

Reading Schedule for March 5-11, 2018

It has been surprising to me of how often the Scripture verses of this book are familiar to me. Even though there are a number of paragraphs in this next week's reading that I am not as familiar with, I still know this text fairly well, even though I haven't read it in quite some time. We are launching into a section of this book that references the old and new covenant. The new covenant is so special that we highlight it every Sunday by giving opportunity for people to participate in the Lord's Table. This is the new covenant meal that emphasizes forgiveness, shed blood, sacrificial death, personal relationship with the living God and life eternal. I encourage you to take special notice of how the new covenant is highlighted in these verses.

March 5 - Hebrews 8:1-13: "But God found fault with the people and said: 'The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.'" (v.8) As my introduction indicated, we are in a section where the new covenant is presented as much greater than the old. This passage is a quote from Jeremiah 31:31-34, which I have referred to already in these readings from Hebrews. The old covenant was the covenant of law between God and Israel. The new and better way is the covenant of grace offered through Christ as he forgives our sins through his sacrificial death. I have specifically highlighted the new covenant in my introduction. An interesting thought came to mind as we refer to the old covenant of the law as old. How do we know it is old? Because now we have a new covenant. Verse 13 tells us that the old is obsolete and aging, and will soon disappear. Isn't that interesting? How do you respond to this comparison, and what do you appreciate about the new covenant?

March 6 - Hebrews 9:1-10: "This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper." (v.9) It is the propensity of every religion on the globe to try to match up to God. Even the people of the old covenant were concerned about their status before God. But the old covenant system brought neither sanctification for the soul, nor the fullness of God's peace into the life of the worshiper. In fact, we've learned in the Book of Romans that the law had no power to help us live righteously. It only told us what we ought to do, but gave us no ability to do it. This was meant to frustrate the pursuer of God, so that he/she would fall before God crying out for mercy. This would prepare the way for Jesus, as he would be the bridge to God. And now, in the new covenant, through his Spirit, we are empowered to live for him. What do you learn from this description about the regulations of the tabernacle? What do you learn in this paragraph that might help you?

March 7 - Hebrews 9:11-22: "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (v.22) One author asked this question, "Why does forgiveness require the shedding of blood?" Is this some arbitrary decree that God had in mind for no good reason? Absolutely not. There is no greater symbol of life than blood. Blood keeps us alive. Jesus shed his blood for our sins so that we wouldn't have to experience spiritual death and eternal separation from God. Jesus is the source of life, not death. The Old Testament sacrifices point to this deeper reality. God used them as types of what Christ would offer. Christ gave his own life to pay our penalty for us so that we might live. Does that make sense? What else do you learn about the blood of Christ in this reading?

March 8 - Hebrews 9:23-28: "... so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of

many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." (v.28) I wanted us to read this shorter section and really try to absorb the significance of Christ's sacrificial death. It tells us how the high priest had to enter into the Holy of Holies year after year to fulfil the old covenant. Christ's sacrifice is superior because the single offering of himself is sufficient for all his followers and for all time. This was anticipated from the beginning of the world, and will be consummated when Christ returns a second time. I wanted to highlight this message about Christ's return. Christ's second coming is woven into God's Word time and again. He died for sins in his first coming, and he will judge the sins of the world in his second coming. We will be saved as his followers, and so eagerly await for his return. How do you respond to this meaningful paragraph?

March 9 - Hebrews 10:1-18: "For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." (v.14) I'm sure you'll understand the truth of Christ making us right before God when we put our faith in him. This does not mean we are sinless, but that Christ earned redemption so that we are perfected in him. We look to Christ, and not to ourselves, for a cleansed conscience, full forgiveness of sins, and totally flawless in heaven as we anticipate future glory. The Lord is in process of forming us into the image of Christ, even though we are seen as righteous in his sight already. This is clearly mentioned in the Scripture. Verse 15 points to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who provides continuous sanctification as we are formed into the image of Jesus Christ. What stands out to you in this reading today?

March 10 - Hebrews 10:19-25: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds . . ." (v.24) This verse is one of my themes for 2018. We are called to help each other along the path of spiritual growth. We are not meant to do it alone, and neither are we to be self-centered. Our concern is for each other. It is a privilege to motivate another follower of Christ towards love and good works. This is what motivates us to be together in community. Encouragement can make an incredible difference in a fellow believer's life. We are not responsible for each other, but we are responsible to each other. Our theme for 2018 is "Pass It On." A great way to pass it on is to live out this verse. How are you doing so? What does this powerful paragraph say to you?

March 11 - Hebrews 10:26-39: "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left . . ." (v.26) This warning is given to Jewish people who are tempted to reject Christ for Judaism. The point is that there is no other acceptable sacrifice for sin than the death of Christ on the cross. If someone deliberately rejects the sacrifice of Christ after clearly understanding the Gospel teaching about it, then there is no way for the person to be saved, because God has not provided any other name under heaven by which we can be saved. (Acts 4:12) The author is obviously concerned about the genuine nature of the faith of his Jewish comrades. No other sacrifice will save but the redemption provided through Jesus Christ on the cross. Does this make sense? How do you respond to these challenging words?

Prayers - Pray for people who have wandered from the community of faith and are now very vulnerable to the attack of the enemy and wavering in their own spiritual stability.