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THE LOOKOUT

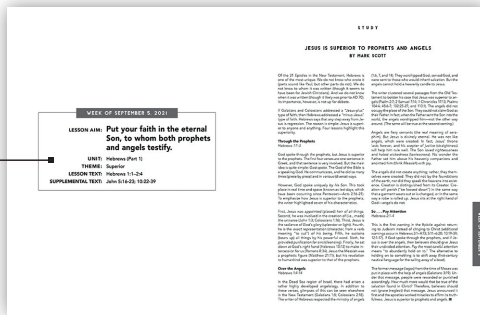
SEPTEMBER 2021

Unit: HEBREWS (Part 1)
Theme: SUPERIOR

Overview: Not everything that is new is improved. But when it comes to the salvation history of the Bible, Jesus is superior to everything in the Old Testament. In the first of three months of study from the Epistle to the Hebrews, students will learn of Jesus’ superiority over the prophets, the angels, and Moses. They will also learn of the superior sacrifice Jesus makes and the superior covenant he brings. Students will learn to embrace God’s wisdom, pray earnestly for revival, witness God’s miracles, and avoid the heartache of disobedience.

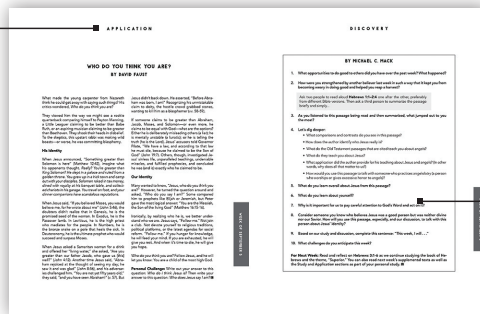
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tab indicates the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 19, 2021

LESSON AIM: **Trust in Christ's
once-for-all sacrifice
to atone for your sin.**

UNIT: Hebrews (Part 1)

THEME: Superior

LESSON TEXT: Hebrews 10:1-18

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Leviticus 4-5; Psalm 111:9; Romans 6:8-11

JESUS IS A SUPERIOR SACRIFICE

BY MARK SCOTT

The way of God in the world is sacrifice. After the fall of humankind in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), God chose sacrifice as the means of getting the world back. Sacrifice forces one to admit how bad sin is. Sacrifice satisfies the demands of justice. Sacrifice was demanded by God (Leviticus 1–7), but hypocritical sacrifice offended God (Isaiah 1:11; Hosea 6:6). Believers can present their bodies to God as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1), and worshippers can offer a sacrifice of praise to God (Hebrews 13:15). *Sacrifice* is a key term in this text. It occurs nine times (and a similar word, *offering*, occurs six times).

Hebrews is clearly the “better” Epistle. The writer thus far has argued that Jesus is *better* than the angels, *better* than Moses, *better* than the entire priesthood, and brings a *better* covenant. Now the writer argues that Jesus is a superior sacrifice—though priesthood, covenant, and sacrifice are quite meshed together. Also, running just beneath the surface of this argument is the reoccurring exhortation of not committing apostasy by turning away from Christ. Why would one want to turn away from One who was the perfect sacrifice?

The Ongoing Sacrifices

We sometimes can gain greater appreciation for something by comparing it to something else. When we do, oftentimes we find there is “no comparison.” A Volkswagen Beetle is not comparable to a BMW. Fast food is not comparable to steak and lobster. Water polo is not comparable to the National Football League. Likewise, the sacrifices that preceded Jesus’ unique sacrifice on Calvary were effectual, but their eternal effect was insignificant by comparison.

The law—embedded as it was with the priesthood, the sacrifices, and the covenant—was *only a shadow* of what was to come. The *realities* (“pragmatic” things) were the things of real substance, and these were found only in Christ’s sacrifice.

The sacrifices that predated Jesus had multiple problems. First, they had to be *repeated* year after year. Second, they were less sin remover than an annual sin reminder. Third, though sin could temporarily be forgiven through the sacrifices, the sacrifices failed to substantially

improve (*make perfect*) the worshipper. Fourth, the sacrifices of animals (*bulls and goats*) were utterly futile in really removing sins. In fact, God was not *pleased* with them even though he had prescribed them in the law. God knew the time would come when the first covenant, with all its sacrifices, would give way to the second covenant. Finally, the priests performed their *religious duties* (liturgies) with regularity but without significant effect.

The Once-For-All Sacrifice

Jesus Christ’s death on the cross, of course, was the once-for-all sacrifice. Calvary was a real hill in time and space. The incarnation was the beginning of this sacrifice. For Jesus to come to earth in the first place was a sacrifice. The writer seemed to put the words of Psalm 40:6-8 into the mouth of Jesus. A *body* was *prepared* (set—as in setting a broken bone) for Jesus. Jesus would accomplish this sacrifice because he was consumed with doing the *will* of God (something mentioned twice in the text). There would be no blemish or duplicity in Jesus’ offering of himself.

The former sacrifices could not ensure the worshipper would be holy (set apart and dedicated to God). But the sacrifice of Jesus could accomplish that *once for all* (a phrase mentioned twice in our text and in Hebrews 7:27; 9:12). In fact, so complete was Jesus’ sacrifice that he did not have to give yearly attention to it. When he was done, he *sat down at the right hand of God*. These days, people sit down to work. By contrast, in the ancient world when someone sat down, it meant their work was finished (John 19:30) and their enemies were conquered (Colossians 2:15). No wonder the high priest Jesus received the place of honor at the Father’s right hand. This once-for-all sacrifice made the worshippers complete and sanctified.

The writer closes this argument with an exhortation from Jeremiah 31, the famous Old Testament chapter dealing with the new covenant. Jeremiah’s people were headed into exile, but God would rescue them and give a new way whereby they could be right with God. God’s laws would not be external and on tablets of stone. They would be internal and written on the heart. And sin would not just be rolled back, but put away and not remembered (brought against the sinner) ever again. Christ’s sacrifice for sin is complete—trust it and trust him. ■

APPLICATION

WHAT DOES SACRIFICE MEAN TO YOU?

BY DAVID FAUST

The word *sacrifice* has been cheapened by overuse. Is it really a sacrifice to skip dessert or give up gourmet coffee? Baseball players call it a sacrifice when the batter makes an out but moves a teammate to the next base.

Sacrifices can be bad or good. Some workers sacrifice their marriage and children on the altar of their careers, while others turn down lucrative promotions in order to spend more time with their families. In Old Testament times, faithful priests sacrificed animals as prescribed in God's Law while others drifted into idol worship and offered sacrifices to idols.

What does sacrifice mean to us today? Here are three questions to consider.

What have others sacrificed for us? America wouldn't exist without sacrifice. Our nation's founders pledged their fortunes and their sacred honor, and soldiers gave their lives to secure and protect our freedom. Who can measure the sacrifices made by our parents and grandparents? What about all the ways we have benefited from teachers, ministers, public safety workers, and caring neighbors who put our well-being above their own? Do we appreciate the sacrifices of previous generations who constructed the schools where our kids learn and the buildings where we gather to worship?

During the Civil War, on November 21, 1864, Abraham Lincoln signed a letter to Mrs. Lydia Bixby of Massachusetts consoling her for the death of her sons who served in the Union army. The letter says, "I pray that our heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom."

This leads to another question: *What are we willing to sacrifice for God and others?* Jesus insisted that his disciples "must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Are we willing to view our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God (Romans 12:1)? Are we motivated to do good and share with others, knowing that "with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:16)? Are we willing to pray as David did in Psalm 51:17, "My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise"?

Here is the most important question. *What did Christ sacrifice for us?* Imagine what it cost for the Word to become flesh and step down to earth. Christ exchanged the palatial glory of Heaven for the gloomy gutter of Golgotha. He endured multiple scourges: his nation's rejection, the soldier's whip, his friend's betrayal. He took the blame for crimes he never committed and paid the penalty for our wrongdoing. The prophet predicted that the government would be on Christ's shoulders (Isaiah 9:6), but first he had to shoulder a cross.

One sublime sacrifice changed the world—and changed us. "We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). In all of human history, no other sacrifice has been so impactful or so costly. The hymn writer was right:

Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all!

Personal Challenge: Offer a prayer to the Lord in two parts. Thank him for the sacrifices he was willing to make for you. Then ask him what sacrifices you can make this week for the benefit of others. ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How did you do in keeping your thoughts focused on Jesus over the past week?
2. Did you have a chance to strengthen another part of the “household” of believers last week? How did that go?

Ask two people to read aloud **Hebrews 10:1-18** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to summarize the passage in one minute or less.

3. What part of this passage gives you the most hope?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - What can the law do and what can't it do?
 - What words and phrases are used to describe the sacrifices performed under the Old Covenant law? (*You might want to make a list on a large sheet of paper or board.*)
 - What words and phrases are used to describe Jesus' sacrifice? (*Add these alongside the previous list.*)
 - As you compare these two lists of words and phrases, what understanding of God's grace do you gain?
 - What do the words from Jeremiah 31 (verses 16-17 in our text) add to your comprehension of God's plan for his people?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about yourself?
7. What do you learn from Jesus about obeying God in this passage?
8. What sacrifice(s) can you make for others this week?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: “This week, I will . . .”
10. What help or encouragement could you use in striving to be a more self-sacrificial person this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Hebrews 12:14-29**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖