

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, some days can be very difficult and we need the touch of Your loving hand to help us and guide us through our troubles. Other days are easier for us, and You empower us to rise to greater heights and do great things for You. Whatever happens today, may we retain our confidence in You, and may everything we do bring glory to Your Kingdom. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Houses

Pray today for any people you know who are unable to afford homes and who have to live in rented accommodation that is far less than adequate for their needs.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for the International Monetary Fund and its responsibilities*
- *Give thanks for the many people you know, and for friendship*
- *Pray for those employed in gathering tax for governments*

Meditation

Holy Spirit, come upon us afresh today;

Help our eyes see what is good
Where people mostly see gloom

Strengthen our hearts to be courageous
Where people fear to tread

Extend the sensitivity of our hearing
Where people prefer not to hear

Grow within us the art of sensitivity
Where people prefer not to know

Enable our spirits to be responsive
Where people so often fail to react

Inspire us with the beauty of love
Where people have stifled passion

Holy Spirit, do the impossible in us today!

Bible Study - Hebrews 8:7-13

⁷ *For if there had been nothing wrong with the first covenant, there would have been no reason to look for a second one;* ⁸ *but God found fault with the people when He says:*

'The time is coming, says the Lord, when I will bring about a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ⁹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not keep faith with my covenant, and I turned away from them, says the Lord. ¹⁰

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time, says the Lord: I will place my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

¹¹ One person will no longer teach another saying "know the Lord", for they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will forgive their wrongdoing, and remember their sins no more.'

¹³ By speaking of a 'new covenant', He has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

Review

Right at the heart of everything Hebrews says about the priesthood of Christ, stands this very famous passage which consists largely of a quote from Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34). Hebrews uses this quote to justify the argument that God always intended to do away with the old covenant, with its old priesthood and its laws and regulations based on God's revelation to Moses, and replace it with something better (8:6,7), as found in Christ. The remarkable thing about this quote is that although Hebrews sometimes quotes the Old Testament loosely, which makes it difficult for us to see how the quotes were obtained (e.g. Hebrews 1:5-13), most of this quote is accurate. It is the same as the text found in Jeremiah 31, with some leeway for differences of translation.

Hebrews says in this passage that God did away with the old covenant because of the sins of the people of Israel (8:7,8), but does not say anything as yet about how the priesthood of Christ is to be linked with the new covenant. This will come in the next chapter. For the time being, the focus is on God's Word through Jeremiah. The prophecies of Jeremiah are not often quoted in the New Testament, but this substantial quote brings his prophecies to the forefront of our understanding of the work of Christ. Jeremiah is not an easy book to read, because the prophecies are not recorded in chronological order. However, most people would accept that this passage is theologically central to his work, and its use in Hebrews is very helpful to Christians who want to try and understand why God should move beyond His Covenant with Israel in the Old Testament and do a new work in Christ.

Jeremiah lived at the time of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem. In 597 BC the Babylonians first came to Jerusalem and removed its king, placing a puppet ruler on the throne, King Zedekiah. When Zedekiah rebelled against the Babylonians, they came back and razed Jerusalem to the ground, destroying the whole city and Solomon's Temple as well (587 BC). With all this going on around him, Jeremiah asked the Lord 'why is this happening?' The Lord then revealed to Jeremiah that the people of Judah and Jerusalem had become so sinful that He had decided to destroy Jerusalem and rebuild His people again (see Jer 7:27f.) It was a radical and deeply disturbing message that made Jeremiah a hated man in his day. He remained faithful to the Lord, however, and not only prophesied (correctly) the end of the kingdom of Judah, but saw beyond the pain and suffering of his day, to a time when God would do a new work amongst His people. Jeremiah 31:31-34 is his most famous prophecy because it speaks of this hope, and he declares God's work of renewal boldly. Most controversially, his prophecy speaks of God's laws as not being taken away, superseded, or abandoned, but placed in the 'minds' of the people and 'written on their hearts' (8:10). Jeremiah never explained any more about how this would come about, but these words have always been regarded as a most powerful explanation of what God eventually did for His people through Jesus Christ.

This extraordinary message from the Old Testament is important because it tells us that God planned to do something new with His law (8:10), and this is of great importance to Hebrews. If God intended to remake His laws and write them on people's hearts and minds, then Hebrews declares that this could not be done with the old priesthood. A new

priest is required to do this, who is Jesus Christ (8:1-6). The passage still speaks to us today, because people still have a religious tendency to be legalistic about their faith, even Christians. The message of Jeremiah as quoted in this passage of Hebrews reminds us that unless our relationship with God is fixed in our hearts and minds rather than in doing 'religious' things, then we have missed the mark. True Christianity is a matter of having a relationship with God through Jesus, and the real Church of God is built upon the shared experience of worship and service of those who follow Christ, and not the maintenance of any system of religious laws, even today.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Read the beginning and the end of today's passage to make sure you know how the letter to the Hebrews is using this quote from Jeremiah.
2. Read through the prophecy from Jeremiah, and discuss in your group which part of it you find most meaningful for today.
3. Why should we not need to teach each other to 'know the Lord' (8:11)?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I have always been fascinated by Jeremiah's comment that God's people should not have to teach each other to 'know the Lord', this means that each one of us should have all we need to maintain our relationship with God through Christ, in our hearts and minds. This might suggest to some that evangelism is not required! However the comment looks forward to a time when God 's people all know the Lord fully themselves, and it raises a question about the life of the church today, in which people attend courses to explore the most basic of Christian teachings!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *It can be helpful to do a personal audit, in which we sit down and write out what we believe, and what is on our hearts and in our minds about matters of faith. This raises questions such as; are we on the right track? Do we need to discover more, read our Bibles, pray, worship, or serve others? Much can come from such an exercise.*
- *Pray for the church of God, and pray that God's people might have such a relationship with Him that they do not need to attend conferences to explore their faith!*

Final Prayer

Thank You, Almighty God, for guiding Your people of old through the revelations You gave to the prophets. May we learn from their experience that You have a plan and a purpose for Your people and Your world, and help us to understand that the guidance You have given in the past is available to us now, through Jesus Christ. We praise You Almighty God: AMEN