



**JESUS IS
GREATER**

Exploring
Hebrews 1-10

Study 1: Hebrews 1:11 - 2:4

Hebrews is a meaty part of the New Testament. It takes some work to digest, but offers us substantial nourishment. Unlike many New Testament books it is not a letter as such, but a "word of encouragement" (13:22), like a sermon which has been written down so it can then be read out to a far-away audience. Much about it is unknown. It seems to have been written some time between AD50 and AD70. Its author does not identify him/herself, but it seems likely it was one of the apostle Paul's associates such as Timothy or Apollos. The target audience is not specified either, but based on the book's contents it was probably intended for a congregation of Jewish Christians known to the author. The writer wants to encourage his readers to press on in faithfulness to Christ, in an environment where various pressures made this difficult. Judaism, their religion of birth, was an accepted religion in the Roman Empire, whereas Christianity was not, so one temptation for these believers was to shrink back into Judaism and let go of Christ. The pressures and temptations we face as Christians today are slightly different, but the encouragements and warnings in this letter can spur us on all the same.

Read Hebrews 1:1-5

The letter to the Hebrews begins by asserting the greatest single fact of the Christian revelation: God has spoken to us through his word in the Bible and through his son, Jesus. The writer's first task in this letter is to exalt God's Son.

1. Can you name some ways that God spoke to his people in the Old Testament? How does this contrast with how God has spoken to us in these "last days"?

2. Write down the six things that describe God's Son - who he is, what has he done, what does he still does (Verses 2b-3).

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____

3. Does it surprise you that the writer speaks about God's Son like this? Why or why not?

Read Hebrews 1:5-14

At the end of his introduction, the writer introduced the claim that Jesus is superior to angels. Now, he argues this point at length. We ask: why angels? It was a contemporary Jewish belief that the Old Testament laws had been mediated to Moses through angels (Acts 7:38-39; Gal. 3:19; Hebrews 2:2). If Jesus is superior to angels, that means it's important to worship and follow him rather than slipping back into Jewish identity and practice.

The writer of Hebrews quotes the Old Testament extensively, clearly believing that it points forward to Christ, even in ways the original writers and readers may not have realised.

4. Fill in the chart to show how Christ is superior to angels.

| Verse | Angels | Jesus |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------|
| Verses 4-5 (Ps 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14) | The name angel means "messenger" | |
| Verse 6 (Deut.32:43) | | |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Verses 7-9 (Ps. 104:4; (Ps. 45:6-7) | | |
| Verses 10-12 (Ps. 45:6-7 Ps. 102:25-27) | | |
| Verses 13-14 (Ps. 110:1) | | |

Notes and Prayer Points

5. What is your concept of angels? Compare it to what is said about the position and duties of angels in this chapter.

Read Hebrews 2:1-4

6. What conclusion does the writer draw here from what he has written in chapter 1?
7. Describe ways that a person might "drift away" spiritually. What are some of the tell-tale signs that someone is drifting away? What can we do to ensure that we don't drift away?
8. Was the way you heard the gospel anything like the way these early Christians heard it (2:3-4)?

In your prayer time pray that you might understand the wonder of the gospel you have heard and the seriousness of turning away from it.

Study 2: Hebrews 2:5-18

In today's passage, the writer of Hebrews continues with the theme that Jesus is superior to celestial beings. He shows us what Jesus has exclusively achieved for His people.

1. It has been said "it's not what you know, it's who you know". Sometimes we gain access to places or privileges by knowing someone special. Can you share an experience like this?

Read Hebrews 2:5-9

Here the writer draws on Psalm 8 and its picture of humanity's place in creation. Although some translations say "him" rather than "them", the psalm is speaking about man(kind) in general rather than an individual. "Son of man" in the psalm means "mortal being" (like in Ezekiel).

2. According to the quote from Psalm 8, what position is humanity meant to hold in the created world?
3. Looking at Hebrews 2:8-9, what problem is discussed, and what solution is pointed out?
4. How did Jesus reach his current position? (Read also Phil 2:9-11)
5. How does this connect to the previous discussion about angels?

Read Hebrews 2:10-13

Jesus is described as the "pioneer" of [our] salvation. This emphasises that Jesus paved the way for those who follow him to share in his Glory.

6. What did Jesus achieve for humankind?

Read Hebrews 2:14-18

Back in v10 Jesus was described as being "perfected through what He suffered". But we know from Hebrews 4:16 that Jesus "did not sin". What is in view here is not Jesus' perfected morality, but rather that he has become a better saviour through his humanity and suffering.

7. Why was it necessary for Jesus to be made human in every way?
8. How is Jesus better able to help us through his humanity and suffering?

Prayer & Reflection

C. S. Lewis said it well: "The Son of God became a man that men might become sons of God." God became a man so that you might become God's child. Now that is something worth celebrating. Take the time to praise God for what God has done and will do for us in Jesus. Ask him to help us in a world which is still in disorder and rebellion.

4. What can we do to ensure we fix our thoughts on Jesus, our confidence and our hope?

Read Hebrews 3:7-19

Moses was faithful but not all those who left Egypt with him followed his example or believed his testimony. Christ, who is far superior to Moses, was also faithful, but many of his followers were not.

5. According to the author of Hebrews, who wrote Psalm 95? What do you make of this?
6. How does this quote from Psalm 95 reinforce the warning given in verse 6?
7. a. In verses 12 - 15 how does the author suggest that the perils of Psalm 95 can be avoided?

b. In what practical ways can we encourage one another?

8. In the final paragraph the author again emphasises the importance of the warning given in verse 6.
 - a. What point is being made by the series of questions in verses 16-18? (Refer also to Numbers 14:1-4 & 26-30)

b. What conclusion is drawn in verse 19?

9. a. As an antidote to the warnings given here, what does the author suggest in verses 7 & 15 that we should do?

b. How can act on this exhortation individually and also support one another in this choice?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 4: Hebrews 4:1-13

Here the writer continues with the idea of "entering into rest" from Psalm 95 and shows how Christ offers true rest.

Read Hebrews 4:1-10.

1. What different types of "rest" are mentioned here? What different time periods are in view? (See 3:8-11; 4:1-5; 4:8-11; Rev. 14:13).
2. As the writer continues to comment on the application of the warning and judgements of Psalm 95:7-11, what does he mean by *his* rest in verse 1? What did God rest from?
3. The children of Israel didn't enter the promised land because of their unbelief (3:9). And Joshua did not give them rest either. What is this future rest? (See also Heb. 11:13-16; Rev. 14:12-13).
4. According to verse 10, what does entering God's rest mean for the Christian believer? How does *resting* fit with the injunction to "make every effort"? (v.11) See also Eph. 2:8-10.

Read Hebrews 4:11-13.

5. What do verses 12-13 say about the power of God's word, and about the power of God himself? What's the connection between the two?

6. How do verses 12-13 relate to the exhortation in verse 11?

7. Give an example, from history, or your own life, that God's word is active, and when taken it seriously things will change.

8. What do you think is the main message of this section of Hebrews? (See 4:1 and 4:11). How does it apply to your life today?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 5: Hebrews 4:14 - 5:10

The author here begins a long discussion of the superior priesthood of Christ. Previously, the ultimate destiny of Christians was compared to the promised land but now it is pictured as entering "the inner sanctuary" of the Old Testament tabernacle/temple (Heb. 6:19). Jesus is pictured as the high priest who leads us into that inner sanctuary. As the Aaronic high priest passed from the sight of the people into the Most Holy Place (Lev. 16:15,17), so Jesus passed from the sight of his disciples, and ascended into heaven, his work of atonement accomplished (Acts 1:9-11).

Read Hebrews 4:14-5:10.

1. In this passage what similarities can you see between Old Testament priests and Jesus?
2. What differences can you see between the Old Testament priests and Jesus?
3. In what sense did Jesus have to "learn obedience" and be "made perfect" (5:8-9)? (See Luke 22:39-46 and Heb. 2:10)

4. What was the result of the Son's willing obedience to his Father?
5. What does the writer ask his readers to do in verses 14 and 16?
6. How does Jesus being our great high priest give us confidence in approaching God? (4:14-16 and 6:19-20).
7. How did Jesus deal with his suffering? Can his example help us in our suffering?
8. When you are tempted, what difference does it make to know that Jesus was also tempted and therefore sympathises with your weakness?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 6: Hebrews 5:11 - 6:20

In this passage, the writer wants to progress beyond "elementary teachings". What results is perhaps one of the more difficult to understand passages in the Bible. It's sure to raise questions and stimulate debate about what it means to "fall away" and be a genuine Christian. Fasten your seatbelts and let's dive in!

1. Have you ever met someone who at first seemed to accept Jesus, but later turned away? What do you think went wrong?

Read Hebrews 5:11-6:3

2. What distinguishes those who are mature in the faith from those who are not?

Read Hebrews 6:4-12

3. In the scenario pictured here, what are the characteristics of those who have "fallen away"?
4. What is the ultimate outcome for these people?

5. Do you think those who have “fallen away” could have been true Christians? Why or why not? (Consider Romans 8:1, 8:38-39, Eph 2:8-9)

Notes & Prayer Points

6. What does the writer want his readers (and us) to do?

Read Hebrews 5:13-16

7. What is unchangeable?

8. How does this assurance affect us?

Prayer and Reflection

Pray for those who once seemed interested in Jesus but now appear to have turned away. Pray for each other that we will continue to trust in Jesus in all circumstances, in full assurance of the salvation that he provides.

Study 7: Hebrews 7:1 – 8:13

Opening Question

1. Tell us about a time when you hired someone to do an important job for you that ultimately let you down.

In today's passage the author of Hebrews speaks at length about someone called Melchizedek. Melchiza who? This obscure Old Testament character was previously mentioned in Hebrews 5:6 when the writer quoted from Psalm 110.

Read Genesis 14:17-20 for the original story of Melchizedek.

2. What do you notice here about this character Melchizedek? Who is he, and what does he do?

Read Hebrews 7:1-10

3. What does the writer point about Melchizedek? What is unusual about him?

Read Hebrews 7:11-22

In the Old Testament the Levitical priests played a central role of interceding for the people by offering sacrifices for sins. In verse 17, this writer quotes Psalm 110:4, where King David describes that God has promised to establish another "eternal" priesthood in the order of Melchizedek.

4. Compare and contrast the priesthods of Melchizedek and Levi by filling in the following table:

| | Levitical Order | Melchizedek Order |
|---|-----------------|-------------------|
| Descended from? | | |
| Tribe of? | | |
| Basis for passing on? | | |
| Upholding the law of? | | |
| Duration of? | | |
| Supported by an Oath? (i.e. God's promise) | | |

5. According to Hebrews, why was a change of priesthood required?

Read Hebrews 7:23-28

Jesus is the promised priest in the order of Melchizedek (v22). He fulfils God's promise of an eternal king and priest.

6. In what way is Jesus a superior priest to others?

7. What is the result of accepting Jesus as our priest and king?

Prayer and Reflection

3. List what you observe in verses 6-14 about the services and sacrifice of the first covenant and the service and sacrifice of Christ.

| First Covenant | Christ |
|----------------|--------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
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| | |
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| | |

4. What practical difference does it make that Christ 'cleanses our conscience' (v.14)? (See also Hebrews 8:10)

Read Hebrews 9:16-22

We have already seen in this letter that in his persuasive exposition of the eternal and unrepeatable work of Christ, the author has been using a series of vivid word pictures to impress upon the readers the message about the 'better' things of the gospel. In this section the author uses legal and Biblical illustrations to emphasise the superiority of Christ and the benefits of the new covenant.

5. How does the author's illustration of the ratification of a will (v.16) help us better understand the concept that the second covenant differs from the first?

6. Why is the shedding of blood for the forgiveness of sins so necessary? Compare v.22 with Matthew 26:28.

Read Hebrews 9:23-28

7. a. Explain the significance of where and how often Jesus Christ offered his sacrifice for the salvation of sinners?

b. What is the point made by the final contrast in verses 27-28 between the death of all other people and the death of Christ? (See Mark 10:45)

8. In the light of what you have been reading, how would you respond to an enquirer who asks you -

a. Why do I need to come to God through Jesus?

Or

b. How can I be assured that my sins will be forgiven if I become a Christian?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 9: Hebrews 10:1-25

This passage continues a discussion of the marvel of Christ's perfect sacrifice, contrasting the shadow with the real way to God and goes on to practical exhortations about taking advantage of our privileges, and about perseverance in knowing God.

Read Hebrews 10:1-18

1. Explain why the sacrifices of the Old Testament tabernacle were inadequate
2. What did Christ say about his coming into this world?
3. How does the quotation from Psalm 40:6-8 indicate what God really wants?
4. How does the sacrificial system prepare us to understand the death of Christ?

5. Note the phrases that emphasise the adequacy and finality of Christ's sacrifice and contrast this with the "priestly treadmill"

6. What encouragement do you find in the testimony of the Holy Spirit in verses 16-17?

Read Hebrews 10:19-25

7. List the reasons given for drawing near to God.

8. What should be our attitude in drawing near to God?

9. Because Christ has made possible certain privileges -
 - a. List three things believers are urged to do

 - b. Discuss what each of these might look like in the life of our church.