

Prayer

We cannot help but praise You, great and mighty God! You have touched our lives, and we are eternally grateful for this incredible blessing. For Your touch changes everything! It makes sense of the past, it empowers us in the present, and it gives us a sure hope for the future. This is the truth, and we know it. Thanks be to God, AMEN!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Christ and Culture

Culture is neither good nor bad, it is neutral. However, what we do with it can make it so, and as with so many things, it is only when cultures go wrong or come under evil influences that we realise how important such things are. Mostly, we do not think about our own culture, so ask the Lord to protect your own culture from evil, and pray that it might be used for good.

Meditation

Be careful, brothers and sisters ...

With the best of intentions, we so easily loose our way
For the world we live in is full of sin and temptation.

Be wise, brothers and sisters ...

For there is always more for us to learn about faith
And we must follow the Spirit to access this wisdom.

Be diligent, brothers and sisters ...

Do not accept a casual approach to God's Word
For Satan is delighted when we don't know the truth.

Be positive, brothers and sisters ...

For all things are possible through Christ Jesus our Lord,
Our victory has been won, and our future secured!

Bible Study - Hebrews 13:18-25

¹⁸ Pray for us; we are confident that our consciences are clear, and we have sought to do what is right in everything. ¹⁹ I urge you to do this all the more, so that I may be restored to you quickly.

²⁰ Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, Jesus our Lord, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ put you right in every good thing so that you may do his will, doing amongst us what is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

²² Friends, I appeal to you to accept my word of exhortation with patience, for I have written to you somewhat briefly. ²³ You should know that our brother Timothy has been released; and if he arrives in time, he will be with me when I see you. ²⁴ Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy send you greetings. ²⁵ Grace be with you all.

Review

At the end of this great letter, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says farewell. From beginning to end, the writer has not identified himself, and the only hint of personal information comes at the very end in which he indicates a personal friendship with Timothy. In addition, the last but one verse indicates that the letter may have been written in Italy. Given all we know about the movements of the early apostles and all the people they knew, these could indicate that the letter was written by Paul in his old age whilst in Rome, or even Peter or Barnabas. Nothing is conclusive. What is very clear is that the letter is an appeal to Jewish Christians to come to terms with how their own heritage points towards Jesus Christ as God's Messiah and Saviour. Jesus is superior to all people and angels (1:1 to 3:6) and His sacrifice is greater than

the entire sacrificial system of the Old Testament (4:14 to 7:28), making Jesus the supreme 'High Priest' through whom God has brought salvation (8:1-10:39).

The whole letter is regarded as difficult and highly technical, demanding a very detailed knowledge of the Old Testament and in particular the Covenant relationship between God and His people. Despite our difficulties, the author comes across as confident and assured, and it is no surprise therefore to hear him say; 'we are confident that our consciences are clear, and we have sought to do what is right in everything.' (13:18). And then, as with a number of Paul's letters, the author speaks of wanting to visit those to whom he writes (13:19,23). Against this backdrop, however, this final passage has two important features, firstly the wonderful blessing found in verses 20 and 21 which admirably summarise the letter's appeal (which we look at shortly), and secondly, an appeal to its recipients to accept the letter 'with patience' (13:22).

The author knows full well that his letter must be read carefully, but it seems extraordinary that the author should say that his work is brief (13:22)! It has taken us some time to work through one of the most demanding of N.T. letters, so by what measure could the author possibly say this, given that the only letters which are longer in the New Testament are Romans and the two letters of Paul to the Corinthians? We do not know, but perhaps we have a hint here of the growing sense of need in the late first century church for people to delve more deeply into the meaning of the life of Christ. It was a movement of the Spirit which gave rise to the great first scholars of the church, people like Justin Martyr (100 – 165 AD) and Tertullian (160 – 220 AD).

The blessing; 'Now may the God of peace ...' (13:20,21) is one of those great affirmations of the faith of God's people which deserve regular use. It is not Trinitarian in nature (that is, mentioning God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit) because it does not mention the Holy Spirit, and for this reason many churches do not use it as a blessing. We should not be pedantic, however, because God says nowhere in Scripture that He should be addressed in a Trinitarian manner. He simply reveals Himself and works amongst us in this way; as 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit'. So here, a great and ancient blessing of the church, possibly used even before it was included in this letter, summarises the incredible blessings of the resurrection of the dead which have been won for us by the One who truly cares for us, 'the great shepherd of the sheep, Jesus our Lord' (13:20). It is this same Jesus, our great High Priest, who has died for us; and He alone can put us right (13:21) with God to do His will, and by His help we may also see the fruits of the Kingdom amongst us. This is the One we worship, 'Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever, and ever ...' (13:21)

The words of this blessing are simple yet profound, both memorable and also capable of feeding the soul. If, perhaps, you have found the study of Hebrews a little difficult, then I suggest that learning and using this blessing at home and in the church, will feed your soul with all the goodness God is able to give us through this great letter of the New Testament.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In the first two verses, the writer urges his readers to pray. What can such prayer achieve?
2. How does the 'blood of the eternal covenant' (13:20) put us right with God?
3. Having read the whole of Hebrews and begun to study it, discuss in your group who you think may have been the author?

Discipleship

There is only one discipleship task worth considering after this reading and this study! Have a go at learning by memory the words of the blessing in Hebrews (13:20,21). If you have the opportunity, try using it at church; perhaps by volunteering to say a final prayer and blessing at the end of a meeting, for example. Also, try using it as a prayer as you go to bed, or when you have completed your work. There are many possibilities for its use when memorised!

Final Prayer

Glory be to You, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. You have defeated all the powers of darkness and established the Kingdom of God, where love, truth, goodness and righteousness are found! You have done all this for us who are not worthy of Your love; and You have even guaranteed us a place there for all who have faith in You! Thank You, Lord Jesus, thank You: AMEN