THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY HEBREWS 9-10

In the fiction of C.S. Lewis, "The Chronicles of Narnia," Aslan the lion, and the little girl Lucy, meet after a time apart... Aslan greets her, "Welcome, child."

"Aslan, your bigger," says Lucy.

"That's because you are older, little one." She asks, *"Not because you are?"*

Aslan responds, "I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger." And this is what happens as we grow in our faith - we discover our Lord Jesus is far bigger than we imagined. As we grow in Christ, our concept of His greatness and glory expand and deepen. We learn to see Him as bigger and better!

This is what Hebrews is all about! The writer explains how Jesus is greater than Judaism. He wants us to be proud of Jesus! He's better than all that came before...

In the OT God made a covenant with Israel that included a priesthood and Temple. But Jesus eclipsed both the Levitical priesthood and Temple in Jerusalem.

He is a priest of a different order - of *Melchizedek*.

And He works in a better Temple - in Heaven itself.

At the end of chapter 8 we learn how Jesus even cuts a *better covenant* with *better promises...* And now in chapter 9 we learn how He offers a better sacrifice!

Hebrews 9 begins with a layout of the Tabernacle - the Temple's predecessor, and a place of sacrifice.

Verse 1, "Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary.

For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat." And then the author writes, "Of these things we cannot now speak in detail."

And my reaction... *"Why not? What a bummer!"* This goes down as the greatest Bible study that never was!

In fact, when I get to heaven I'm going to seek out the writer of Hebrews and demand the rest of the story. A breakdown of these verses would've been fabulous.

Remember, the Tabernacle was the tent where the OT Hebrews were required to worship God. Moses received blueprints for its construction on Mt. Sinai.

Its sacrificial altar was in the court outside the tent.

While the tent itself was divided into two areas. The first contained the lamp, or menorah - a table of fresh bread - and a censer that sent smoke beyond the veil.

Behind the veil was the Tabernacle's inner sanctum, in which sat the sacred Ark, a 4' by 2' box over which hovered the very glory of God. The Ark was God's throne on earth and His meeting place with Israel. And the Ark held three important relics - a jar of the mysterious manna, Aaron's staff that sprouted almond blossoms and identified him as high priest, and the two stone tablets on which God wrote His Top Ten Commandments... The Ark was the shadow box of all shadow boxes. It foreshadowed spiritual realities!

Everything about the earthly Tabernacle cast a light on NT truths. In Hebrews 8:5 the author told us the Tabernacle was a small-scale replica of heaven itself.

And so much of its symbolism foreshadowed Jesus.

The NT Gospels open up with this analogy. John introduces Jesus in 1:14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt (or literally, tabernacled) among us."

The OT Tabernacle was the perfect picture of Jesus.

And wouldn't you have liked to know how?

That's why Hebrews 9:1-5 is **the greatest Bible Study that never was.** We can fill in the blanks and pose our conjectures, but it would've been intriguing to have read it from a writer under Divine inspiration...

Yet the author has to move on to more pressing matters. Rather than focus on the Tabernacle and its sacrifices, his goal is to describe how the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, eclipsed them in its effectiveness.

Verse 6, "Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services." The OT limited access to the Tabernacle, and thus to God. The **people** couldn't come into the Tabernacle at all. They stopped with their sacrifice at the outside altar.

The **priest** could enter the first room, the Holy Place.

But it was only the **High Priest** who had access into the presence of God. Verse 7, "But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year..." Only one man could entered God's glory, and only once a year!

And when he entered he didn't dare come empty-handed. He came with the blood of a sacrificial lamb...

For it was "not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing." Over the years a river of blood flowed from the Jewish altar, yet all that blood gained only limited access to God. The endless repetition highlighted the inadequacy of the sacrifice.

Judaism was a religion primarily ceremonial. Verse 9 states, it "was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience..." The Jewish Law spoke symbolically of higher realities, but had no effect on a man's inner life.

Verse 10 tells us why, the Law was "concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation."

Tabernacle worship involved outward, superficial rituals regarding diet and hygiene, but it didn't effect the soul. Hand

washing protects us from coronavirus, but it doesn't disinfect our sin or cleanse our sick soul.

Verse 11, "But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation." Rather than symbolic or ceremonial, Jesus' work was **eternal** - dealing with *"the good things to come."* And **spiritual** - impacting our status in heaven.

And the sacrifice Jesus makes - verse 12 - is "not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." You measure the potency of a cleanser by the number of applications it requires. *And the same was true of sacrificial blood.*

The OT sacrifices were repeated annually, but Jesus offered His blood once and for all. His sacrifice never has to be duplicated or reapplied. The blood of animals covered our sin for a time. They earned a temporary probation. But Jesus provides a permanent pardon.

Verse 13, "For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Here the author mentions Numbers 19 and *the ashes of a heifer.*

This was the way the Old Covenant was dedicated.

A red heifer was sacrificed, and its ashes mixed with water. A hyssop, or leafy twig, was then dipped into the ashy mixture, and sprinkled on all that was being dedicated *people, priest, furniture, or Tabernacle.*

And this was all a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Jesus and its spiritual effect. For on the cross Jesus spilt His blood for us. Now its effects are mixed with the water of God's Spirit, and sprinkled on us who believe.

And this is far more than ceremonial, it cleanses our conscience and qualifies us to serve the living God.

Some of you *former Methodists will be happy to know* we're cleansed by sprinkling! We're sprinkled with the blood of Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Once, "Good Morning America" interviewed Albert Speer, a former Nazi. Speer was the industrial genius that kept Hitler's factories running during World War 2.

He was the only one of twenty-four war criminals tried at Nuremberg to admit his guilt. Speer was sentenced and imprisoned for two decades, and was remorseful to the end. Speer said in the interview, "I was jailed 20 years. But I still carry the burden of what happened to millions of people. I can't get rid of it."

Sadly, this was Albert Speer's last public statement. He could never rid himself of his guilt and shame.

None of us can! Only the blood of Jesus can cleanse the guilty conscience of an Albert Speer... *or your's*...

Verse 15, "And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives." We talk about the Old and New Covenants as *"Testaments"* - for in a sense that's what they are - a "last will and testament." Death activates the promises.

Say your rich ole Uncle Bob promised you his boat, house, stocks, bonds, everything - but until He dies you don't get a dime... Likewise, God's redemption, even for those who died before Jesus, had to wait.

The effects of the testament aren't released until the testator dies. Thus, before Jesus, God's promises were unattainable. They were tied up in probate, but now they're released to us in Christ. It's through the cross of Jesus that God's many blessings are now experienced.

A truth that made these Hebrews Jesus-followers!

Verse 18 reads, "Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you. Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry." When Moses launched the Old Covenant, he dedicated everything by the sprinkling of blood - *the tabernacle, its furniture, even the people.* The point being, the Covenant was a bloody affair from its outset.

And all this blood and gore emphasized to Israel the seriousness of their sin. Because of what they did, a lamb from their flock was taken, and its throat was slit.

Imagine, taking your household pet - putting little Rover on a leash, and taking him to the priest, where he was slaughtered because of the stupid stuff *you* did.

If that happened to you, you'd see sin in a new light! Sin is a serious crime and it deserves a severe penalty.

"And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission." This was the Law's primary premise.

Today our places of worship are clean and sanitary, but if you walked into the OT Tabernacle, it looked and smelled like a beef cattle slaughterhouse or a meat market. The job of the priest was like that of a butcher.

One author writes, "The Old Testament sacrificial system... was a gory affair indeed! During the thousand-plus years of the Old Covenant, there were more than a million animal sacrifices. So considering that each bull's sacrifice spilled a gallon or two of blood, and each goat a quart, the Old Covenant truly rested on a sea of blood." During the Passover a ditch was dug from the Temple into the Kidron Valley just to channel off the blood. It was a *"sacrificial drainpipe."*

Leviticus 17:11 tells us clearly, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul."

God told Adam and Eve, the wages of sin was death.

Since the nutrients of life flow to the rest of the body through the bloodstream; biblical reasoning demands that the debt of sin requires the spilling of blood.

Of course, this is where some liberal theologians ridicule Christianity. They call it "a slaughterhouse faith" or "a bloody religion." The necessity of blood offends their modern sensibilities. They consider it barbaric.

Well, I have one response to that, "So what!"

It doesn't matter what some theologian thinks. If God is doing the forgiving; then He can set the terms for that forgiveness. And He's told us unequivocally *"without shedding of blood there is no remission"* of sin.

People who try to eliminate the cross, and clean up the gore, and sanitize Christianity - *strip it of its power!*

In Revelation 5 when John visits heaven he sees "a Lamb as though it had been slain." Jesus, the Lamb of God, will bear the marks of crucifixion for all eternity.

To negate the importance of His blood is to insult the Savior. As the hymn puts it, "There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins; and sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains."

Verse 23, "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.

For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us..." Moses dedicated the replica of God's throne, the Tabernacle, with the blood of bulls, but Heaven itself was dedicated with Jesus' own blood!

"Not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another -He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." The Jewish Priest offered his sacrifice annually, but Jesus offered Himself, *but once!*

This is why Protestants reject the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation - the belief that the waver and wine of communion turn into the literal body and blood of Christ when offered. If so, Jesus is sacrificed again and again. God forbid! He was sacrificed once!

On the cross all that needed to be done for our salvation was done - and it was done once and for all!

Verse 27, "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment..." Notice here the Bible refutes reincarnation. You don't return in another form.

When I die I meet my Maker, and give an account of my life. There're no *do-overs* or *second chances*. Upon death, don't expect to see tunnels and bright lights.

CS Lewis tells us what to expect the moment after we die, "There will be God without disguise: something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side. There is no use saying you choose to lie down when it is impossible to stand up. That will not be the time for choosing: it will be the time when we discover which side we have really chosen, whether we realized it or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last forever." Hear it again: *you die, then it's your judgment!*

Verse 28, "So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation."

On the cross Jesus cried out, "It is finished." When He comes again it won't be to add anything to our salvation. It'll be to enforce what He's already done.

Chapter 10, "For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things..." Say I was away three weeks on a long trip. The first night back Kathy fixed me a romantic dinner...

Yet instead of joining her in the dining room, what if I took her picture off the wall and started kissing and talking to her photo - *while the real Kathy Adams was sitting at the table.* You'd classify me a certifiable nut!

Yet this is what the Hebrew believers were doing by returning to the sacrifices and traditions of Judaism.

They were embracing *the shadows* and *the symbols* while ignoring *the substance*. They were acting *nutty*!

Verse 2, "(for) the very image of the things can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins." If the OT sacrifices had truly eradicated sin; they wouldn't need to be repeated!

"But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins." The OT sacrifices utterly failed in producing a lasting resolution for sin.

But there was a solution... born in Bethlehem!

Usually at Christmas when we recall Jesus' birth, we go to the Gospel of Matthew to read of Joseph and the wise men, or Luke to read of Mary and the shepherds.

We don't think to turn to Hebrews, *but we should!*

For in Hebrews 10:5 we find the most vital, yet overlooked scene in the Christmas narrative. Here was Jesus' parting statement to His Father, just before He left His *eternal home* for His *embryonic home...*

Verse 5, "Therefore, when (Jesus) came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure."

For centuries Jesus watched the Father in Heaven.

He received *sacrifices*, but they produced in Him no *satisfaction*. There was a *reluctance* in His *acceptance*.

The look in His eye indicated it was not quite right.

The animals offered were tainted with sin themselves. All creation had been effected by the fall of mankind. The Father understood that only a sinless sacrifice - untainted blood - could at the same time, *sanitize a sin-stained world* and *satisfy a sinless God.*

But where would God go for such a sinless sacrifice? That's when His only Son, the eternal Son, stepped up and volunteered, "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me."

Realize, spirit doesn't pierce. It doesn't bruise or bleed. Jesus needed a body. He was born to die!

God became a man so He could *take a nail for you!*

Verse 7, "Then I said..." And Jesus is now quoting Psalm 40, "Behold, I have come - in the volume of the book it is written of Me - to do Your will, O God."

On every page of Scripture, buried in every ritual, seen in every sacrifice - there's a prophetic portrait of the person and work of Jesus. And when it came time to lay down His life, He was obedient to the will of God.

Verse 8, "Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second." God took no pleasure in the blood of animals. What satisfied the Father's sense of justice was *the sinless life* and *sacrifice* of His Son. "By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

"And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins." For a thousand years the Levitical priests had repeated the Temple rituals. For Jews in Jerusalem *the sight, smells, and sounds* of the Temple were as familiar as the sunrise and the sunset.

Yet in just a few years after the penning of this book the Roman Legion invaded Jerusalem and burned the Temple to the ground, putting an end to the sacrifices.

Following Jesus' sacrifice, God ended the Temple operation. It was now obsolete and irrelevant. Once the ultimate sacrifice was made, who needed the shadow!

"But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool." Once Jesus completed the job of atoning for our sin, He **sat down** at God's right hand - a position of honor. And today, He's there, waiting for the time when God defeats His enemies, *or puts them under His feet.*

It's interesting, the OT priest never sat down.

There was furniture in the OT Holy Place, **but no chair.** The priest was in perpetual motion, always on his feet, *for under the Law his work was never finished*.

Yet when Jesus offered His sacrifice He "sat down at the right hand of God." Jesus completed the work of redemption

once and for all - a job well done! That's when He sat next to the Father to await His exaltation.

Verse 14, "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." In Christ, before God, the work of our acceptance is finished. It's a done deal. We're *"perfected forever..."* And in us, before others, God's Spirit is at work deepening our dedication. We are *"being sanctified."* Both are true...

Spiritually and eternally *the work is finished*. While mentally and practically, *we're a work in progress...*

"But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them, then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." The Hebrew believers who received this letter, as well as all believers today, are involved in a New Covenant - in which God has given us a new heart, a new start, and a new part.

God's Spirit writes His will in us. We're given a **new heart** of love for God and for others... We get a **new start** - *a clean slate.* What God forgives He forgets...

And a new part - faith in Jesus takes the place of old sacrifices. Verse 18, "Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin."

"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh..." The Temple had a veil of separation. It was a huge curtain that hung in front of the Holy of Holies. It was a reminder that God was off-limits to mortal men.

Yet the moment Jesus died, Matthew tells us the veil tore from top to bottom. The way to God is now open.

And thus today, the veil between God and man is the torn body of Jesus. You come to God not by jumping through religious hoops - but over His dead body!

Believe in Jesus, and the door to God opens.

Verse 21 tells us, "and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near..." In Christ we now have access to God, so how should we respond?

He gives three commands. I call them **"The Salad** Commands." They begin, *"Let us... Let us... Let us..."*

Verse 22, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Since Jesus opened the door to God, *what are we waiting on?* **Enter in!** Spend time with Him! One of the great Christian catechisms states as our duty, "To know God, and enjoy Him forever." *Let us* draw near!

And "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." If we've been given a lifeline to God; then hold on! Don't waver or drift. Continue in your faith for God is faithful!

"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, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." Let us **enter in**, let us **hold on**, and let us **stir up** each other to godliness. Let's hang out with God, hold on to God, and do it together!

My faith fuels your faith, and vice versa...

And at a time when we're all being asked to social-distance to fight the coronavirus the command to *"not forsake our assembling together"* requires creativity...

Thankfully, we're able to stream our services online.

And on Good Friday, we'll taking it a step further and we're having online communion... But don't wait on us, develop your own connections. In the last days, and in troubling times, it's vital for us to find good fellowship.

Verse 26, "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries." Here the "sin" in view isn't a simple slip-up - a foul word in the heat of battle... or a beer too many... or an outburst of anger. This is the same sin we've dealt with throughout Hebrews. It's the sin of deliberately denying the superiority of Jesus.

The temptation for these Hebrews was to abandon Christ, and trust again in the institutions of Judaism.

And the writer assures them, since salvation comes by faith, if they stop having faith in Jesus, it's impossible to be saved. *"If we sin willfully... there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." Turn your back on Jesus, God's only answer; and how can you be saved?*

Verse 28, "Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" The Law of Moses, the inferior covenant, had serious consequences if you rejected its terms... How much worse will your fate be if you reject the superior covenant, and insult Christ?

To say a person can be right with God by good deeds, or religious rituals is to render the precious blood of Jesus irrelevant. You've insulted the Spirit of His grace, and made a mockery of the cross of Jesus.

In verse 30 the author of Hebrews quotes twice from Deuteronomy 32, "For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." In other words, *God is not afraid to judge*. So take heed, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

God is a God of mercy and grace, but if you reject His only Son - if you callously trample the Son He sent to die in your place - *there is no punishment too harsh!*

Verse 32, "But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, 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." Shortly after they came to Christ the Hebrews were hassled for they faith - *to the point of having possessions confiscated*.

They'd probably been excommunicated by their Jewish families, and forced to return inheritances and keepsakes. Yet they had continued in their faith!

Every Christian experiences times when their faith offers no real worldly advantage. *Instead of making us rich it causes us loss... Instead of popularity it draws persecution... Instead of promotion we get put down...*

And in those times we need to hunker down! We'll receive a great reward - an eternal reward no less - if we don't lose heart, but hold fast to our faith in Jesus.

The writer exhorts them, verse 35, "Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward."

And losing their confidence in Christ was not just a theoretical threat. It was a very real possibility.

In John 10:28, Jesus made a promised I believe has often been misinterpreted. "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." True, no one can snatch us from Jesus' hand, but that doesn't mean a believer can't get up and walk out. You have to continue in your faith!

Author, GK Chesterton, use to say, "The only way to love anything is to realize it can be lost." And that's especially true of God's blessings and our salvation. I believe it's naive to teach that just because you made a decision for Jesus at a point in your past, there is now nothing you can do to jeopardize your salvation.

That's not only wrong, it breeds a false sense of security. We should be encouraging our perseverance.

Verse 36, "For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry." Jesus is coming again, but a wait is involved. There's always a lag time between the giving and receiving of a promise. Thus, believing is not enough, you need to *continue to belief.*

"Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." This is tough talk from the writer of Hebrews... Draw away from faith and you're no longer pleasing to God. The just - those who're right with God - **are** - *because they live by faith.*

And the tough talk isn't over, "But we are not of those who draw back to perdition (literally "damnation, ruin") but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."

Stop having faith and you're stumbling toward hell. To be saved by faith we have to continue in faith.

Hey, in Christ, we have a better way - a new and living way, so Let's enter in. Let's hold on. Let's stir up one another... Hold fast to your faith in Jesus!