

Help From The Epistle to the Hebrews

A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Guide
prepared by
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Introduction To Hebrews

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The Epistle To The Hebrews

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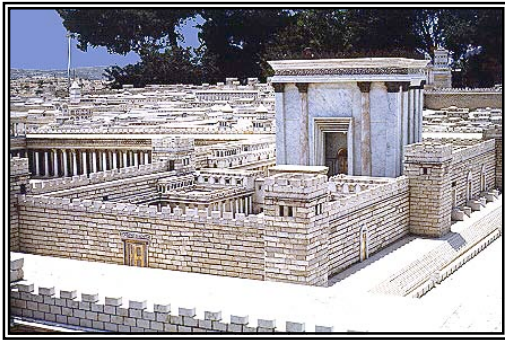
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Introduction to the Epistle To The Hebrews

We don't know who wrote Hebrews, but with mounting archaeological data we can now say *why* it was written with more certainty than has ever been known. What you learn from this study of the *Epistle To The Hebrews* may startle you. It may challenge some previously held concepts you have had concerning this epistle. It is perhaps one of the most important documents we have regarding the pressure which First Century Jewish Christians found themselves under.



Too few scholars have grasped the intense pressure which First Century Christians faced to return to Judaism. They were harassed, jibed, persecuted, martyred, and ostracised for abandoning Judaism and following Jesus of Nazareth. Many Jewish Christians succumbed to this increasing pressure and simply found it easier to return to Judaism with its physical Temple, sacrifices, priesthood and holy city, which were all tangible evidences of God's supposedly *eternal* covenant with Israel. After all, if God had really done away with the Old Covenant, then why was He still working through the Temple, the sacrifices, the Levitical priesthood, and the holy city of Jerusalem? These essential elements of Judaism and the Old Covenant still remained after Christ, so obviously He was not the Messiah, and therefore Christianity was not the true way to God, argued the First Century Jewish authorities.

But the writer to the Hebrews argues the case for Christ and Christianity in the face of this attack. He shows that Christ is superior to the Old Covenant. He is greater than mere angels; greater than Moses; greater than the High Priest; greater than sacrifices; greater than the temple; greater than the Old Covenant itself; and deserves our utmost devotion!



The Time of Christ

1. Note Christ's heart toward His fellow countrymen, the Jews, as recorded in Matthew 23:37. How does He feel at this point?

2. Based on this same verse, why was He so saddened?

3. Christ came to establish the Kingdom of God. He told His disciples to preach that the Kingdom of God "was near" (Luke 10:11). But when Pilate introduced Him as King of the Jews, how did the Jewish authorities respond? (note John 19:14 – 15)

4. In effect when the Jews made the statement of Matthew 27:25, what were they saying?

- (a) We acknowledge Christ as our Lord
- (b) We and our children accept responsibility for Christ's unjust death and punishment
- (c) We want Christ released and for Barabbas to be justly put to death instead.

The Jewish leaders prided themselves in their Temple. It was a grand structure. Pictured below is a surviving wall from the surrounding walls of the Temple which existed during the time of Christ. It is known as the “*Wailing Wall*”.



When the disciples were with Jesus in the Temple area, they pointed out to Christ the grandness of the buildings. Christ’s immediate response caught them off guard.

5. What was Christ’s response in Matthew 24:2 to His disciples pointing out the Temple buildings?

The thought that the temple would be destroyed again must have sounded like the time the Temple was destroyed in 586 BC when God used the Babylonians to execute His judgment on Israel (2Chronicles 36:14 – 19).

6. Based on this passage, what did God do to avert His judgment on Israel, and why did this actually make His judgment all the more severe?

If God judged Old Testament Israel because they rejected and killed His prophets how much more would God judge New Testament Israel for rejecting and killing His Son?

7. How did Christ foretell God’s imminent judgment on Israel? (Note Matthew 11:21 – 24)

The Bible uses the expression “Day of the Lord” to refer to any time when God intervenes into our world to judge. God used the nation of Babylon to judge His people when they went into rebellion. But then the Babylonians didn’t repent or submit to God either. This was foretold by Isaiah. In Isaiah 13:6 the prophet predicts that Babylon will experience *the day of the Lord*. Note the judgment language in Isaiah 13. This is called *apocalyptic* language. It is often *hyperbolic* which means it uses exaggerated language to make a point.

Note the following –

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Apocalyptic Description	Interpretation
<p>(Isa 13:3 NIV) <i>I have commanded my <u>holy ones</u>; I have summoned my warriors to carry out my wrath-- those who rejoice in my triumph.</i></p>	<p>God's judgment is executed by angelic beings ("holy ones") who guide human instruments.</p>
<p>(Isa 13:5 NIV) <i>They come from faraway lands, from the ends of the heavens-- the LORD and the weapons of his wrath-- to destroy the whole country.</i></p>	<p>Note Deut. 4:32; 30:4, "the ends of heaven" often refers to "faraway lands" which describes people coming from long distances.</p>
<p>(Isa 13:10 NIV) <i>The <u>stars</u> of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising <u>sun</u> will be darkened and the <u>moon</u> will not give its light.</i></p>	<p>The expression <i>sun, moon and stars</i> frequently refers to Israel (Note Gen. 37:9), when it describes them being <i>darkened</i> it often indicates that Israel was no longer shining for the Lord, that is, they had rebelled and were about to be judged. This was the case when God used Babylon to judge Israel</p>
<p>(Isa 13:11 NIV) <i>I will punish <u>the world</u> for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless.</i></p>	<p>"The world" often refers to a specific territory of earth. For example, in Luke 2:1 the <i>whole world</i> was to participate in the Roman Census but this obviously only included the Roman Empire.</p>

Introduction To Hebrews

Isaiah 13 gives some remarkable insights into the apocalyptic language used in the Bible. Although Hebrews is not written in apocalyptic language, it does employ it. One such example is its use of the word “fire” which apocalyptically refers to God’s judgment (see Hebrews 10:27).

The writer of Hebrews seems to suggest the Israel was about to experience another *day of the Lord* where they would experience His judgment (Hebrews 10:27, 30). He also said that the Old Covenant *was about to disappear* (Hebrews 8:13). He described the appearing of Christ to put away sin as marking the *end of the ages* (Hebrews 9:26). Something was therefore about to happen within the lifetime of the recipients of this epistle which would have been around 68AD. Based on this he encourages Jewish Christians to maintain their faith in Christ.

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

Hebrews 10:39



An artist's impression of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD

8. The Book of Hebrews deals with the Old Covenant system of animal sacrifices. But according to Hebrews 13:15 – 16 what kind of sacrifices are required under the New Covenant?

Amen.

Jesus Is Superior Superior To Angels

The writer to the Hebrews was using this epistle to passionately plead with Jewish Christians not to abandon Christ and return to Judaism. This epistle was written around 68AD just two years before the destruction of Jerusalem. This event was the central theme of Christ's prophetic statements in Matthew 24. The writer to the Hebrews seemed to realise that time was near for the complete fulfilment of what Christ predicted.

1. Match these references to the particular reference in Matthew 24 to show how the writer to the Hebrews must have known the time was ripe for the things spoken of by Christ -

- | | | |
|--------------------|---|----------------------|
| (a) Matthew 24: __ | > | Acts 11:28 |
| (b) Matthew 24: __ | > | Acts 12:1-2 |
| (c) Matthew 24: __ | > | Acts 21:38 |
| (d) Matthew 24: __ | > | 1John 4:1 |
| (e) Matthew 24: __ | > | Colossians 1:5-6, 23 |



Added to this we know that there was an unusual amount of earthquakes, volcanic activity, wars in many parts of the empire toward 70AD. All of these events are recorded in the writings of Josephus (pictured left). In fact, Caesar Nero declared war on Jerusalem in late 66AD when the Jews revolted against Rome. This war concluded when Caesar Vespasian and his son, co-emperor, Titus completely overran and destroyed Jerusalem in 70AD. Thus the war on Jerusalem lasted 1260 days (about three and half years, note Revelation 12:6). These were perilous times.

"For there shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." Read the record written by Josephus of the destruction of Jerusalem, and see how truly our Lord's words were fulfilled. The Jews impiously said, concerning the death of Christ, "His blood be on us, and on our children." Never did any other people invoke such an awful curse upon themselves, and upon no other nation did such a judgment ever fall. We read of Jews crucified till there was no more wood for making crosses; of thousands of the people slaying one another in their fierce faction fights within the city; of so many of them being sold for slaves that they became a drug in the market, and all but valueless; and of the fearful carnage when the Romans at length entered the doomed capital; and the blood-curdling story exactly bears out the Saviour's statement uttered nearly forty years before the terrible events occurred."

C.H. Spurgeon, Commentary on Matthew 24:21

Just years before this event, Jewish Christians were being pressured to abandon Christ and return to Judaism.

2. Perhaps one of the criticisms of Jews towards Christianity was that the prophets of the Old Testament could be trusted and therefore by implication that Christ could not. What assertion does the writer to the Hebrews make about Jesus Christ's relationship to God and perhaps the Old Testament prophets as well? (Hebrews 1:1-2)

The author now sets about on his overall theme of proving Christ's superiority.

3. Who is Christ equal to according to Hebrews 1:3?

4. How else is Jesus described in Hebrews 1:3 that emphasizes His superiority?

Through the centuries some have taught that Christ was merely the *first* of God's creation. They have taught that He was an angel, perhaps even Michael the archangel. One of the most famous and earliest teachers of this heresy was bishop Arius (depicted right) who lived around 300AD. His views were debated by the Church in 312AD around eventually rejected. The result of this Church Council was the Nicene Creed.



5. Does Hebrews 1:4 mean that Christ *was* an angel?

One of the principles of sound Bible interpretation is *context*: Always read a verse in its immediate and surrounding context.

Jesus Is Superior – Superior To Angels

6. How does Hebrews 1:5 counter the suggestion that Christ was an angel?

Christ is described as the “firstborn”. This does not mean that He was created.

7. Note the context of these passages and see how the expression *firstborn* is used of Christ-

Colossians 1:18

Revelation 1:5

8. Christ said that only person was to be worshiped. Who did Christ say was the only one to be worshiped? (Matthew 4:10)

9. How does Hebrews 1:6 relate to this statement by Christ in Matthew 4:10? In other words, what does Hebrews 1:6 reveal about Christ?

Some have suggested that Christ is to be worshiped but in the same way that the Father is to be worshiped. They say that we salute people, shake the hands of others, or even bow down in the presence of some, that these are all forms of worship and in this context this is what the Bible means when it says to worship Christ.

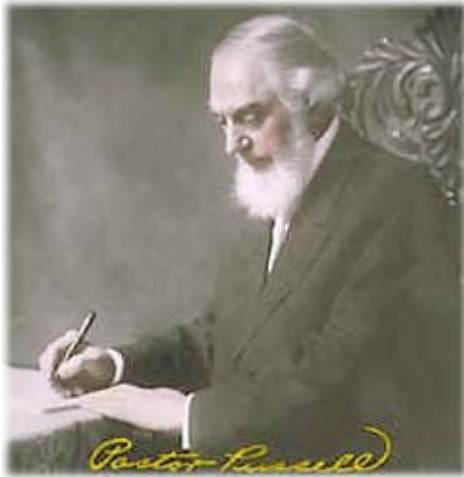
10. How does John 5:23 correct this view?

Christ was no mere angel. He was God in the flesh (John 1:14). This is clearly what the Hebrews 1 teaches.

Amen.

Jesus Is Superior Superior To Any Man

Hebrews chapter 1 argues that Christ is no mere angel. He is God the Son and as such shares a unique relationship with God the Father. He is God's "only Son" in the sense of eternal relationship. This demands that both He and the Father are eternal and have been in relationship for eternity. 'Eternity' is spoken of in Scripture as "Today" (note Hebrews 1:5). The Father presents His Son to the world and commands all the angels to 'worship Him' (Hebrews 1:6). The Father then addresses Christ as "God" in Hebrews 1:8. This clearly establishes the theme of this Book: *Christ's superiority*. With so many of the Jewish Christians being pressured to abandon faith in Christ and return to Judaism, the writer to the Hebrews is earnestly pleading the case that Christ supersedes the Mosaic Law (The Law of Moses) and was not mere angelic visitation or prophet. It is this second point that the writer now deals with in Hebrews 2.



It was Charles Taze Russell (pictured left) who revived the teachings of Arius by teaching that Christ was a created being and in fact was really Michael the Arch Angel.

The Warning

1. In Hebrews 2:1 there is a warning. What is this warning?

The English translation of the Greek word, *angelos*, is a bit confusing. It is translated as either “angel” (in the sense of a heavenly being) or “messenger” (in the sense of a human messenger). It is the context which determines its translation. Hebrews 2:2 generally translates this Greek word as *angel* rather than *messenger*. But this would be a strange way to render this word considering the lengths which chapter 1 has gone to, to highlight Christ’s superiority to angels. It also doesn’t seem to be in keeping with the general tenor of the New Testament either.

2. Note Galatians 1:8. How does Paul make a distinction between earthly messengers and heavenly angels in this verse?

3. Consider the account of Cornelius' vision in Acts 10:1-6. Who visited Cornelius, and who gave him the Gospel?

Christ has not ordained heavenly angels to preach the Gospel to mankind. Nor has He ordained heavenly angels to gather in the harvest of lost souls. This job rests with us, His earthly messengers (Matt. 28:18-20).

4. Hebrews 2:3 also shows us that the context of 'angels' in Hebrews 2:2 more likely refers to earthly messengers than heavenly beings. Why is this so?

5. How would Hebrews 2:3 cause a First Century Jewish Christian considering returning to Judaism to have second thoughts?



It's interesting how many people throughout history have claimed to be prophets of God yet have not had any miraculous demonstration of their message. Buddha did no miracles. Mohammed did no miracles. Charles Taze Russell did no miracles and neither did Joseph Smith.

6. In light of this, how does Hebrews 2:4 argue for Christ's superiority over all other men?

Why Christ Became Man

Hebrews 2:5 talks about the future of the world, again contrasting the difference between mankind and angels.

7. Who will rule the world according to Hebrews 2:5, 1Corinthians 6:2-3?

Jesus may not have appeared to be reigning when the Epistle to the Hebrews was written, which would have prompted the Judaizers to claim that the Law of Moses was still in force rather than the claim by Christians that the Law of Christ had made it obsolete. So while the Christians of the first part of the first century could not 'see' the rule of Christ, they could still see Jesus (Hebrews 2:9). This is an important principle to remember whenever you are in a difficult situation and cannot see how God is ruling. Look beyond the circumstances and see Jesus!

8. According to Hebrews 2:10 why did Jesus have to die?

When Jesus became a man, He became the new head of the human race for all who believe in Him (1Corinthians 15:45-48). This also meant that He became the *brother* of all who accept Him (Hebrews 2:11).

Jesus Is Superior – Superior To Any Man

9. According to Hebrews 2:14, why did Jesus have to die?

Praise God that He knows what it's like to be tempted (Hebrews 2:18).
Therefore no matter what you're going through, Christ understands and can
help!

Amen.

Jesus Is Superior Superior To Moses

Moses was the most influential figure in Judaism. The 10 Commandments and the associated precepts are referred to as “the Law of Moses” (or, *Mosaic Law*) (note Ezra 3:2; Dan. 9:13; Luke 2:22; 22:44). The fact that at the time of the writing of this epistle to the Hebrews the Law of Moses was still in force, with its sacrifices, priesthood, temple and law, was used by Judaizers to try and persuade Jewish Christians to return to Judaism. In Hebrews chapter 3, the writer seeks to show that Jesus was indeed superior to Moses, and that faith in Christ was of vital importance.

1. How is Christ described in Hebrews 3:1?

Note how the writer subtly states that following Christ is a *heavenly* calling. This contrasts with earthly religion. Christianity is not about form, ceremonies or rituals. It is about walking in a *heavenly* calling. In other words, Christianity is from God. Judaism on the other hand is mostly man-made. It is man's attempt to find and please God. But Christianity is God's attempt to find you and bring you into fellowship with Him!

2. How are both Christ and Moses described in Hebrews 3:2?

Note that both these leaders were very devout. You can be devout, sincere, and dedicated in your religion, but still not be walking with God.

3. Read Paul's statement in Galatians 1:13-14. Does he seem to consider to being religious something that will impress God?

4. Note the implication of Hebrews 3:3 which reveals why Christ is fundamentally superior to Moses. What is the implication of the statement of Hebrews 3:3 about Christ?

5. Connecting Hebrews 3 verse 3 with verse 4, if Christ is the Creator (especially of Moses) and in verse 4 it says that the Creator is God, then who does that make Christ?

Hebrews 3:5 states that Moses was a servant who ruled over the household of his master. In this sense, the 'household' speaks of God's people. But when Christ came, He was not a mere servant, He was *the* son of the Master who had given Him the household and therefore He was rightly able to command the servants of His household (thus making Him superior to Moses).

6. If the Hebrews, under the Old Covenant, were 'the household' of God, who constitutes the household of God now according to Hebrews 3:6?

Reading further on in Hebrews 8:8-12 we note that those God referred to as Israel (*the household of God*) in Jeremiah 31:31-34 now is no longer restricted to one nation or race but to all who are of the *household of faith* (note Galatians 6:10 NKJV) which includes Gentiles and of whom Paul refers to as *the Israel of God* (Galatians 6:16).

7. What condition does the writer to the Hebrews seem to make in Hebrews 3:6 to be considered a part of the household of God?

This is a continual theme throughout this epistle: *be faithful to Christ*.

8. According to Hebrews 3:12, what are we to be on guard against?

9. What are we told to do in Hebrews 3:13? Can you do this now?

10. What do we have to do in order to “share in Christ” according to Hebrews 3:14?

Don't Harden Your Hearts

Hebrews 3:16 makes the staggering point that it was the very ones who saw one of the most amazing miracles and displays of God's power ever witnessed in human history who eventually hardened their hearts by disbelieving that God had ever brought them out of Egypt. Even when presented by a clear miracle there is no guarantee that a person will remain loyal to Christ. Sometimes people claim that their lack of faith in Christ is due to their lack of proof. But consider this: *wherever there is absolute faith it not only removes all doubt, it also removes the **need** for faith.*

11. What was it that caused the Israelites to not enter into their Promised Land according Hebrews 3:19?

But note what caused their lack of faith. In Hebrews 3:18 it says it was because of their disobedience that they first failed to enter their rest (Promised Land, typical of our salvation). There was once a man who told an evangelist that he could never believe in Christ because he had too many intellectual objections. The evangelist painstakingly answered all this man's questions which he said were the obstacle to him coming to Christ. The man indeed acknowledged that

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all his questions had now been answered. When challenged by the evangelist to now accept Christ the man said he couldn't. When asked why by the evangelist, the man told him that he was the owner of a topless bar which he rather enjoyed and that he knew that if he gave his life to Christ it would mean having to close down the topless bar! The man's lack of willingness to obey caused him to be unwilling to decide to put his faith in Christ.

May God grant that we are willing to obey Him and put our faith in him.

Amen.

Jesus Is Superior – Superior To Moses

Jesus Is Superior Superior To Joshua

Hebrews 4



When Israel had been in bondage in Egypt they were made to work tirelessly. When God sent them a deliverer, Moses, they were promised that if they followed God they would have “rest”. As great as this deliverer was, the people still failed to enter into the rest, which God was speaking of. In our previous study we saw how

the writer to the Hebrews showed how Christ was superior to Moses. In this study we will see how the writer shows that Christ is superior to Joshua, the leader who brought Israel into their Promised Land.

The promise of ‘rest’ was closely associated with possessing their own land and thus being their own masters rather than slaves to a foreign ruler. But God was referring to another type of rest that went way beyond mere deliverance from slavery.

1. Note Hebrews 4:8. How does this verse indicate that God was speaking of a rest that went beyond merely possessing the Promised Land?

Just like Israel of old, many people are looking for something that they think will bring them fulfilment. In Israel's case it was the thought of possessing their own land. For some today, their concept of a personal Promised Land looks like a bigger bank balance, or a new toy, or a holiday, or even a new spouse. But God was trying to show Israel of old that true fulfilment was to be found in Him alone.

2. How did Jesus sum this up in Matthew 11:28?



The writer to the Hebrews was deeply concerned that his Jewish Christian readers were now contemplating returning to Judaism and abandoning their relationship with Christ. He now sets out to show that the rest, which the Hebrews sought under the Law, was not available through works of religious effort.

3. According to Hebrews 4:2, what did Israel fail to do with the Word of God they heard?

The opening verse of chapter 4 contains a stern warning based on a reminder of what happened to the generation of Hebrews who failed to believe when they came out of Egypt. "Let us fear" is the injunction to the readers.

4. How does Philippians 2:12 make 'fear' a positive action?

God wanted Israel to recognise Him for who He was. He wanted them to love Him for who He was, not just what He could do for or give them (Deuteronomy 6:5; 10:12). Just after they came out of Egypt, something extremely tragic happened.

5. Why is the statement in Exodus 20:19 so tragic?

God wanted intimacy with His people, but His people did not seem to want intimacy with Him! He had called the entire nation to be priests, not just a few privileged tribal members.

6. Note now the context of Exodus 20:19 by seeing what God had just said to the Israelites in Exodus 19:6. What was His desire for all Israel?



Almost from the moment that Israel came out Egypt they complained against God. He wanted their intimate fellowship. They wanted Him to feed, clothe, water, bless, and provide for them. When He called them to come near, they refused. So for the next forty years He waited for them to want Him not what He could do for them. Today, many Christians are only loyal to God when they feel He is meeting their needs. The moment they feel that God is no longer serving their purposes they cease to be loyal to Him. The irony of this is that they never find the kind of fulfilment that can fill their hearts because they refuse to empty and open their hearts to Him.

7. How does Matthew 10:39 (and 16:25) reinforce this concept of seeking God rather than merely His blessings?

Enter God's Rest

Rest comes when someone stops being active (Hebrews 4:10). Rest brings refreshment and restoration. Even God rested after his work of creation as a model for His creation. All of creation needs to rest. Yet the kind of rest that the deepest longing of the human yearns for can only be satisfied by entering into the 'rest' which God offers.

8. According to Hebrews 4:2, 6 how do we enter into God's rest?

9. Can someone claim to have faith in God yet refuse to obey Him? (Note James 2:14-17)

10. Conversely, can someone claim to obey God yet not trust Him?
(Hebrews 11:6)
-

Hebrews 4 carries a theme of judgment. It opens with the warning that Christians who abandon Christ by refusing to continue to trust and obey Christ risk being judged (Hebrews 4:1). The chapter closes with a reminder that nothing is hidden from God's sight (Hebrews 4:13). Therefore, let us not think that we can earn our salvation, or find fulfilment in life without realising that God is worth knowing intimately even if He was never to bless us.

Amen.

Jesus Is Superior – Superior To Joshua

Jesus is Our High Priest

Hebrews 5



The writer to the Hebrews has established that Jesus is superior to the central figures of the Older Covenant. With the growing pressure from the Jews for all Jewish Christians to abandon Christ and return to Judaism, the writer to the Hebrews (Jews) now seeks to show how Christ is not only superior to the High Priest, but He is in fact *the* true High Priest.

Judaism's claim to be the true religious path to God was reinforced by their claims to have the backing of the patriarchs (Abraham, Moses, Joshua), the temple, the covenantal sacrifices, and the God ordained priesthood. Based on some of these things they were urging Jewish Christians to return to Judaism.

Jesus Is Our High Priest

The writer to the Hebrews pleads with his readers to cling to Christ and to never stop trusting Him (Heb. 4:14). In our comfortable western lifestyles, the appeal to “trust” Christ means something other than what this appeal meant. For the original readers to “trust Christ” meant that they had to withstand the temptations that came from persecution, economic hardship, social isolation, and suspicion from their countrymen and kinfolk, to abandon Christ.

1. How does the writer to the Hebrews (4:15) encourage his readers to hang on?

What we can find really encouraging is that even though many of these Jewish Christians had been tempted to falter and lapse back into Judaism momentarily, God was still showing them mercy! (Hebrews 4:16) This should give us tremendous hope since God deeply understands our weaknesses, and still shows us His mercy and grace. This is amazing, as John Newton once wrote, that God is still prepared to forgive us despite our failings. It is also a clue as to how we should treat those around us who let us down.



What a Priest Is

Hebrews 5 begins by defining what a priest is.

2. According to the definition given in Hebrews 5:1, what is a priest?

3. Under the Older Covenant only certain men were eligible for the priesthood (Hebrews 5:4). What do the following references imply about the priesthood under the Newer Covenant?
1Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6

Under the Older Covenant, priests had to be (i) Hebrew, (ii) from the tribe of Levi, and then (iii) from the clan of Aaron. From this small pool of priests, a High Priest was selected to make the annual Atonement sacrifice.



The writer to the Hebrews assumes that his readers understand what the Day of Atonement (referred to by Jews as “Yom Kippur”) refers to.

4. Note Leviticus 16:6-10. What symbolism (more correctly, “typology”) can you observe in this passage?

It's this sacrificial ceremony which paints the backdrop for the first part of Hebrews 5. But unlike earthly High Priests, Christ did not put His name forward for consideration as selection as a High Priest. He was directly chosen by God (Hebrews 5:5).



5. What does this verse (Heb. 5:5) also mean –
- (a) God created Christ then one day promoted Him to be His Son
 - (b) Christ was eternally co-equal with God but when He was born in Bethlehem He became the Son of God
 - (c) Christ has always been the Son in an eternal relationship (“Today”) with the Father
 - (d) Christ was always the Son of God but when He was incarnated in Bethlehem He was *revealed* as the Son of God
 - (e) Both (c) and (d)

Melchizedek

Christ is classified as a priest after the order of Melchizedek. He is first mentioned in Genesis 14. He is referred to in Psalm 110, then most frequently in Hebrews 5-7.



6. In what ways is Christ our High Priest?

Help From The Epistle To The Hebrews

Thank God that we have direct access to the Father because of Christ's exclusive Priesthood (1Tim. 2:5). We will see over the next few studies how this Divine Priesthood has a dramatic impact on the Christian life.

Amen.

Jesus Is Our High Priest

Be Devoted & Fruitful

Hebrews 6

There's a tremendous sense of urgency about the epistle to the Hebrews. And Chapter 6 not only maintains this urgency, it also contains a great deal of frustration from the author as well. One of the keys to understanding why there is such an urgency and frustration is found in the statements of the New Testament about the generation to whom Hebrews is written.

1. Note the following Scriptures and build a picture about the generation in which Christ appeared and the disciples ministered-

Matthew 11:16, 20 - _____

Matthew 12:41-42 - _____

Matthew 23:33-36 - _____

Luke 11:30-32, 50 - _____

Luke 17:25 - _____

It seems that when Galatians 4:4 says that God sent forth His Son at just the right time, it was also just *in* time. The generation that witnessed Christ and the first apostles was the most wicked generation ever. But what qualified them as the most wicked generation of all time was two fold.

2. Christ told a parable where He was the central character. How does the parable of Christ in Matthew 21:33-44 reveal the first reason why *that* generation was the most wicked ever?

3. Secondly, not only did that generation reject Christ Himself, what else did they do that no other generation has ever done, or could do? (Note the implication of these verses Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 1Corinthians 15:15)

The generation that hosted Christ had a form of godliness, but they were merely religious, not genuinely godly (note what Christ said in Matthew 23:27; and what Paul said in Acts 23:3). Their era, the Jewish era, was going to come to an end (note the use and context of the term “last days” refers to the last days of that generation- the last days of the Jewish era). When Christ foretold of the events of 70AD when the Romans would come and destroy Jerusalem and murder over one million Jews during their 1,260 day attack, He actually gave a very clear timeframe when this would happen (which many people have overlooked or changed to suit their own interpretations).

4. Read Matthew 24:34 and note the timeframe for judgment coming upon Jerusalem-

When we consider that the epistle to the Hebrews was written in the mid to late 60s AD, and that from the hindsight of history we know that God was going to forcibly bring the Jewish era to an end by using the Romans as instruments of judgment, we might begin to understand why the writer to the Hebrews was prophetically frustrated and almost impatient with his readers.

Elementary Things

The writer to the Hebrews is frustrated that so many Hebrew Christians were entertaining the idea of returning to Judaism or had failed to press forward in their walk with Christ. He encourages them to move beyond the elementary things of Christianity and grow up.

6. Read Hebrews 6:1-2 and list what he describes as elementary doctrines-

6. What is the warning he gives to those Hebrew Christians considering returning to Judaism? (Heb. 6:4-6)

7. What positive encouragement does the author similarly give to Hebrew Christians to maintain their walk with Christ? (Heb. 6:11)

8. What two things are required to inherit God's promise of salvation? (Heb. 6:12)

9. The author threads together the father of Judaism to Christ, thus showing that the God of Abraham is the God who ushered in the New Covenant through Christ. So if God had promised a New Covenant what is the point to the author referring to one aspect of God's character in Hebrews 6:18?

And it is ultimately God who deserves to be trusted, according to the writer to the Hebrews. Because He is totally trustworthy, we can have hope that we will be vindicated in our trust of Christ and encouraged to maintain our walk with Him.

This chapter of Hebrews shows us that Christianity comprises two aspects to our growth. Firstly, it requires that we become increasingly familiar with the doctrines of the Bible. Secondly it requires that we live a life which reflects devotion to Christ. May God grant us both of these prized qualities as we press forward with Christ.

Amen.

A Priest After The Order of Melchizedek

Hebrews 7

The Jews only thought of one priesthood: *the Levitical priesthood*. They considered *their* religious practices the only ones authorised by God Himself largely because God had given them the priesthood rather than to any other religion. We can easily imagine how they must have ridiculed the Christian 'sect' for not having any 'priesthood'. But the writer to the Hebrews now enlarges upon a point he fleetingly referred to in Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20 which establishes that Christianity *does* have a priesthood- but not the familiar Levitical priesthood.

1. What made Melchizedek different to any other priest? (Note Heb. 7:2-3)
-

The writer to the Hebrews successfully made the point to struggling Jewish Christians that the accusations made by their Jewish brothers about Christianity's lack of a priesthood were not true. He is about to use some very deep spiritual insight to make this point. These concepts are among the most profound of any in Scripture. It involves the concept of 'headship' (how one person can represent an entire group\ of people). He uses this very deep concept to show that rather than Christianity's priesthood being inferior to Jewish Levitical priesthood, it was indeed *superior* to it!

2. According Hebrews 7:3 who did Melchizedek represent?

3. This is a profound point in Hebrews 7:4-5. When Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, whom did he represent? (Hebrews 7:9-10)

4. How does this show that the Melchizedek Priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood?

Levitical priesthood is more correctly known as the 'Aaronic' priesthood because only Levites who were descendents of Aaron could be priests. Tithing was (and is) an acknowledgement of superiority and honour. Within Israel, all Israelites paid tithes to the tribe of Levi (Heb. 7:5); then all Levites paid tithes to the descendents of Aaron (priests). When Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek he was in effect representing the Aaronic Priests and submitting them to Melchizedek's superiority.

This also makes the point that tithing was not done away with when the New Covenant was introduced. Since Abraham tithed over 400 years before Moses gave Israel the Law, it shows that tithing is a principle which supersedes the Old Covenant. This is confirmed by what Malachi said in Malachi 3:8-10 since these words came after Israel had abandoned their Covenant with God.

Blessing

Melchizedek blessed Abraham! The writer to the Hebrews is showing that Melchizedek was superior not only to the Levitical priests, but to Abraham himself.

7. What is Abraham described as having in Hebrews 7:6?

6. What did this consist of according to Genesis 12:2-3, and described in Genesis 24:1; 35?

7. Some people claim that the blessing of Abraham exclusively belongs to his natural descendants. But according to Galatians 3:29 who are the heirs of the promise made to Abraham?

The implication here is possibly that these Jewish Christians may have been told that they were no longer blessed since they had abandoned Judaism to become Christians. But since Christians received the ministry of a priest after the order of Melchizedek, who blessed Abraham, they were in no way deprived of blessing.

Hebrews 7:8 seems to suggest that Melchizedek didn't die. This has caused some to speculate that Melchizedek was actually a 'theophany' (a divine appearance) of Christ. But the Scriptures merely state that there is no record of Melchizedek having a mother or father, birth or death (Heb. 7:3). The writer to the Hebrews makes the point that in this way, Melchizedek's priesthood foreshadows the priesthood of Christ.

8. In what ways is Melchizedek like Christ? (Note Heb. 7)

Christ As Our Priest

Psalm 110 (the most cited Psalm in the New Testament) prophesied that the Messiah would be a Priest after the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews also says that it was well known that the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah (since He was to be a descendant of David, Hebrews 7:14). Since the Scriptures prophesied that the Messiah would also be a Priest, it is logical that the Scriptures were also endorsing that when the Messiah came there would be a new covenant established.

OLD COVENANT	NEW COVENANT
Levitical Priesthood	Melchizedek Priesthood (vs. 11)
The Law written on stone (vs 18)	The law written on hearts (8:10)
Animal Sacrifices	The Death of Christ
Temple	Church (people)

9. The Levitical Priests merely performed religious duties on behalf of Israel. But in what ways does our Priest go further than this? (Hebrews 7:25, 27)

Knowing that Christ is our High Priest of a better covenant may not mean too much to us today, but to struggling Jewish Christians who were being told by Jewish persecutors that since the Temple and Jewish Priesthood remained, God obviously had not abandoned the Old Covenant. But the writer to the Hebrews has shown powerfully that this was not so.

Amen.

A Priest Of A Superior Covenant

Hebrews 8

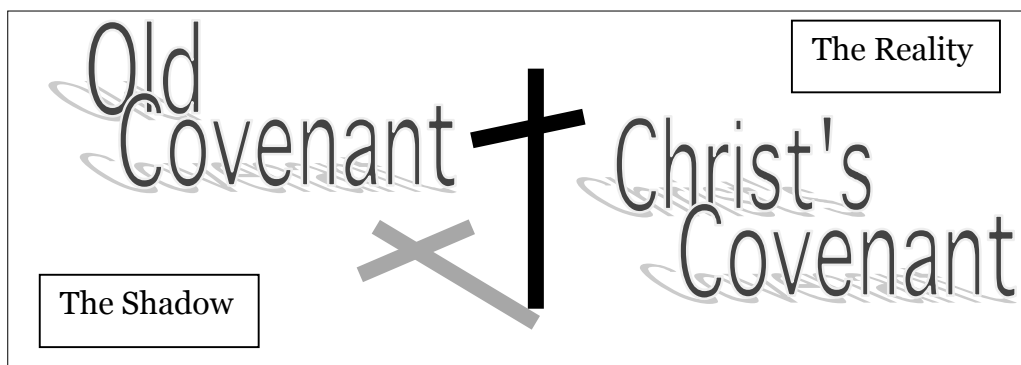
The Book of Hebrews to this point has highlighted the difference between Christ and the Old Covenant. This chapter now draws to a conclusion all that has been stated, and adds some convincing theology to show that Christ is indeed superior to the Old Covenant and its trappings (the Law, the Priesthood, the Temple, and Covenant).

1. Note Hebrews 8:1. If you saw two people and one was seated while the other was standing before the seated one, who would you assume is superior, and who would you assume was still required to work?

“When you’re done, sit down.” Hebrews 8 introduces Christ as the One who is seated. His work is finished. This is contrasted with the work of the Old Covenant priests who continually stand (to minister) before God.

2. While the Old Covenant priests ministered before God, where does Hebrews 8:1 state that Christ is positioned, and how does this emphasize His superiority to them?
-

Shadows



The writer to the Hebrews states that the Jewish Priests were only ever going to be temporary. They were merely a shadow of the reality. The reality was indeed Christ. Old Covenant Priests stood between God and mankind to offer sacrifices to God on behalf of mankind. But Christ *is* God who has offered *Himself* to bring mankind into relationship with the Father. All the sacrifices, ceremonies, and utensils (including the Tabernacle) of the Old Covenant were types of Christ and His redemptive work. But now Hebrews shows us that not were these trappings only ever going to be temporary, the entire Old Covenant itself was temporary.

3. How does Hebrews 8:6 state the New Covenant is better than the Old one?
-

The New Covenant and the New Israel

Some Jews may have tried to persuade Jewish Christians that the New Covenant may well have been established with Jesus, but all Jews were still required to keep the Old Covenant. Now the writer to the Hebrews shows that the New Covenant was always intended to supersede the Mosaic (Old) Covenant. He does this by referring to the prophets who foretold of another covenant which God would make.

4. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 and determine who God was speaking to.

Another question further arises from this passage in Hebrews 8:7-12 and Jeremiah 31:31-34. Was the New Covenant only ever intended to be for the House of Judah and the House of Israel?

8. Note Isaiah 11:10; 42:1, 6; 49:6; 60:3; 66:19; Jeremiah 16:19; Malachi 1:11. What did these prophets seem to predict about the scope of the New Covenant?

Israel had become a divided nation after the death of King Solomon. From then it endured repeated civil wars and strife. Eventually the Northern Kingdom (“Israel” or “Ephraim”) abandoned worship of the *LORD* and were then exiled from their land and made captives of Assyria (note that God had warned this happen if they abandoned Him, Deuteronomy 28:64).



The Southern Kingdom later likewise also abandoned the LORD and were exiled to Babylon. In the pursuit for global domination, Babylon was eventually taken over by the Medo-Persians (Assyrians). Emperor Cyrus decreed that all Jews were allowed to return to their land (read the book of Nehemiah). So after 70 years some Jews returned to the Land

just as the prophets had also prophesied. Suggestions that these prophecies also relate to a recent modern Jewish return to Palestine are wrong. It seems then that God was saying the New Covenant would unite people previously estranged from each other.

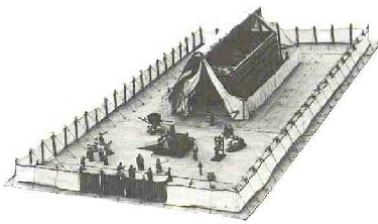
6. The New Covenant is described as being between God, Israel and Judah. But since it clearly encompasses more than just Hebrews (note Ephesians 2:11-15), what can the expression in Galatians 6:16 “the Israel of God” possibly refer to?

Hebrews 8:13 makes the astounding statement that while the New Covenant had indeed been instituted but the Old Covenant had not been made entirely obsolete. Something was about to happen which would without doubt make the Old Covenant obsolete. When we understand the history of this period I believe we gain an incredible insight into the Spirit’s urgency for Jewish believers to remain loyal to Christ.

Amen.

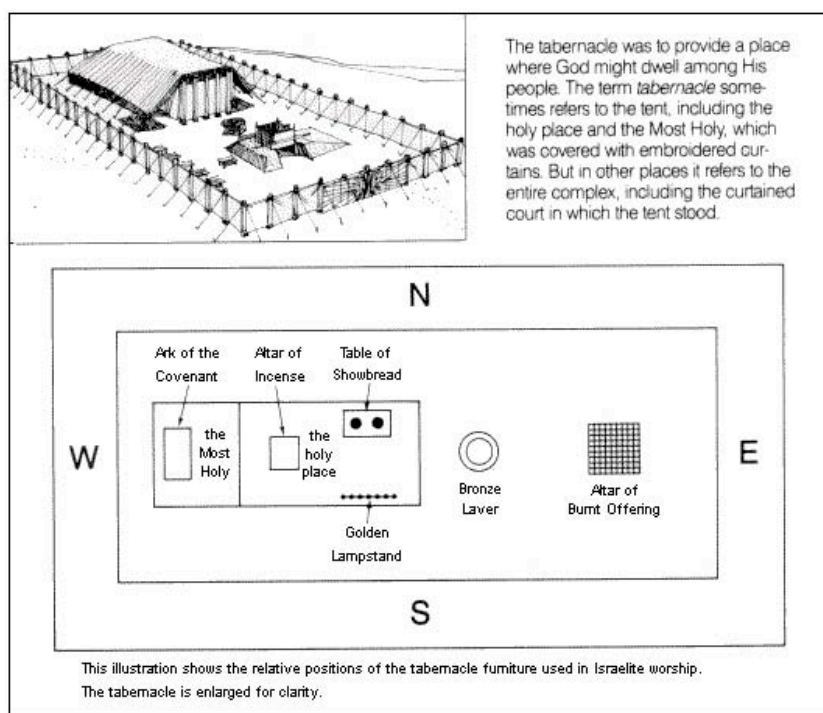
Christ Offered Himself In The Perfect Temple: Heaven

Hebrews 9



The Old Covenant was composed of the Law (sacrifices and ceremonies), the Priesthood, and the Tabernacle/Temple. The Epistle to the Hebrews has dealt with the first of these ingredients and now examines how the tabernacle was a shadow of the heavenly temple (the dwelling of God). To understand this chapter of Hebrews it is important to understand the Old Testament tabernacle.

The Plan of the Tabernacle



The opening verses of Hebrews 9 assumes that the reader has a knowledge of the tabernacle of Moses.

1. Note the above diagram of the tabernacle. Now read its New Testament description in Hebrews 9:3-4 and compare the difference in this description to how the Old Testament describes it. What is the difference?

Within the first part of the Tabernacle, as described in Hebrews 9, there was a table of showbread (which was a picture of Christ and our communion with Him), and a golden lampstand (a picture of Christ's anointing of the Holy Spirit). Beyond the veil or curtain was the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark (Box) of the Covenant symbolised God's presence. The priest ordinarily ministered in the "Holy Place" on a daily basis (Hebrews 9:6), but went into the "Holy of Holies" or "The Holiest Place" once a year (Hebrews 9:7).

But under the New Covenant we can come into God's presence daily, that's why the New Testament describes the Altar of Incense being in the Holy of Holies (Hebrews 9:4).

2. Note the contents of the Ark of the Covenant in Hebrews 9:4 and match the meaning with the description:

(a) Overlaid with gold _____ Speaks of God's provision

(b) Golden pot of Manna _____ Speaks of God's standards

(c) Aaron's budded rod _____ Speaks of heavenly purity

(d) Tablets of the Covenant _____ Speaks of resurrected life

Atonement

The High Priest only went into the Holiest Place once a year on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:7-10). This was when he would offer the blood of the atonement goat. The Day of Atonement is a powerful description of how Christ has been our Substitute for our salvation. Two goats were presented to the High Priest who represented God. Lots were cast to see which goat would be allowed to escape into the wilderness. The goat which lost was slain and offered on the brazen altar. Its blood was taken by the High Priest into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled on top of the Ark of the Covenant (the Mercy Seat).

3. Who did the sacrificial goat represent?

Who did the escaping goat represent?

Under the Old Covenant this ceremony of the Day of Atonement took place every year. All of the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Old Covenant took place until Christ came to "reform" a New Covenant.

New Covenant Ministry

Under the New Covenant there is no longer repeated sacrifices, offerings or ceremonies for our salvation. Christ accomplished it all on the Cross.

4. Note the contrast between the Old Covenant elements and their New Testament equivalents in Christ (Hebrews 9:11-14) -

Old Covenant	New Covenant
(i) The High Priest	eg. <i>Christ is our High Priest</i>
(ii) Tabernacle	
(iii) Blood of bulls and Goats	
(iv) Imperfect sacrifices	

9. Note Hebrews 9:16. It introduces a new term which is often confused with the word *covenant*. What is the word and how does it differ from a covenant?
-

A *testament* is a plan. Before people pass away they sometimes prepare their “Last Will and Testament”. God has only ever had one testament or plan (Eph. 1:4; Heb. 9:26; 1Peter 1:20). But within this testament He has two covenants (the Old and the New). The One who makes a testament is a “testator”.

6. If the Testament is God’s and He is therefore the Testator, what does Hebrews 9:16 imply about Christ?
-

Help From The Epistle To The Hebrews

Christ appeared at the end of the Old Covenant Age (“*the end of the age*” Heb. 9:26) to initiate the New Covenant and deal with sin once and for all not in a humanly constructed Tabernacle, but in the Tabernacle of His own body. This has either bliss or dire consequences for all of us (Hebrews 9:27).

Amen.

Christ Offered Himself in the Perfect Tabernacle: Heaven

Christ Was The Antitype of The Entire Old Covenant

Hebrews 10

For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

Hebrews 10:1 (NKJV)

The Epistle to the Hebrews is strenuously arguing that to follow Christ is to be pursuing the will of God. While many Jews who had rejected Christ were trying to persuade Jewish Christians to renounce Christ and return fully to the Old Covenant, Hebrews argues that the Old Covenant has been made obsolete and was about to be done away with-

In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

Hebrews 8:13 (NKJV)

Hebrews has taken its readers through a response to all the arguments used by the Jews who claimed that God had not abandoned the Old Covenant. It has shown that Jesus was superior not only to the Law but to Moses as well. It has shown that the Tabernacle was a reflection of Christ and His work on the Cross. Now it continues to emphasize this by showing that Christ was the antitype of the Old Covenant's sacrifices, ceremonies, priesthood, and laws.

1. How does Colossians 2:16-17 describe the Old Covenant Law compared to Christ?

2. According to Hebrews 10:3 how did the Old Covenant sacrifices continually point to the people's sin? How does this compare with the New Covenant?

3. According to Hebrews 10:4, was anyone saved purely by offering animal sacrifices?

Christ fulfilled all that the Old Covenant sacrifices represented. In Hebrews 10:1 the writer of Hebrews says that the ceremonial law was a shadow of good things to come. Much of what we read in the first five books of the Bible are actually 'shadows' of what was to come. Another word for shadows is 'typology'. Typology is where things in the Old Testament represent things in the New. Almost all typology are shadows of Christ or His work on the cross. Even the experiences of people in the Old Testament may give us some valuable lessons, but are not necessarily shadows.

4. What does 1 Corinthians 10:6 say about this?

The Tabernacle

The Tabernacle typifies nearly all aspects of Christ's person and work. God told Moses to build it according to the plan shown him on the mountain. Even this has significance. Firstly, it shows us that God had no other plan. The plan He gave was exact and detailed. This typified God's plan of salvation. Secondly, He repeated it so often so that it would be clearly understood that this was God's only way. Today we have many people who say that Jesus Christ and His work are not the means, or only means, of salvation. They believe that truth naturally lies within a person and each must find his/her own personal salvation within themselves by whatever means they like. Underlying this thinking is the philosophy that they are actually the God of their own life.

5. What did Satan say to Eve in the Garden, if she rebelled against God? (Gen.3:5)
-

Animals, Sacrifices And Offerings

Each of the offerings in the Ceremonial Law speak of Christ or His work on the Cross.

6. According to Colossians 2:14 what did the death of Christ do away with?
-

BURNT OFFERING- the person who had to make this sacrifice had the choice of a bullock, kid, turtle-doves, pigeons or a ram. All the sacrifice was burned and the person identified with it by understanding that his guilt was also burnt with the sacrifice. Exodus 29:15-18.

7. What was this typical of?

Eg: *Christ gave His all for us*

MEAL OFFERING- this was bloodless, consisted basically of flour and oil. Leviticus 2:1-3; 6:14-18.

8. What did this typify?

PEACE (FELLOWSHIP) OFFERING- a bullock, a lamb, or a goat. It celebrated peace between God and man. Leviticus 3:6-11.

9. What was this typical of?

SIN OFFERING- a bullock, a kid, turtle-dove, pigeons, or fine flour. The offering was burnt outside the camp. It concerned paying the price for sin. Exodus 29:10-14.

10. What was this typical of?

TRESPASS OFFERING- consisted of a ram and restitution money. It provided for particular transgressions rather than forgiveness as a whole. It recognised atonement as the basis of restitution. Leviticus 5:1-7.

The Feasts

Each of these seven great feasts signify some aspect of Christ and His work before and after the cross.

The Feast:	Typical of:
PASSOVER Commemorated deliverance from death and Egyptian bondage	- Christ shed blood on the cross to release us from bondage.
UNLEAVENED BREAD Ate unleavened bread for one week	- Holy walk follows salvation
FIRSTFRUITS It looked forward to the harvest	- Resurrection of Christ
PENTECOST OR WAVE LOAVES Two loaves baked with leaven offered	- Uniting of the Gentile and Jew into the Church.
DAY OF ATONEMENT One goat killed and one goat allowed to go free	- God's justice and God's grace Christ's death satisfied God's demand for justice and met man's need of forgiveness of sins.
TRUMPETS	- Judgment
TABERNACLES	- Resurrection

Typology serves as a means to find Old Testament shadows of New Testament truths. These can illustrate the eternal nature of God's plan and nature and show us how beautifully God works. However, we should never use typology as a basis for doctrine. It serves purely as an instrument of illustration.

Amen.

Christ Was The Antitype of the Entire Old Covenant

Faith Heroes Who Persevered

Hebrews 11

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony..

Hebrews 11:1 - 2 (NKJV)

Hebrews 11 is the famous “faith chapter” of the Bible. But without understanding the previous context of the epistle at this point we will fail to truly appreciate the kind of faith the author is describing. Often this passage in Hebrews 11:1-2 is used to justify extravagance and materialistic greed on the part of the believer. We hear people say that they “have faith for a new car” or “faith for a new job” and use Hebrews 11:1 to undergird their reasoning.

Interestingly this chapter cites the Old Testament heroes of faith, yet the word “faith” does not occur in the Old Testament! To the Hebrews, *faith* was not merely *believing* - it was a decision bringing about a change in the way one lived. The closest word we have in English to describe this concept is *faithfulness*.

Faith Heroes Who Persevered

1. Faith is the basis for faithfulness, but what does the word *faithfulness* encompass that the word *faith* does not necessarily?

2. Read Hebrews 6:12 and note what is being urged.

3. Consider Hebrews 10:23-24 and determine from this whether the author considers faith to be merely a belief or an act of the will. Give reasons for your answers.



Obtaining A Good Testimony

Under the Old Covenant the emphasis was on *working* at maintaining the Law of Sacrifices and Ceremonies, thus, the requirement for *faithfulness*. But under the New Covenant the primary emphasis is on *trusting* Christ's finished work. Since trust is the essence of faith and belief, what we believe is critical because it will determine how we live.

4. How does Hebrews 11:6 show us that what we believe really does matter?

Hebrews 11 lists people who trusted God despite their circumstances and makes the statement in verse 2 *that they obtained a good testimony*.



5. Which people stand out to you in this Hebrews 11 list and why?

Faith Holds On

These people had faith in God and thus demonstrated faithfulness toward Him.

6. What is the great irony of these faith heroes? (Note Heb. 11:39)

7. What reasons does the author of Hebrews give for these heroes to be tempted to *not* trust God?

The author to the Hebrew Christians is trying to encourage these believers not to abandon Christ because of the opposition and difficulties they faced. He cites these treasured heroes as inspirations for having faith in God even when prayers are not answered and God seems silent.



8. In what ways are modern Christians tempted to abandon their walk of faithfulness with God?

I pray that we may also be stirred to remain increasingly faithful to Christ despite any circumstances which would tempt us to abandon Him.

Amen.

Run The Race Of Faith

Hebrews 12

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.,

Hebrews 12:1

Hebrews 12 begins where Hebrews 11 finished off. The list of Faith Heroes in Hebrews 11 are now described as a “cloud of witnesses”. This does not mean that dead saints literally watch events here on earth. But the writer to the Hebrews describes our faith predecessors in Olympic terms. They are metaphorically



sitting in the stadium stands and cheering us on as we compete in the race of faith (which is more about finishing than competing).

Ancient Olympian marathon runners were known to have trained with weights attached to them while they ran. But when it came time for the real race they “stripped off” - literally!

Run The Race of Faith

The author tells his audience to strip off, lay aside, or throw off, every weight which hinders us in our race of faithfulness to Christ. He is not yet dealing with sin which he mentions immediately after this.

1. What are some things that are not sin, yet can hinder a believer from being fully devoted to Christ? (Note 1 Corinthians 6:12)



2. The writer to the Hebrews then describes sin as that which is “easily” recognised as being a hindrance to walking with Christ. How do we know what this “easy-to-recognise” sin is, and how should we strip it off?

3. According to latter part of Hebrews 12:1, what type of faith-race is required from believers?

This faith race is not just about how you start or even the pace of your progress but how you faithfully keep going and eventually finish.



Run With Eyes Fixed On Christ

4. How does considering what Christ went through leading up to the Cross encourage believers to endure hardship in their walk with Christ? (Hebrews 12:2)

Jesus is the Author of our faith. He plants initial faith in our hearts. We can't even claim our own faith! It is a gift! (Romans 12:3; Eph. 2:8)

5. But what does it mean to describe Christ as the *Finisher* of our faith?

6. Why does the writer of Hebrews say that believers should not be discouraged? (Hebrews 12:3)

The Suffering of Christ For Us



7. When Hebrews 12:4 says that Christ resisted sin to the point of shedding blood, what might he be referring to? (Luke 22:44) What does this indicate about when Christ's suffering began?

8. How does this analogy make the excuse "I couldn't help myself" seem like a lame excuse for sin?

The race of faith is not about moving mountains or receiving miracles, but about remaining faithful and loyal to Christ even when circumstances would plead not to. The race of faith is for the long haul. This means that we will have bad days and lose some battles in our efforts to live a godly life- but as we keep being faithful and deal with sin through repentance and confession we are assured of joining Christ in celebrating the victory of this war.

Amen.

The Heavenly Jerusalem

Hebrews 12

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,

Hebrews 12:22

The great hope of the Jews was to be in control of their city: Jerusalem. By the time Hebrews had been written, Jerusalem had been under foreign control for over five centuries. The longing of every Jew was to be rid of these “Goyim” (Gentiles) to once again worship freely. It was their expectation that the Messiah would accomplish this. Consequently, when many Jews suspected that Jesus might have been the Christ-Messiah they judged His claims by their expectation that He would deliver Jerusalem.

1. How do we know that even Christ’s disciples thought this way?
(Note Acts 1:6)
-

2. How did Christ correct this misunderstanding of what His Kingdom was truly about? (Refer to Luke 17:21; John 18:36)

A Disciplining Father

We know that the Jewish believers who survived through to the mid sixties of the first century had to endure much persecution and opposition. What many Bible readers have failed to grasp within the words of Christ found in Matthew 24, is that Christ said all of those things would happen within the generation of His original audience (Matthew 24:34).

3. Understanding this context of Matthew 24 (as it relates directly to the events occurring at the time of Hebrews being written) what did Christ urge His disciples to do in Matthew 24:13 and what does it reveal about those times?

Perhaps the Hebrew believers at this time felt like God was either abandoning or punishing them because of the intense persecution they were enduring.

4. But how does Hebrews 12:5-11 reinterpret what was really happening?

We need to have a right theology about how God deals with His people. It would be wrong to think that God is a harsh aloof father figure who demands unachievable goodness. Sometimes we hear people say that “*God has broken me.*” I question whether this is a theologically correct understanding. Understanding Hebrews 12:5-11, we can see that God may let us be broken by our wilful recalcitrance, but it is His desire that we be chastened *now* rather than be judged for eternity!

5. Therefore rather than simply being a believer who battles against their carnal nature, Hebrews 12:12 encourages a pro-active approach to spiritual living. How?
-

A Different Way To Live

All of the New Testament epistles conclude with the life implications of what has just been taught. In the first portion of the Epistle to the Hebrews the writer has made the case for Hebrew believers to remain faithful to Christ because He is the Promised Messiah; the Prophet foretold by Moses; the fulfilment of the Law; the End of Sacrifices; the Rest from works; the True High Priest; the True Temple; and the only worthy object of our faith.

This understanding has implications for how we live...together. For example, Hebrews 12:12 has plural overtones. That is, it is not simply an injunction for us to strengthen ourselves, but an urging for us to strengthen those among us who are weak (Note Isaiah 35:3, 4).

6. How do these Scriptures reinforce this thought?
 - (a) Romans 14:1-
-

(b) Romans 15:1-

(c) 1Corinthians 8:9-

(d) 1Corinthias 12:22-

7. Hebrews 12:13 seems to be citing Proverbs 4:26. One commentator says “By taking care for the defective members of the congregation, the stronger members can help them along the way. Where the Christian life is in any way ‘out of joint,’ steps should be taken to revitalise it.” How does the imagery of Hebrews 12:13 support this comment?

We need to make every effort to live peaceably with other brothers and sisters in Christ. One very successful and experienced pastor once said to me that for a congregation to experience real fellowship they needed to know how to love, forgive, forebear, and forget! (Note Hebrews 12:14)

8. What are the two warnings found in Hebrews 12:14-15 for those who refuse to live peaceably within a congregation of believers?

9. How does Hebrew 12:16-17 warn us about making our fellowship and feelings our primary spiritual goal?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said –

*For Jesus Christ alone is our unity. “He is our peace.”
Through him alone do we have access to one another,
and fellowship with one another.*

Life Together, page 39

10. Who is Hebrews 12:15 addressing? What are the implications for us from this verse?

11. What does Hebrews 12:17 imply about being fooled into thinking that we can indulge in sin then repent?

May God help us to build the kind of Church that is holy, humble, and hard-working. And may God give you the wisdom to know how to be a part of it and apply what we have just studied.

Amen.

The Heavenly Jerusalem

Lives That Honour Christ

Hebrews 13

15 Therefore, through him let us always bring God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. 16 Do not neglect to do good and to be generous, for God is pleased with such sacrifices.

Hebrews 13:15-16

Godliness consists of emotional integrity, genuine compassion, willing submission, and earnest worship. In the closing chapter of Hebrews the writer urges his readers to live godly lives which honour Christ. This chapter alone is a wealth of instruction for those seeking to live wholeheartedly for Christ.

Emotional Integrity

Integrity means wholeness. The word integrity comes from the same root word as *integer*. If you cast your minds back to your school days during mathematics class, you would have been told that there are essentially two types of numbers. Firstly there are fractions (which are incomplete numbers).

Secondly there are integers which are whole numbers. To be a person of integrity means to be a *whole* person. The person who carries unforgiveness or constant thoughts of guilt, or a preoccupation with what others think of them, is an emotionally fractured person. It is very difficult for this person to truly care for others. The traits of an emotionally whole person are reflected in this chapter.

1. Scan Hebrews 13 and list those verses which would require the believer to have emotional integrity:

Vs: _____ Thought: _____

Genuine Compassion

Compassion is a deep feeling of sympathy for another. It is to somewhat feel how the other person must be feeling and feel a deep desire to help. Note Matthew 9:36; 14:14. Compassion is one of the hallmarks of Christianity.

2. Scan Hebrews 13 and list those verses which would require the believer to have compassion:

Willing Submission

To submit to another implies that we are giving up our position. Its hardly submission when we merely agree with another's position or request. To submit means that despite our differences we are prepared to comply.

3. Scan Hebrews 13 and note those references to submission.

4. Examine the above verses and note how God deals with those to whom we are to submit-

Earnest Worship

Worship is our expression of surrender to our God. We shouldn't limit worship to just singing and music. Surrendering our time, finance, talent, minds, and hearts can all be the basis of our worship. For some worship primarily happens on a Sunday when they sing praise to God. For others it happens when they surrender their time, heart and minds to the preaching of God's Word. Yet for others it happens primarily when they quietly pray to God.

In Old Testament (Covenant) times worship was primarily sacrificial. Worshipers brought their sacrifices of animals, grain, and money to the Tabernacle/Temple as their offering.

5. What does Hebrews 13 instruct us about worship? Note what it considers to be “New Testament” sacrifices.

The Psalms are a wonderful collection of worship songs. As you read through the Psalms as a part of your daily private worship, consider how often a Psalm is written as if there are two people praying it. Some have suggested that this reveals the community aspect of worship within the Psalms. Often each verse in a Psalm expresses a thought to God which is then echoed in the same verse using different words. In this way we can pray these prayers to God with the original author. Someone else has developed this thought by stating that since Christ is continually interceding on behalf of His people, it is actually His echo which is recorded in the Psalms. Either way, the Psalms have traditionally formed the basis for worship by God’s people.

6. How do you primarily worship God?

I believe the benediction (good last words) in Hebrews is one of the most beautiful sentiments in all Scripture. Having urged the Hebrew believers to remain faithful and loyal to Christ, the writer now reminds them that God can sustain them during these trying times and give them everything they need to do His will. He also reminds them that their relationship with Christ is made possible through the death of Christ since this Covenant is signed with His blood.

Shortly after this epistle was written Jerusalem was invaded by the Romans in 66AD under the orders of Caesar Nero. He demanded the complete submission of the Jews in what became a 1260 day bloodbath and siege of the city. During the opening days of the campaign when General Cestius marched into the Temple precinct and set up the Roman Eagle insignia as an object of worship, he mysteriously withdrew from the city for just three days. During this time, the Jewish historian Josephus notes mysteriously that every Christian fled the city. At the end of the siege every priest was executed, the temple destroyed and sacrifices done away with. Many commentators now believe that this event in 70AD fulfilled what Christ said in Matthew 24 about His coming to judge Jerusalem. Little wonder the Spirit’s urgency throughout this epistle to the Hebrew Christians to remain loyal to Christ and His cause.

Amen.

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