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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**.



Vertical tabs on the right side of the page indicate 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 26, 2021

**LESSON AIM: 'Be thankful, and . . .
worship God acceptably
with reverence and awe.'**

UNIT: Hebrews (Part 1)

THEME: Superior

LESSON TEXT: Hebrews 12:14-29

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Jeremiah 31:31-35; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26;
2 Corinthians 3:7-18

STUDY

JESUS IS MEDIATOR OF A SUPERIOR COVENANT

BY MARK SCOTT

People need mediators. A couple injured in an accident might need a mediator to help them settle a claim with an insurance company. Professional athletes might need a mediator to help them settle contract disputes with owners. Job wanted a mediator to help him argue his case with God (Job 9:33).

Jesus is the ultimate mediator between heaven and earth. In addition to that, Jesus mediates a superior covenant between heaven and earth.

Following the exhortations of drawing near to God and not shrinking back (Hebrews 10:19-39), and after giving numerous examples of people who did just that (chapter 11), the writer of Hebrews challenged people to continue running the race and looking to Jesus (12:1-2). Any difficulties they experienced along the way could help them see those disciplines as evidences of God's love for them (12:3-13).

Two Boys

In making his final exhortations and appeals, the writer of Hebrews mentioned two Old Testament boys who stand in stark contrast. Both lived prior to the Mosaic covenant. The first was Esau, whom Clovis Chappell called "the Sensualist." Esau lived by his glands and impulses. His dad was the patriarch Isaac, and his deceptive brother was Jacob. Esau was not the poster child for how people who have a better covenant live. He was *sexually immoral* (" pornos " in Greek) and *godless* (profane; unhallowed; desecrated). This was why he sold his *inheritance rights* (birthright as firstborn). The story is tragic (Genesis 25:29-34). He regretted doing it, but the incident could not be reversed.

This was why the writer called on believers to *make every effort* (as in hunting down an animal) *to live in peace . . . and to be holy*. Esau certainly did not follow that advice. Almost as an aside, the writer said, *without holiness no one will see the Lord*. Believers are not to *fall short of the grace of God* or allow a *bitter root* (something offensive to God and destructive to others) to grow.

The second boy was Abel. Though mentioned only briefly, Abel was, in a manner of speaking, a type of Christ. He was victimized and murdered—like Jesus. His innocent blood cried out to God from the earth (Genesis 4:10). But Abel's innocent blood was surpassed by Jesus' saving blood.

Two Mountains

The Mosaic covenant was delivered on Mount Sinai. "Awesome" fails to adequately describe that moment (Exodus 19:9-23; Deuteronomy 9:9-29). The mountain shook and burned with fire (later in the text God is described as a *consuming fire*), and *darkness, gloom and storm* hung over it. These were "real" symbols of God's presence. The *trumpet blast* and voice of God were so incredible that the people wanted a mediator (Moses?) to help them. They even wondered how they could rein in their animals lest they die by touching the mountain of God. But their desired mediator (Moses) was himself *trembling with fear*.

Jesus' covenant was given on Mount Zion. As mentioned in previous lessons, the word *Zion* has many nuances in the Bible. Here it referred to the temple mound of Jerusalem, but the later context would indicate it referred to even more than that. It is possible to understand these verses (Hebrews 12:22-23) as referring to some future kingdom, but they just might be some of the loftiest descriptions of the church anywhere in the Bible. After all, only a thin veil separates the church on earth and the church in heaven. When the worship in a church service is "off the charts" good, it seems a bit like heaven. When the *church of the firstborn* joins the *angels in joyful assembly*, all heaven breaks loose. Jesus the mediator is the *Judge of all* and makes people righteous by sprinkling them with his redemptive blood. The church is a mountain of sorts (Daniel 2:44-45), and that mountain is superior to all others.

One Mediator

The two boys offer a contrast. The two mountains are very different. But the mediator between God and mankind is now one (cf. 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6; 9:15). Believers therefore accept his admonitions (Hebrews 12:25-29). They do not *refuse him who speaks*. The writer used the *how much less* argument to drive his point home. God's voice shook the earth with the arrival of the Mosaic covenant, but he would shake the earth again with the coming of the church and the beginning of the end (Haggai 2:6; Acts 2:19-20). If we are kingdom members of the superior covenant, then we *cannot be shaken*, and therefore we can worship *with reverence and awe*. ■

CLIMBING THE WRONG MOUNTAIN

BY DAVID FAUST

Hebrews 12 compares two mountains. Mount Sinai was dark and scary, and for most people it was unapproachable. Even Moses confessed that God's holy presence on the mountain made him tremble with fear. Fortunately for us, Jesus is "the mediator of a new covenant" (Hebrews 12:24), so we are invited to a different kind of mountaintop experience. "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." On this heavenly mountaintop there are "thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly" along with "the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven" (vv. 22-23).

These two mountains illustrate two different approaches to life. The mountain called Law is a rugged one, too steep to conquer. We slip and fall again and again on that rocky trail. We will never make it to the top by our own efforts. The mountain called Grace is rugged, too, but instead of trying to struggle our way to the top, we trust the Son of God to lift us in his arms and carry us up to the Father.

On the Wrong Path

Trying to climb the mountain of Law will leave us frustrated and exhausted. How can we tell if we are on the wrong path?

We may be climbing the wrong mountain if we are constantly at odds with others. God's grace enables us to be gracious. Jesus predicted that the world would hate those who love him (John 15:18-23) so we'll never please everyone, but we don't have to be chronically cranky. Hebrews 12 says, "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone" (v. 14). Heavenly wisdom makes people "pure . . . peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (James 3:17). If interpersonal

conflict follows everywhere you go, maybe you're trying to climb the wrong mountain.

We are climbing the wrong mountain if we have grown comfortable with sin. The writer urges us to "be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). We're saved by grace, but we shouldn't be nonchalant about right and wrong. God's mercy motivates us to say "no" to ungodliness. "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24).

We may be climbing the wrong mountain if we are filled with bitterness. "See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many" (v. 15). Roots grow underground, so they're not obvious on the surface. The problem is, bitter roots lead to bitter fruit. On this side of Heaven, God doesn't spare us from all hurts and disappointments, but our souls don't have to turn sour. The Holy Spirit produces a sweet crop of "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Christ transports us to heights we could never reach on our own, taking us to scenic summits where we can "worship God acceptably with reverence and awe" (Hebrews 12:28). That's what it's like on the mountain of Grace.

Personal Challenge: Talk with a trusted friend about the comparison between the two mountains presented in this article. Ask each other, "What is the difference between trying to climb the mountain of Law and letting the Lord carry you up the mountain of Grace?" ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How did you do in striving to be more self-sacrificial over the past week? Have an example to share?
2. What new challenges did you face last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Hebrews 12:14-29** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. What contrasting ways of living are addressed in this passage?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - What images are used to describe Mount Sinai, where Moses received the law (vv. 18-21)?
 - In comparison, what images are used to describe Mount Zion, which represents the church and God's kingdom (vv. 22-24)?
 - How can Esau's life serve as a warning for us?
 - How do you see the Old Covenant law and the New Covenant of God's grace contrasted in this passage?
 - "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people" (1 Timothy 2:5-6). How do these verses help you further understand the meaning of the Hebrews passage we're studying?
 - Look at the word *receiving* in verse 28. What does that word choice indicate about God's grace?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about yourself?
7. This passage provides several instructions for how we can live in God's grace, as members of his church and kingdom (see *phrases that begin with "make every effort" and "see to it"*). Which of these will you focus on obeying this week?
8. How does what you've learned from this passage lead you to "worship God acceptably with reverence and awe"? What will that look like for you this week? Be specific!
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What can you be thankful for during the upcoming week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Hebrews 2:5-18; 4:14-16** as we continue studying Hebrews with a new theme of "High Priest." You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖