, let his insinuations be never so fearful, the death of Christ has destroyed the devil's power either to tempt or to destroy. He may be allowed to attempt either the one or the other, but he can be successful in neither. The death of Christ has destroyed **'him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.'**

Some people say that they do not believe in the devil. Well, I have only to tell them I don't believe in them! Because if they knew themselves well, they would very soon find a devil. But it is quite possible that they have very little evidence of there being any devil; for, you know, the devil never wastes his time. He comes up a street, and he sees a man engaged in business, hoarding, covetous, grasping. He has got a widow's house in his throat; he has just swallowed the last acre of a poor orphan's lands. 'Oh', says the devil, 'drive by; I will not stop here, for he does not need me; he will go to hell easily enough.' He goes to the next house. There is a man there, a drunkard, spending his time in prodigal living. He marches by and says, 'There's no need for me here; why should I trouble my own dear friends? Why should I meddle with those whom I am sure to have at the last? There's no need to tempt them.' Then he finds a poor saint upon his knees, exercising only a little power in prayer. 'Oh!' says the devil, 'I shan't have this creature at last; I'll howl at him now.' There is a poor

sinner just returning from his evil ways and crying, 'I have sinned and done evil in your sight. Lord, have mercy on me!' 'I'm losing a subject', says Satan; 'I'll have him. I'm not going to lose my subjects like this.' So he worries him. The reason why you don't believe there is a devil, very likely, is that the devil very seldom comes to you because you are so safe that he does not take any trouble to look after you; and you have not seen him because you are too bad for him to care about, and he says, 'Oh no, there's no need for me to waste time to tempt that man. It would be like carrying coals to Newcastle to tempt him, for he is as bad as he can be, so I will let him alone.' But when a man lives near to God, or when a man's conscience begins to be aroused, Satan cries, 'To arms! To arms! To arms!' This for two good reasons: first, because he wants to worry him, and secondly, because he wants to destroy him. Well, we bless God that though the devil may direct his utmost scorn and craft and malice against the Christian, the Christian is safe behind the rock, Christ Jesus, and may rest secure.

And now, in conclusion, listen to a word or two of comfort to the people of God, and a warning to those who do not know him.

Children of God! Death has lost its sting because the devil's power over it is destroyed. Then cease to fear dying. You know what death is: look him in the face, and tell him you are not afraid of him. Ask grace from God, that by an intimate knowledge and a firm belief in your Master's death, you may be strengthened for that dread hour. And mark me, if you are truly alive, you will be able to think of death with pleasure, and to welcome it when it comes with intense delight. It is sweet to die; to lie upon the breast of Christ and have one's soul kissed out of one's body by the lips of divine affection. And you who have lost friends, or are likely to be bereaved, do not sorrow as those who are without hope; for remember that the power of the devil has been taken away. What a sweet thought the death of Christ brings us concerning those who are departed! They are gone, my brothers; but do you know how far they have gone? The distance between the glorified spirits in heaven and the militant saints on earth seems great; but it is not so. We are not far from home.

**'One gentle sigh the spirit breaks,
We scarce can say 'tis gone,
Before the ransomed spirit takes
Its station near the throne.'**

We measure distance by time. We are apt to say that a certain place is so many hours away from us. If it is a hundred miles off and there is no railway, we think it a long way. If there is a railway, we think we can be there in no time. But how near must we say heaven is? For it is just one sigh, and we get there. Why, my brothers, our departed friends are only in the upper room, as it were, of the same house. They have not gone far away; they are upstairs, and we are below. Yes, just as the poet says –

**'Ten thousands to their endless home,
This solemn moment fly,
And we are to the margin come,
And soon expect to die.'**

And then he describes them –

'Part of the host have crossed the flood.'

There they are, on the other side of the banks. 'Here is another part, deep in the stream. Here are we on the margin, just about to step down. They are all one army; there is not one gap right down from Abel to the one that is now departing – and they will never be but one, till the pearly gates are shut forever, and they are all secure.

**'E'en now by faith we clasp our hands,
With those who went before,
And greet the blood-besprinkled bands
Upon the eternal shore.'**

And now I close by saying this word to the sinner. You who do not know God, you who do not believe in Christ, death is to you a horrible thing. I need not tell you that; for your own conscience tells you. Why, man, you may laugh sometimes at religion; but in your own solitary moments it is no laughing matter. The greatest braggers in the world are always the greatest cowards. If I hear a man saying, 'Oh, I am not afraid of dying; I don't care about your religion', he does not deceive me. I know all about that. He is saying that to cover up his fears when he is alone at night. You should see how white his cheek is if a leaf falls against his window. When there is lightning in the air, you should look at him. 'Oh that flash!' he cries. Or, if he is a strong man, perhaps he does not say a word, but he feels in such horror all the time until the storm passes. This is not like the Christian man: not like the man who has courage. Why, I love the lightning! God's thunder is my delight! I never feel so well as when there is a tremendous thunder and lightning storm. Then I feel as if I could mount up, and my whole heart sings. I love to sing –

**'This awesome God is mine,
My Father and my love,
He shall send down his heavenly powers
To carry me above.'**

Yes; you are afraid of dying I know. And what I say to you is this – You have good need to be afraid of dying, and you have good need to be afraid of dying now. Because you have escaped many times, you think you will never die. Suppose we take a man, and tie him to that pillar, and a good marksman takes bow and arrows and shoots at him. Well, one arrow might glance off someone who is sitting to the right, and another might glance off someone to the left. One might fly above his head, and another beneath his feet. But you would not suppose that that man would laugh and mock when the arrows were flying about his ears. And if he was quite certain that the marksman was taking aim at him, so that he might be shot, then, my friends, you cannot imagine how he would tell you what terror he was experiencing. But certainly there would be no laughter. He would not say, 'Oh, I will not die! See, the man has been shooting at all these others.' No; the risk of dying would be enough to unsteady him, and the thought that that marksman had an eye so true, and an arm so steady, that he had but to pull the string and the arrow would certainly reach his heart, would that not be enough at least to sober him and keep him always watchful? For in a moment, when he least expected it, that arrow might fly. Now, that is you today. God puts the arrow to the string. Your neighbour is dead on the right, and another on the left; the arrow will come to you soon. It might have come before, if God had willed it.

Oh, do not mock at death, and despise eternity, but begin to think whether you are prepared for death, lest death should come and find you wanting. And remember, the death that comes to others will make no delay for you. You have postponed the time in your thoughts, but death will not be postponed to suit you. When you die, there will be no hour allowed for you in which to turn to God. Death comes with its first blow; condemnation comes afterwards, without the hope of reprieve. **'He who believes and is baptised will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned.'** (Mark 16:16) Thus we preach the gospel of God to you as God would have us. **'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.'** (Mark 16:15) **'Go and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.'** (Matthew 28:19) Behold, I tell you, faith in Jesus is the soul's only escape; profession of that in immersion is God's own way of professing faith before men.

May the Lord help you to obey him in these two great gospel commandments, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

STUDY 7

OUR APOSTLE AND HIGH PRIEST

HEBREWS 3:1-2

EXPOSITION

Throughout his letter, the writer presents Jesus as superior to everything and everyone – whether it is angels or devils, prophets or priest. In his resurrected and exalted state, nothing can be above him – **'[the God of our Lord Jesus Christ] raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.'** (Ephesians 1:20-21)

If we gospel preachers are to commend Christ honestly and effectively, we must be able to answer this simple question: 'Who is this superior person, Jesus Christ?' The writer, in 1:3 has shown that he is God himself, the final word of God to a sinful race of men, the only Saviour from sin, the most effective High Priest who offered a perfect sacrifice for sin on the Cross. He alone can snatch lost souls from the devil – **'that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.'** (Hebrews 2:14-15)

We now come to a new section in Hebrews chapters 3-7 where we look at the superiority of Christ in comparison with four great characters of the Old Covenant, all of whom were well known and highly respected by the Jewish readers. They are: Moses, Joshua, Aaron, and Melchisedek.

1. What kind of Saviour is Jesus Christ? (1)

Before we come to these character studies, however, we must first look at the sort of salvation Jesus has accomplished.

The word **'therefore'** must take us back to the Old Covenant. Christ is superior to the prophets (1:1-2) and the angels (1:6, 13). What does chapter 1 tell us about the Saviour? In fact, two most important things:

Firstly, that the purpose of his coming was indeed to save. This act is described as **'so great a salvation'**. (2:3) He came, in the estimation of our writer, not to feed the hungry, or help the poor, or liberate Israel from Roman oppression, but to deliver poor condemned sinners from the consequences and the power of their sin. He is **'the author of their salvation'**. (2:10)

Secondly, In order to accomplish this salvation, the Son of God had to become a man – born a Hebrew, born under the Law of Moses, and born a descendant of Abraham – **he does not give aid to angels, but he does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things he had to be made like his brothers.** (2:16-17)

This, then, was the extent the Saviour was willing to go to **'save his people from their sins'** (Matthew 1:21). **'Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared in the same'**. (2:14) Notice that in 2:17 those whom he saves are

called his brothers – not only brothers to one another, but brothers of Jesus, and children of God. The writer quotes Isaiah 8:18 – ‘**Here am I and the children whom God has given me.**’ (2:13) Such a close alliance and relationship is brought to its ultimate condition in Jude verse 24 – ‘**Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy ...**’ Then, by his coming, and by his saving work, he is the One ‘**who sanctifies**’ (2:11); for ‘**those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason he is not ashamed to call them brothers**’. They are set apart (sanctified) as his holy brothers with a heavenly calling – to share in the benefits of his saving priestly sacrifice in heaven. Christians are always looking ahead, as Paul did – ‘**I press towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**’ (Philippians 3:14) This earthly life of service to God is full of care and sadness and suffering. But all this will one day be left behind as we seek, and will see, our Saviour face-to-face. This is a great gospel message, and a fine base of truth from which to call sinners to receive the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we move on to chapter 3. Here in verse 1 is a key word – **consider**. In 2:1, ‘**we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard**’. Then in 2:3 – we must not ‘**neglect so great a salvation**’. Finally, in 3:1 – ‘**Therefore, holy brothers, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider ... Christ Jesus.**’

Here is the answer to the sin of backsliding, a terrible temptation for his Jewish readers (2:18) – ‘**For in that he himself has suffered, being tempted, he is able to aid those who are tempted. Therefore ... consider ... Christ Jesus**’.

Other temptations to give up the faith have come their way – some hardened their hearts through unbelief, some neglected their study of God’s Word, some left off fellowship altogether, and some were molested, their property confiscated, and they were put in prison. Others left off their profession of Christ, and returned to the old life of Judaism and the Law of Moses. To all of these, our writer calls, ‘**Consider ... Christ Jesus**’.

**1. O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There’s light for a look at the Saviour,
And life more abundant and free!**

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in his wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace.*

**2 Through death into life everlasting
He passed, and we follow him there;
Over us sin no more hath dominion -
For more than conquerors we are!**

**3 His word shall not fail you – he promised;
Believe him, and all will be well:
Then go to a world that is dying,
His perfect salvation to tell!**

(Helen Howarth Lemmel)

2. We are called upon to ‘consider’ Jesus Christ.

Here, in verse 1, we have yet another appeal to those who were falling back in their spiritual life. They were not putting Christ Jesus first in their lives, nor looking to him. **Consider** is a forceful word in Greek. A Puritan commentator, John Trapp, whose commentary on the New Testament is full of memorable phrases, wrote that it means **‘to bend the mind with the utmost diligence’**. Just as a drowning man clings to a piece of wood, or as a thirsty traveller drinks water from a well, so too we must **‘consider ... Christ Jesus.’**

We have in verse 1 a reference to the three-fold office of Jesus Christ. When he is addressed as ‘Christ Jesus’ we are reminded of his salvation; when as ‘apostle’, we think of him as God’s ambassador; when as ‘high priest’, we regard him as the One who intercedes for sinners before God.

So, **firstly**, he is called **‘the apostle ... of our confession’**. He is someone who comes with the ultimate authority of God. He is the final Word of God (1:2). John Owen connects this office with our own personal salvation – **‘His work as “the Apostle” was to reveal and declare the will of the Father unto the children of men; to declare the Father himself (John 1:18) and his name (John 17:6, 26): that is the mystery of his will concerning our obedience and salvation.’**

And what does he say to us? He calls out, **‘Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.’** (Matthew 11:28-30)

He also says, **‘Whoever believes in me should not perish but have eternal life.’** (John 3:16) And, **‘He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.’** (John 3:36)

To his disciples, he says, **‘Abide in me, and I in you ... He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing.’** (John 15:4-5) But to those who refuse him, he says, **‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness!’** (Matthew 7:23), and, **‘You fool! This night your soul will be required of you ... So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God..’** (Luke 12:20-21) Even the people recognised that **‘he spoke as one having authority, and not as the scribes.’** (Matthew 7:29)

Secondly, he is our **high priest**. He alone is the One who can reconcile sinners with a holy and angry God by his offering of an effective blood sacrifice on the Cross. He alone has the right to intercede for us in the very sanctuary of heaven before the throne of God, and to present us faultless before God in his righteousness. How useless were the high priests of the line of Aaron, Moses’ brother! No sacrifice offered by a sinner could take away sin, and neither could the blood of animal offerings and sacrifices take away sin. No conscience was every loosed from the burden and guilt of sin through the rituals of the Law of Moses (Hebrews 9:9, 14)

Thirdly, he is **Christ Jesus**. Christ is the Greek name given to the Jewish Messiah. It means ‘anointed with oil’ – set apart for the holy offices of prophet, priest, and king. Yet Jesus made it abundantly clear that he was Messiah to all nations, and that the gospel message should be taken out to **‘all the nations’** (Matthew 28:19), and to **‘every creature’** (Mark 16:15).

If ‘Messiah’ speaks of his offices, **‘Jesus’** is his name. And it is a precious name standing on its own 9 times in the Letter to the Hebrews. (2:9; 4:8; 4:14; 6:20; 7:22; 10:19; 12:2; 12:24; 13:12). Later, the writer will use the Hebrew form of the name Jesus (JOSHUA), and

compare him (in chapter 4) with the great and godly Jewish leader who brought the people into rest in the Promised Land. JOSHUA means 'Jehovah saves', a most suitable name, indicating his divine origin, and his saving work.

Thus, in his three-fold offices, we must **consider ... Christ Jesus**. He is the One we confess. Confession is the result of faith. **'...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation.'** (Romans 10:9-10)

We must note the difference between 'confession' and 'profession'. Profession is what we wish others to believe about us; but confession is the natural outcome of saving faith, when Jesus Christ became real to us, and the fixed object of our lives.

Here, again, is a real opportunity for a gospel appeal. To our hearers we might say

Is Christ Jesus the Lord of your life? Have you believed in him? Do you consider him as the greatest One in your life? He is Jesus, the only Saviour. He is the only perfect High Priest who has offered a perfect sacrifice for sin on the Cross, and now intercedes for sinners before his Father's throne. Listen to him as the Apostle of God; mark his words, and act upon them. Come to him, and return to him. For he is the only way.

3. An outstanding characteristic of Jesus Christ is his faithfulness. (2)

' ... who was faithful to him who appointed him'.

The faithfulness of Christ indicates several important aspects of his mission. He was determined to keep the will of his Father, and fulfil the promises of his Father amply revealed throughout the pages of the Old Testament. He regarded himself as the only way to the Father. In his nature he was a man, so he was not ashamed to be counted among the faithful of Israel. In his nature he was also God, and therefore unchangeable – **'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever.'** (Hebrews 13:8)

This statement of the eternity of Christ takes us back to the eternal faithfulness of God, which is the pattern for all faithfulness in his children. There is no more anguished passage in the Bible than the outcry by the prophet Jeremiah to God, and his complaint at being rejected by the people – **'I have become the ridicule of all my people, and their taunting song all the day. He [God] has filled me with bitterness, he has made me drink wormwood. He has broken my teeth with gravel, and covered me with ashes.'** (Lamentations 3:14-16) How often gospel preachers feel the same, although not to this degree! Jeremiah, when he had pulled himself together a little, remembers the faithfulness of God to him – **'Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion", says my soul, "therefore I hope in him!"'** (verses 22-24)

Jesus made the will of such a God the very centre of his life, and was perfectly faithful to it, even when tempted to lay it aside. We recall his prayer when in agony in the garden of Gethsemane – **'He went a little farther and fell on his face and prayed, O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.'** (Matthew 26:39)

He faithfully and perfectly and obediently fulfilled all his offices. He accepted the will of his Father, for that was what he was appointed to do. Those whom God appoints, he calls; and

those whom he calls, he anoints; and those whom he anoints, he uses in his purposes and to his glory. On this occasion, the writer refers to Moses – **‘who was faithful in all his house.’** We recall the moving testimony of the prophet Samuel to the life of Moses, when he said to the people of Israel – **‘It is the LORD who raised up Moses and Aaron’.** And Moses responded to the Lord’s call by devoting the remaining forty years of his life in faithful service to God. John Owen states that Christ’s faithfulness was of a totally different order to that of Moses

‘Faithfulness consists of two things, a trust committed and a discharge of that trust. Our Lord had a trust committed unto him, for it pleased the Lord to lay up in him “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3), to commit unto him the whole mystery of his will and grace, and send him to make known the last full declaration of his mind and will as to his worship with the obedience and salvation of the Church. This trust he discharged faithfully.’

The mark of a true believer is also seen in his faithfulness in his service for God. Like Moses, they disregard persecution, hindrances, adversities, and temptations to riches. Nothing will stop him; he continues faithfully in his Saviour’s service regardless. He has an example in Jesus Christ, who rendered faithful service through many deprivations and sufferings. But he persevered, bringing untold blessings of salvation to the world for all time.

Praise God!

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 7

A. QUESTIONS ON THE VERSES QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Ephesians 1:20-21

1. What did God work in Jesus Christ?
2. What two things were manifestations of this in relation to Jesus Christ?
3. What four things is Christ over at the present time?
4. What is the Old Testament meaning of **‘far above ... every name that is named’**?

Read Philippians 3:13-14

5. What is Paul glad to leave?
6. What does Paul reach for?
7. In view of verse 8, what did Paul regard as the greatest prize?

Read John 1:18

8. Who has ever seen God?
9. What did Jesus do with regard to God?
10. How do we know that Jesus has never lost his Godhead from this verse?

Read John 17:6, 26

11. What has Christ manifested in the world?
12. What did God give to his Son?
13. What response do Christians make towards God?
14. In verse 26, what two things would you expect to find in a Christian?

Read Matthew 11:27-30

15. How can anyone know God?
16. What does Jesus promise to those who come to him?

Read John 3:16, 36

17. What does the believer receive through Christ?
18. In verse 36, what does the believer receive?
19. What comes to the unbeliever?

Read John 15:4-5

20. Who is the 'me' in 'Abide in me'?
21. How can the Christian bear spiritual fruit?
22. Who are 'the branches'?
23. What is the effect of not abiding?

Read Luke 12:20-21

24. Who was the fool?
25. Why was he a fool?
26. What did God do?

Read Matthew 7:28-29

27. For what two reasons were the people astonished?
28. What is the name of the sermon Jesus had just preached?

Read Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15

29. What are the similarities in these two verses?
30. What are the main differences in these two verses?

Read Roman 10:9-10

31. Why do you think these verses are quoted in the transcript?
32. What must be confessed?
33. What must be believed?
34. Which similar words appear twice, once in each verse?

Read Lamentations 3:13-16, 22-24

35. What is a 'lamentation'?
36. What is Jeremiah complaining about?
37. What two things does Jeremiah eventually remember about God?
38. What effect does this have on him in verse 24?

Read Matthew 26:39

39. What was the 'cup' Jesus wished to pass away?
40. What did Jesus wish to do above all?
41. Where is this said in another verse of this chapter?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

This Study is called 'Our Apostle and High Priest'. After reading the exposition carefully again, explain, in no less than 30 words each, how Hebrews shows Christ to be:

- (1) Our Apostle
- (2) Our High Priest

C. PRACTICAL

Prepare a sermon illustrating the hymn quoted in the transcript - 'Turn your eyes upon Jesus'.

- (1) Show how this hymn is connected with Hebrews 3:1.**
- (2) Write an original title for the sermon.**
- (3) Write a heading that summarises each of the four verses.**
- (4) Explain to your congregation the meaning of each of the verses in a few words.**
- (5) Include the Bible verses you used to explain the verses of the hymn.**

STUDY 8

CHRIST AND MOSES

HEBREWS 3:2-6

EXPOSITION

To speak of Moses was to get the immediate attention of all his Jewish readers. Of all the great personalities of national life, Moses towered over them all. He was their great national leader and prophet who delivered them from slavery in Egypt. For forty long years he brought them safely through the wilderness to the borders of the Promised Land. He was the great Lawgiver, the conveyer of God's covenant with the people of Israel, a covenant sealed with the blood of animal sacrifices.

To 'sit on Moses' seat' was the highest ambition and honour of all bright Jewish boys, being a great source of pride and satisfaction to their parents. Of this, we read that **'Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples, saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe that observe and do; but do not according to their works; for they say, and do not do."**' (Matthew 23:1-2)

In the Gospels, it is recorded that Jesus appealed to Moses' life or words to uphold his own righteous cause. He always pointed to Moses' immense authority and godliness. The writer to the Hebrews always speaks of him with great respect, and commends above all his faith and faithfulness in serving God and his people Israel.

Yet despite these great qualities, Jesus is greater than Moses, not equal with him. Our writer states – **'Moses indeed was faithful in all his house ... but Christ [was] as a son over his own house, whose house we are'**. (Hebrews 3:5-6) Moses stood for the old covenant that failed, but Christ brought in a new covenant, which never fails those who, by faith, avail themselves of it. **'And of his [Christ's] fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.'** (John 1:16-17)

The first comparison between Moses and Christ was in their respective persons. The second comparison is worked out in terms of households. Moses was a servant in God's house of the law and the covenant, a house which only contained the people of Israel; whereas Jesus was the son over his house which is entered by grace and faith alone, not by Israel alone, but all the nations. Moses' household was a fleshly nation, whereas Christ's house is spiritual, his body, his Church.

Now, in 3:2-6, we will see just how Christ is superior to Moses.

1. Consider the faithfulness of Moses (2)

'...as Moses also was faithful in all his house.'

Christ Jesus is the Apostle and High Priest. (1) He was sent from God to offer himself as a sacrifice for sin, and intercede for sinners in heaven. This he did, and does, faithfully. But Moses also was faithful in God's work. (2) Moses preceded Christ, bringing in the Law with

its condemnation of sin. This resulted in sinners fleeing to the grace of the gospel, and to salvation through the new covenant of Christ.

Yet we must not devalue Moses. God bore testimony to Moses with these words – **‘If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make myself known to him in a vision, and I speak to him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the Lord.’** (Numbers 12:6-8)

Moses’ spiritual life was not on a lower level than that of Christians. This is a great error, and a common one too! Moses, David, Abraham, and all the other Old Testament saints knew the grace and mercy of God, and, indeed, his forgiveness. It says that Moses spoke with God face to face directly. Is that true of believers today? Moses’ spiritual life before God was of a quality unknown anywhere else in the history of Israel. He was a uniquely godly man. Yet Jesus is superior to Moses, greater than Moses.

HOW WAS MOSES FAITHFUL IN HIS HOUSE?

Moses was actually faithful in his service in three house, which he established.

(1) There was the house of God’s people: ancient Israel. In this sense, Jeremiah spoke on God’s behalf – **‘I have forsaken my house, I have left my heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies.’** (Jeremiah 12:7) Due to Israel’s sin, God permitted heathen Babylon to invade and capture the land, and take the Jews captive into exile. Just as Moses had brought the people out of slavery in Egypt, so Zerubbabel and Ezra brought them out of exile back to their own land. Moses laid the foundation of his house, Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah re-laid the foundation of the house, that at the right time and place Christ Jesus might be born – **‘But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.’** (Galatians 4:4-5)

(2) There was the house of God, meaning the Tabernacle (later, the Temple). In one of his sermons, Moses declared – **‘You shall not bring a prostitute’s fee or the price of a dog to the house of the Lord your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God.’** (Deuteronomy 23:18) No unclean things may be brought into God’s house where he is worshipped. Another name given to this construction was ‘sanctuary’ (a holy place) – **‘And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.’** (Exodus 25:8-9)

The worship of the Lord was to be pure. Its ceremonial and furnishings were designed to teach the people valuable lessons about the true nature of spiritual worship, and the true nature of God’s purpose in cleansing from sin. All this was fulfilled in the coming and the death of Jesus Christ who said – **‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’** (John 14:6)

(3) Then there was the priestly house of God. This consisted of Moses’ brother Aaron, and all his sons, of the tribe of Levi. The main problem was that the priests were as sinful as those on whose behalf they offered the sacrifices for sin. **‘Aaron shall offer a bull as a sin offering, which is for himself and for his house.’** (Leviticus 16:6)

Moses established this priestly house as a pattern for the perfect High Priest, Christ Jesus, who offered no sacrifice for himself, for he was sinless, but for the sins of the whole world on the cross. (1 John 2:2)

Thus, to all three houses Moses was faithful, for he was pointing forward to the Messiah and the Church. He was a most worthy and faithful man, greatly to be admired. He stands head and shoulders above all the other Old Testament saints. Yet Christ Jesus is better! (See Hebrews 3:3)

2. A comparison between Moses and Christ Jesus (3-4)

'For this one [Christ] has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who built the house has more honour than the house. For every house is built by someone, but he who built all things is God.'

Jesus is superior to Moses because he built his own house, whereas Moses was only a servant in his house. The triumphant words of Christ concerning his Church spring readily to mind – **'... on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.'** (Matthew 16:18)

Moses was part of the house, but Jesus is building his own house, by redeeming its members with his own precious blood, which he shed at the cross. **'... you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.'** (1 Peter 1:18-19)

In verses 3-4, the writer to the Hebrews is asserting a great truth about the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the truth of his deity – the divinity (or, Godhead) of God's Son. Here, Jesus is actually called 'God' in verse 4 – **'he who built all things is God'**. In verse 3, he is called the builder of the house. In verse 4, the builder is called God. Therefore, the inescapable conclusion is, that Jesus is God. Here is further reinforcement of the truth affirmed in 1:3 that the Son is divine – **'the brightness of his [God's] glory and the express image of his glory'**.

There is a further argument here. If Jesus is God, and God built the house in which Moses was a servant, therefore Jesus must be superior to Moses as the head of the house. This argument must have come with devastating force to Jewish people! Perhaps Stephen used it when he preached in the Synagogue of the Freemen in Jerusalem, and Paul in the synagogues of Asia Minor.

3. A further illustration of the unequal comparison between Christ and Moses (5-6)

'And Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterwards, but Christ as a son over his own house, who house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.'

(1) Verse 5 tells us the position of Moses.

The writer is again appealing to those who were feeling the social pressure to leave Christ and the things of Christ and return to their former Judaism. If Moses was inferior to Jesus Christ, why desert a superior for an inferior, or the master for the servant?

Yes; Moses, despite all his great authority, was only a servant in his house. Many instances could be quoted of how the Israelites grumbled against God, and rejected Moses' authority. On one well-remembered occasion, God sent a plague of fiery poisonous snakes into the camp. On another, and in answer to the physical depression and weakness of Moses in constantly intervening in disputes among the Israelites, God appointed seventy elders to

assist him. **'So Moses said to the Lord, "Why have you afflicted your servant? And why have I not found favour in your sight, that you have laid the burden of all these people on me? ... I am not able to bear all the people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me.'** (Numbers 11:11, 14)

Even Moses experienced great problems in serving in his house. Yet he faithfully carried on. A short time after this incident, Moses received this commendation from the Lord, **'He is faithful in all my house.'** (Numbers 12:7)

How good it is to remind our hearers that the Lord does not require success of his servants. Moses failed to bring salvation to the people through the Law, for the people could not keep the Law perfectly. God requires of his servants only that they remain faithful to him and to the work.

(2) Verse 6 gives us a clear idea of the position of Jesus.

It is indeed true that Christ himself became a servant.

'... who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.' (Philippians 2:6-7) Yes; Jesus did become a servant, but only until he had finished his work of salvation for sinners. He never ceased being God's Son, for it was no robbery for him to be equal with God. Then **'God also has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow'** (Philippians 2:9-10)

Jesus is the Son over his own house. Moses was a servant in all his house, (5) but Christ was a son over his own house. (6)

We have one further question to answer: "What is God's house over which the Son rules?" It is not an earthly house, meaning a nation, nor is it a house of bricks and mortar; neither is it a house of sinful priests and failed animal sacrifices. It is a spiritual house not built with hands (Hebrews 9:11, 24). **'Coming to him [Christ] as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.'** (1 Peter 2:4-5)

Jesus is the head of his house. We would be failing in our calling as gospel preachers if we did not make an appeal at this point, and ask our hearers

'Are you one of these living stones that make up the spiritual house of God? Is he the head of your life? Can it truly be said that you are a servant in the house of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, or are you still in the house of Moses, seeking to establish a righteousness of your own by your own works, which are sure to fail you in the day of God's judgement?'

John Calvin adds these challenging words:

'He had earlier said that the house of God was subject to the rule of Christ. In accordance with this sentence, he adds the reminder that they will have a place in the family of God if they obey Christ. Since they have now begun to embrace the gospel, he adds the condition "if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end." ... This passage reminds us that we must always go forward right to the day of death, because the whole of life is like a race.'

Calvin might have quoted the words of Hebrews 12:1-2 – ‘... **let us run the race with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith**’.

By way of encouragement to wavering Christians, and certainly not a stranger to hardships himself, the Puritan preacher John Owen comments on this phrase ‘**if we hold fast**’

‘In times of trial and persecution, freedom, boldness and constancy in profession are a good evidence unto ourselves that we are living stones in the house of God. In the discharge of this duty the glory of God is greatly concerned... Again, by these means, the souls of the saints have a trial and experiment of their own grace, of what sort it is ... Tried graces are exceedingly precious, and are evidences that those in whom they are do belong to the house of God.’

QUESTION FOR STUDY 8

A. QUESTIONS ON THE VERSES QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Matthew 23:1-2

1. What authority did Jesus allow the religious leaders to have?
2. Name two of the religious parties named by Jesus?
3. In verses 3-4, what did Jesus tell the people to do?
4. What did he tell the people not to do?

Read John 1:16-17

5. What do we receive from Christ?
6. What came from Moses?
7. Why was this bad?
8. What else comes from Christ?

Read Numbers 12:6-8

9. Which two methods did God use in speaking to a prophet?
10. How was it different with Moses?
11. How did God not speak to Moses?
12. Yet what was wrong with the people?

Read Jeremiah 12:7

13. Which two words are used here to describe God’s people?
14. Which two words describe what God has done to his people?
15. What wonderful title does God use for his people?
16. What terrible fate did God deliver his rebellious people into?

Read Galatians 4:4-5

17. What did God do in the fullness of time?
18. What are two strange things (from man’s point of view) that happened to God’s Son?
19. Why did he come?
20. What happens to those he came for?

Read Exodus 25:8-9

21. What else was the tabernacle called?
22. Later, when it became a stone building, what was it called?
23. How did they know how to construct the tabernacle, and how did they know what furnishings to make?

Read John 14:6

24. What three titles are used of Christ here?
25. What unique claim concerning Christ is made here?
26. Why is this verse used in gospel sermons so often?

Read Leviticus 16:6

27. What did Aaron need for the sins of himself and his house?
(See also verse 11)
28. What does the word 'atonement' mean in this verse?

Read Matthew 16:18

29. What was Peter's original name? (See verse 17)
30. Why did Jesus bless Peter? (See verse 16-17)
31. The confession was to be the foundation of what?

Read 1 Peter 1:18-19

32. What will not redeem a sinner?
33. What will redeem a sinner?
34. Explain in no more than 30 words what 'redeem' means.
35. What sacrificial title is used here of Christ?

Read Numbers 11:11, 14

36. Why was Moses complaining? (See verses 11, 14)
37. What had God charged Moses to do?
38. What were the people urging Moses to get for them?
39. What favour was Moses asking God for? (See verse 15)
40. What was God's solution? (See verses 15-17)

Read Philippians 2:6-7, 9-10

41. How would you prove from this passage that Jesus was truly God?
42. There are seven steps down for Christ here in verses 7-8. Name them.
43. How did God exalt his Son?
44. What two effects does this have on mankind?

Read 1 Peter 2:4-5

45. What sacrifices do the people of God offer up?
46. What three titles are used here for the people of God?
47. What other four titles are used in verse 9?
48. Who is the chief corner stone? (See verse 6, 7)
49. Which word is used twice in verses 6-7 to describe him?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

- (1) Explain why Moses was held in such high regard by the Jewish readers of Hebrews. How does this passage (3:1-6), and the sermon based upon it, show that Christ is better than Moses?
- (2) In your own words, explain how John Calvin and John Owen add some challenging words about avoiding backsliding at the end of the sermon.

C. PRACTICAL

Preach a sermon on Hebrews 3:1-6 where Christ is compared with Moses.

- (1) Look up the following and use in your sermon:
Zechariah 6:12-13; 1 Chronicles 17:11-14; 1 Peter 2:5; and Ephesians 2:19-22.**
- (2) The theme of your sermon will be an explanation of the phrase –
'... the builder has more honour than the house' (verse 3)**
- (3) Explain to your congregation what is the 'house' being described here.**
- (4) Afterwards, ask some of your elders or deacons how they have come
to understand the meaning of this phrase used above. Write out
their comments, and send them in.**
- (5) Send in an outline of your sermon with its various points.**

THIS IS THE END OF MODULE 1