

A person stands on a beach at sunset, their silhouette reflected in the calm water. The sky is filled with dramatic, golden clouds, and the sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, glowing atmosphere. The person is facing away from the camera, looking out at the sea.

# Better...

## Hebrews

Bible Studies for Ashfield Presbyterian Church

# Introduction:

These studies are designed to complement the Bible Talks at Church. Most Home Groups use them in the week before the Bible Talk, and they find this helps prepare them to hear the talk. Hopefully, any unanswered questions from the study will be addressed on the Sunday. The studies will work just as well for personal study. Perhaps you could find two or three short times during the week to work through each passage and questions.

## A. What is Hebrews?

1. Why was this letter written according to 13:22?
2. Let's look at some examples of exhortations. What are we being encouraged to do? (2:1; 3:1; 4:14; 6:12; 10:19-25; 13:15,16)

## B. Who wrote Hebrews?

The short answer is that we don't know. He (or she!) was a friend of the Apostle Paul's son in the faith, Timothy (13:23), so most likely was a member of Paul's group of workers. Many have believed Paul was the author, but there is no clear evidence for this. It was accepted as Scripture at different times in different parts of the Church. (F.F. Bruce has a section on this in his commentary in the New International Commentary on the New Testament, p xlv) It need not bother us that we don't know who the author was. He had a deep understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures and how Jesus fulfilled them. This is why it is included in the New Testament.

It is a letter designed to be read as a sermon. There is a repeated pattern of Old Testament quote, explanation, and application – just like a sermon! And every quote is introduced with "God **says**", not "it is **written**". It's designed to be **heard**, not just **read**.

## C. Why was it written?

This letter was probably directed to a **community of Jewish Christians** (in Rome or dispersed?) who were **in danger of falling away from Christ** due to persecution (from Judaism or Rome) and **returning to Jewish traditions**, either because they thought they were superior, or because of the protection offered from Rome under the wing of Judaism. The writer urges them to maintain their confession and not fall away

























Since the argument of the epistle is designed to show **Christ's superiority over the old order, the apostasy (falling away) in question is a return to Judaism**. The insistence of the author that the old covenant has been superseded by the new makes sense only if the readers are trying to live under it.

- 13:13 - come outside "the camp" i.e. of Israel.
- The plea to not "turn away from the living God" (3:12) was based on the example of ancient Israel (Deuteronomy 5:32; 11:16; 17:11,20; 30:17-18) , and so could just as readily be applied to first-century Jews.
- If the letter was directed to Gentiles in danger from Judaizers, you would expect circumcision to be mentioned. (BUT it's the argument from silence).
- A number of arguments for the superiority of Jesus turn on the finality of the cult – an irrelevancy for Gentiles tempted to return to paganism.



# Jesus is Better

## The Shadow vs the Reality

THE OLD COVENANT with 'our fathers' 'in the past'	promise = shadow	fulfilment = reality	THE NEW COVENANT with 'us' 'in these days'
angels = God's messengers		Jesus the Son is superior to the angels (1:2-14)	 Jesus = God's Son = heir, creator, glory of God, imprint of God, sustainer, priest, Lord
the message of angels		Jesus the Son's message is superior to the message of angels (2:1-4)	 the message of Jesus = his incarnation & substitutionary atonement = salvation
Moses = servant in God's house		Jesus the Son is superior to Moses (3:1-6)	 Jesus = Son over God's house
Aaron (and his sons) = representative of sinners		Jesus the High Priest is superior to Aaron (4:14-5:5)	 Jesus = our true High Priest = sinless representative & substitute
Melchizedek = eternal priest		Jesus the High Priest is superior to the priesthood of Melchizedek (5:6-10)	 Jesus = our true High Priest = eternal priest who brings eternal salvation
Levitical priests = sinful, impermanent, weak, must offer sacrifices for themselves before offering for others		Jesus the High Priest is superior to the Levitical priesthood (7:9-28)	 Jesus = our true High Priest = priest appointed by divine oath, perfect, permanent, powerful to save others, can offer himself for others
Levitical priests = serve in human tent on earth = copy & shadow		Jesus' place of service is superior to that of the Levitical priesthood (8:1-6; 9:1-5)	 Jesus = our true High Priest = serves at divine throne in heaven = original & reality
Levitical priests = mediate old covenant = ineffective & obsolete		Jesus' covenant is superior to that of the Levitical priesthood (8:7-13; 9:6-10)	 Jesus = our true High Priest = mediates new covenant = effective & eternal
Levitical priests = blood of animals in earthly tent, repeated sacrifices, no true redemption, outward cleansing only		Jesus' sacrificial blood is superior to that of the Levitical priesthood (9:11-28)	 Jesus = our true High Priest = own blood in heaven itself, single sacrifice, eternal redemption, inward forgiveness & purification
Levitical priests = bodies of animals, continual & many, reminder of sin, no lasting sanctification or perfection, stand daily to serve		Jesus' sacrificial body is superior to that of the Levitical priesthood (10:1-18)	 Jesus = our true High Priest = own body, singular & once for all, takes away sin, eternal sanctification & perfection, sits down at right hand of God
God's old covenant people = examples of faith		Jesus is superior to the people of God (11:1 - 12:3)	 Jesus = God's Son = the founder & perfecter of our faith, endured the cross, seated with God
Sinai = earthly mountain, terror & fear toward God, laws & penalties = condemnation from God		Jesus' New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant as symbolised by Sinai & Zion (12:18-24)	 Zion = heavenly mountain, grace & kindness in the presence of God, forgiveness & cleansing in the blood of Jesus

# A Better Messenger:

## Hebrews 1:1-2:4

1. **Read 1:1 to 2:4.** Do you know someone who has drifted away from Jesus? What happened?

In 1:1 to 2:4 the writer is comparing “the message spoken by angels” (2:2) and the “great salvation ... announced by the Lord (Jesus)” (2:3). He is saying that the message of salvation through Jesus is more important than the message spoken by angels. What is this message spoken by angels? It is the Law of God spoken to Moses at Mt Sinai. This seems strange at first because angels are not mentioned in the giving of the Law in Exodus 19 and 20. But in Deuteronomy 33:1-4 there is a reference to angels at the giving of the Law. “The LORD came from Sinai ... He came with myriads of **holy ones** ...the law that Moses gave us ..” Two other places in the New Testament speak of the Law being given through angels, namely Acts 7:38 and Galatians 3:19.

The point is that the message of salvation is greater than the Law of Moses **because it has come through a greater messenger**. The message of salvation came through the Son of God, whereas the message of the Law came through angels. So the writer sets out to show that the Son is greater than the angels.

2. How do the following sections show that the Son of God is greater than the angels?

a) verses 1 to 4

b) v5,6

### **“Son” and “Father”**

What does this title of “Son” mean? v5a is a quote from Psalm 2(v7). Psalm 2 is about the crowning of the king of Israel. God refers to the king as his Son and declares himself to be the king’s Father. In other words, the king of Israel was the king of God’s people so he was to rule the people for God in a godly way and not for his own benefit. He was to represent God to the people. Notice from v2 that the king is also God’s Anointed One, that is, the Messiah or Christ. The Gospel declares that Jesus of Nazareth is this King of Israel who is therefore Messiah and Son of God.

v5b is from 2 Samuel 7:14, part of God’s promise to King David that he would always have a descendant on the throne of Israel (see 2 Samuel 7:11-16). Again God refers to this king as his Son. And again, the Gospel declares that Jesus is the final fulfilment of that promise. He is the King, the Son of God who reigns forever.

**Notes on 1:6**

**1. What does “firstborn” mean?** In Psalm 89:26,27, God refers to his king, the descendant of David, as his firstborn, meaning the firstborn son who had the highest rank in that culture.

**2. Where is the quotation from?** The footnote in the NIV refers us to Deuteronomy 32:43 in the Dead Sea Scrolls (ancient copies of the Old Testament found near the Dead Sea in 1948) and Septuagint (Greek Translation of Old Testament made before Christ). When we turn to that verse in the NIV there is a footnote to say that those two versions of the Old Testament include that quote: “Let all the angels worship him”.

**3. Isn’t the original verse about the LORD, not the Son?**

In the quote from Deuteronomy, it is the LORD, Yahweh, whom all the angels are to worship. However, the New Testament teaches that all of God’s purposes in the Old Testament are fulfilled by Jesus. (see 2 Corinthians 1:20, Matthew 5:17) God has raised his Son so the nations should rejoice because the Son will avenge the blood of his servants, take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for God’s people, as Deuteronomy 32:43 says. So all the angels should worship the Son as they worship Yahweh.

Another possibility is that it is a quote from Psalm 97:7. In the Septuagint mentioned above the last line of that verse is “Worship him, all you angels.” The context of the Psalms is much closer to David and the coming Son of God.

c) v7-12

**Isn’t Psalm 102 about the LORD? Why is it applied to Jesus?**

In 1:10 to 12 the writer quotes Psalm 102:25-27. When you read Psalm 102 you see that it is addressed to the LORD, Yahweh. The psalmist is suffering and pleads for God not to let him die young since He continues on forever (v24). Verses 25 to 27 continues to address the LORD. How can these verses then point to the Son? The solution is to see that the writer considers that the whole of the psalm has been fulfilled by Jesus. For example, God has raised Jesus so he sits enthroned for ever (v12). It is through Jesus that God has had compassion on Zion (another name for Israel) - v13. It is through Jesus that the LORD is rebuilding his people and has appeared in glory (v16). God acts through his Son. So it must be true that God’s original work of creation was through his Son as well. So it is quite appropriate to apply Psalm 102: 25-27 to Jesus.

d) v13

e) v14

As stated above, the author shows that Jesus is greater than the angels to show that his message is greater than theirs, that is, to show that the message of Jesus’ salvation is greater than the Law of Moses. But what does this mean for us? The point being made about the Law is that it “was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment”(v2), that is, God was very clear in the Law that if people disobeyed or ignored it there would be dire consequences. This is very clear throughout the Law. For example have a look at Deuteronomy 4:23-26.

3. What do we learn about God's salvation in 2:3,4?
4. What point is the writer making by comparing the Law and Jesus' salvation in 2:1-4?
5. In what ways can we pay close attention to the message of Jesus' salvation, so that we won't drift away from it?
6. In what sense is Jesus better than the angels? What difference does that make to you?

### **Homework:**

Read Hebrews this week. Perhaps in one sitting or two or 2 chapters a day. Underline what strikes you as important. Put a question mark next to what you're not sure of. Getting an overall view will help you understand each section and hopefully whet your appetite for what lies ahead in our studies.

### **Prayer Points:**

Praise the Lord Jesus for who he is and his salvation.

# A Better Leader: Hebrews 2:5-3:6

Why was it necessary for God the Son to become a human being? This study focuses on that question.

1. **Read Psalm 8.** What is the main point of v3-6?
2. **Read Hebrews 2:5-10.** Psalm 8 is quoted in 2:6-8. From v8b, how is this psalm **not** fulfilled in the present age?
3. From v9, how **has** the psalm been fulfilled?
4. Why was Jesus crowned with glory and honour?
5. Why did Jesus die? v9&10

## **Jesus Made Perfect???**

In what sense was Jesus made perfect through suffering (v10)? *“Jesus being made perfect through suffering does not mean that he was less than perfect before; he was already the perfect Son (see 1:3). Yet through his suffering, Jesus achieved our forgiveness, and so he became the perfect Saviour. ‘Perfect’ here means achieving the desired end or purpose.”*  
Peter Adam, “The Majestic Son”

## **Read 2:10-3:6**

Verse 11 says that both the one who makes men holy (Jesus) and those who are made holy (people of God) are of the same family. From v12-14 & 17, how is Jesus similar to us?

### **Jesus Speaks in the Old Testament**

Notice in v12 and 13 that Jesus says three things. But these are not things he said in his earthly life, they are quotes from the Old Testament. The first from Psalm 22 and the second and third from Isaiah. The writer considers that Jesus spoke through the Old Testament authors. Peter taught the same truth in his first letter: “Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, 11 trying to find out the time and circumstances to which **the Spirit of Christ in them** was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.” (1 Pet 1:10-11 NIV)

### **How Old Testament Quotes Work**

It’s important not to take a verse of the Bible out of context. But doesn’t it seem like that’s what the writer to the Hebrews does in, for example, 2:12,13? No, what the writer is doing is assuming that the reader will have a knowledge of the context of the verses he quotes. The verse quoted is meant to recall the passage as a whole. Today when someone says “The Lord is my Shepherd” it recalls the whole of Psalm 23 to mind. When Jesus cried from the cross “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” he was recalling the whole of Psalm 22 which so aptly described his situation. So in Hebrews here. v13a quotes Isaiah 8:17. The context (see 8:11-17) is of the rejection of God’s word that Isaiah was bringing. Despite this Isaiah and his disciples continued to trust in God. Jesus was the same. Despite rejection, he continued to trust in God and encouraged his disciples to do so.

6. Why did Jesus share our humanity? v14-18
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. From v18, why is Jesus able to help us when we are tempted?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. How was Jesus tempted?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. In what ways are you being tempted at the moment? In what ways do the truths of this section help you in those temptations?



10. The application for this section is found in 3:1-6. What does the writer call us to do? Why? ("house" is used with a double meaning in this passage. It means literally a structure people live in and also a "household", that is a family.)
11. Chapter 1 explains how Jesus is greater than angels. Chapter 2 explains another way in which Jesus is a better leader than angels. What is it? What difference does that make to you?

### **Prayer Points:**

Since we are to fix our thoughts on Jesus, spend some time praising Jesus for what he's achieved.

#### **A Note on Angels**

First century Jews emphasised the role of angels more than the Scriptures. They "believed that angels were the highest beings in creation next to God. The Jews were convinced that such angels were the primary instruments of bringing God's Word to men and of working out his will in the physical universe. Many Jews believed that the angels acted as God's 'senate' or 'supreme council,' and that God did nothing without consulting this council. These Jews interpreted the 'us' in 'Let us make man in our image' (Genesis 1:26) as a reference to the deliberations of the angelic council.

According to Jewish thought, God assigned to angels various tasks as operators of the universe. Two hundred angels controlled the movements of the stars. Another mighty angel managed the seas, while others superintended the frost, dew, rain, snow, hail, thunder, and lightning. Still others were the wardens of hell and torturers of the damned. There were even recording angels who - in order to assist God in His future judgment of humanity - wrote down every word men spoke... They believed that the angels were actually the mediators of their covenant with God, and that the angels were charged with ministering the blessings of the covenant to them.

It was in this context that the writer to the Hebrews set out to prove Christ's superiority over the angels."

from 'Hebrews' in the *Lifecchange* Series.

# A Better Rest: Hebrews 3-4:13

So far the writer has taught the superiority of Jesus over the angels (ch 1). Jesus' message is even more important than the Law given by angels (2:2,3) and the Prophets (1:1). So we must pay very careful attention to it. The world to come is not ruled by angels but by Jesus (2:5-9). And Jesus became human, not to help the angels, but to help God's people (2:10-18, especially 16). So we must fix our eyes on Jesus, not the angels, or anything else for that matter. Now the writer moves to another comparison. He compares Jesus with the greatest leader the Jews ever had, the one who received the Law on Mt Sinai, Moses.

## Read 3:1-15

### Old Testament Background

The writer quotes Psalm 95. **Read the whole of Psalm 95.** It refers back to the time after God miraculously and powerfully rescued Israel from slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt. But soon after that they were questioning whether or not God was with them! See Exodus 17:1-7. Then when they came to enter the Promised Land they wouldn't trust God to enable them to defeat the nations there. So God punished them by forcing them to wander for 40 years in the wilderness. See Numbers 13,14.

Psalm 95:8 is different, as quoted in Hebrews, to our Old Testament because our Old Testament is based on a Hebrew manuscript called the Masoretic Text and the writer to the Hebrews used the Septuagint, an ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament.

1. What are we warned against in v7-15?
2. How can we "be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (v13)?

### The Human Heart

The modern humanist thinks of people as basically good. The Bible has a different view. That is that sin dwells in our hearts. For example Jeremiah said, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (17:9). Satan exploits the deceit in our hearts with his deceit. A good example is how he deceived Eve in the Garden, and then Adam through Eve. See Genesis 3:1-7. Notice what Eve had to say afterwards, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (3:13). The Israelites succumbed to the same deceit. Even though God had rescued them amazingly, they would not trust him day by day to provide for them when the going got tough. Jesus also said, "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'" Mark 7:20-23

Which view of human nature do you think is most realistic?

3. From v12-15, how can we help one another not to become hardened but to continue confident in Christ till the end?

4. What has encouraged you to continue in Christ?

5. What are some ways you can encourage others?

**Read 3:15-19**

6. God saved the Israelites, but they died in the desert. What is the lesson we should learn from that?

## **The Promise of Rest.**

God promised to give Israel rest in the Promised Land. See Deuteronomy 12:8-10. And God fulfilled that promise. Under Joshua the Israelites defeated the Canaanites and they enjoyed living in a good land of their own. We read in the book of Joshua: "So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them. Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled." (21:43-45)

**Read 4:1-13**

7. If God's people already had rest in the land, what is the promise of entering God's rest which still stands mentioned in verse 1? See v 3-10

8. What was the rest in the land pointing forward to?

### **Sabbath**

Christians disagree on the Sabbath. Some live under the Sabbath commandment and so rest on Saturday. Others live under the commandment but rest Sunday in recognition of Jesus' resurrection. (see Revelation 1:10). Others say that Christians are no longer under the Sabbath commandment because that was God's law for Israel. They say that Jesus came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17) and so the Sabbath has found its fulfilment in Him - see Colossians 3:16,17. Such Christians may nonetheless say that it is wise to rest one day in seven for our own physical good. Before we start criticising a Christian with a different view to our own we must carefully consider Paul's words in Romans 14: 5,6 "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord." (see the whole section 14:1-15:13) Whatever view a Christian holds though, Hebrews 4:9 points to the ultimate significance of the Sabbath. The Sabbath points forward to rest with God. We enjoy that **now** through faith in Jesus even though we are still in a stressful world. We will enjoy it completely **in heaven**.

9. Why didn't that first generation who came out of Egypt enter God's rest in the land?  
3:16-19, 4:1,2,11
10. What can we learn from their example?
11. Often people's words are **just** words. We speak of certain people as being "full of hot air." We talk disparagingly of "talk-fests". What 5 ways is the word of God described in v12?

### **The Living Active Sharp Word of God**

After the Israelites realised they had disobeyed God by not invading Canaan, they changed their mind and decided to attack. Moses said, "Why are you disobeying the Lord's command? This will not succeed! Do not go up, because the LORD is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies, for the Amalekites and Canaanites will face you there. Because you have turned away from the LORD, he will not be with you and you will fall by the sword." Numbers 14:41-43.

But they disobeyed God's word again. They attacked and fell by the sword. God's word became a sword to them. If they disobeyed God's word through Moses and were judged, how much more will we be if we hear God's word through God's Son and disobey!

12. How does God's judgement differ from Man's?
13. How does the truth in v11 and 12 make you want to live?
14. In what ways is Jesus a better leader than Moses? What difference does this make to you?

### **Prayer Points:**

Thank God for the rest we enjoy in Jesus now and for the future rest he promises.  
Pray for strength to continue in obedient trust in God so we will enter that rest.

# A Better Priest: Hebrews 4:14-7:28

The writer is encouraging his readers not to drift away from trust in Jesus (2:2) but to hold on firmly to the end (3:14). The basis for this encouragement is who Jesus is. He is the Son of God, high above the angels (chapters 1&2). He is the faithful Son (3:1-6). So we must pay careful attention to his message of salvation (2:1). We must not be like the Israelites who did not trust God's promise and so failed to enter rest in the land (3:7-4:11). We must continue to listen carefully to God's word through his Son and continue to trust it no matter how difficult or dangerous that becomes.

But not only is Jesus the Son of God. He is also "a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God" (2:17) This long section explains how Jesus achieves this.

## Read 4:14-5:10

1. What should the fact that Jesus is a great high priest encourage us to do? (14,16)
2. What enables Jesus to understand our suffering (15)?

## Read 5:1-4.

3. From v1, what was the role of the high priest of Israel?

### **The Role of Priests**

Priests and sacrifices are very important in the Old Testament. Leviticus chapter 9 is a good introduction to what they actually did.

4. In verses 2 to 4 what two things about the high priest of Israel are highlighted?

### **The High Priest**

The fact that the high priest had to offer sacrifices for his own sin is recorded in Leviticus 16:6,11,15. God called Aaron to the priesthood in Exodus 28:1. When other Israelites challenged this choice, God destroyed them. See Numbers 16.

## Read 5:5-10

5. How was Jesus appointed by God as High Priest? v5-6 (We'll come back to Melchizedek in Ch 7)

6. How do we know Jesus is a gentle and merciful high priest? v7-8. From v7-10, how is Jesus the priest **different** from other priests?

Before the writer explains how Jesus was a high priest in the order of Melchizedek, he breaks off from that teaching to encourage his readers to listen very carefully. 5:11 to 6:20 is an encouragement to work hard at learning more of God's truth.

The people receiving this letter were mature Christians. The teaching they are given in this letter is certainly not for beginners. In the past they had suffered for Jesus (10:32-34). But now, for some reason, they were wavering, perhaps because of the threat of more persecution. They were moving back towards spiritual infancy.

**Read 5:11-6:3**

7. From 6:1-3, what does the writer want his readers to do?

**"The Elementary Teachings About Christ" 6:1,2**

Understanding what some of the elementary teachings were is not that elementary! **"Repentance from acts that lead to death"** is literally "repentance from dead works" in the original. Dead works are those which are not done in service of the living God. See this contrast in 9:14 where the same phrase "dead works" is used. These works would include works done to try to earn our salvation, works done to impress others and works done selfishly.

**"Instructions about baptisms"** has often been understood as a reference to Christian baptism. But the plural counts against that interpretation. Also the word in the original is different to the normal word for Christian baptism. It is the same word as used in Mark 7:4 and Hebrews 9:10 and translated "washings". It refers to the ceremonial washings which the Jews practised. So it more likely a reference to the washings in the Old Testament which pointed forward to the forgiveness of sins through Jesus. For example Hebrews 9:13,14 talks about "the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean", referring back to a ceremony in Numbers 19, which provided a forerunner of the cleansing of our consciences through the blood of Christ. If this is correct, "instruction about baptisms" refers to teaching about forgiveness based on the washings in the Old Testament.

**"Laying on of hands"** most likely refers to the symbolic expression of coming to Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit. Laying on of hands was commonly associated with receiving the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts (8:17;9:12,17;19:6).

**Read 6:4-20**

8. What are the five characteristics of the people described in v4,5?
9. To "fall away" in v6 means to renounce Christ – to stop following him. From v6, what is someone doing to Jesus by "falling away"?
10. Why do you think it is impossible for such a person to be brought back again to repentance? v4-6



**Caution!**

We need to be careful in how we use this passage. What if someone we know stops acting as a Christian? Does this passage say that he or she can't return? No, not necessarily.

Firstly, we don't know if they were a real Christian before. They may have been acting as a Christian without actually having been born again. Only God knows who are truly his.

Also we can't tell if they have truly fallen away or whether they are going through a lazy phase (see 6:12). Ultimately, falling away will be seen in the long-term. While they are alive, they can heed this warning, and return to Jesus.

This passage is a warning to those of us who ARE following Jesus to KEEP doing it, and for us to use to warn people who are in danger of falling away.

11. What fruit of the Gospel have the Hebrews shown in the past? What does the writer want them to do?

**Personal Reflection:**

Are there areas in my life where I'm becoming lazy in living out my faith? Have I slipped back? If so, pray about them and ask God's help to change.

The writer has called for his readers to "imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." v12. In v13-20 he gives an example of someone we are to imitate - Abraham.

12. What promise did Abraham receive by waiting patiently (v15)? (See Genesis 12:1-4, 15:4, 21:1-5 - notice Abraham's age)

13. In v18 to 20 the writer applies this truth to us. What lesson are we to learn (18)?

**The Inner Sanctuary Behind the Curtain**

The inner sanctuary was the Holy of Holies, the innermost room in the tabernacle where God's presence was. It was divided from the Holy Place by a thick curtain. This was an earthly representation of a heavenly reality. It represented heaven itself, where God lives. Jesus has gone into that inner sanctuary, that is, heaven itself. See also 9:1-5, 11, 24.

14. From v19, 20, what is the basis of our hope in God? How can you take hold of this anchor more effectively?

**Melchizedek – Man of Mystery!?**

Earlier in his letter the writer raised the topic of Melchizedek. Jesus is the fulfilment of Psalm 110:4, "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek". In Ch 7 he spells out what this means. Apart from Psalm 110, Melchizedek is mentioned in only one Old Testament

passage. Read Genesis 14:17-20 and then Hebrews 7:1-10. There are several similarities between Jesus and Melchizedek, and so Melchizedek is a forerunner, or prototype, of Jesus.

15. List the ways in which Jesus is similar to, or greater than, Melchizedek (1-10)

### **Without father or mother??**

Are we to take v3 literally? Some commentators have done so, seeing Melchizedek as a God-like figure, who literally had no mother or father. But much more likely, the writer was contrasting **what Scripture says** about Melchizedek with what it says about the Levitical priests. The point is that there is no genealogy of Melchizedek in Scripture - remember Genesis 14:17-20 and Psalm 110:4 are the only passages which mention him. This contrasts with the Levitical priests who had to be descended from Levi to be priests. Melchizedek's father and mother are not mentioned. His birth and death are not mentioned. This makes him an ideal forerunner for Jesus the Priest, who **was** eternal, without beginning or end.

### **Read v11-19**

The point of v11 is that perfection for God's people was not possible through the Law of Moses with its Levitical priesthood. The Old Testament itself made that clear by looking forward to another priesthood - the order of Melchizedek - in Psalm 110:4.

16. What is significant about Jesus coming from Judah not Levi (v12-14)?

### **The Weak and Useless Law - v18**

In what sense was the Law of Moses weak and useless? It was weak because of the people. They were unable to keep it. It was useless in the sense that it was able only to cleanse externally for Temple worship, it was not able to cleanse our conscience before God.

### **Read v20-28**

17. In what other ways is the new covenant made through Jesus better than the Old?

From a) v20-22

b) v23-25

c) v26-28

18. How is Jesus a better high priest than the Jewish high priest? What difference does this make to you?

### **Prayer Points:**

Give thanks for the characteristics of your great priest Jesus, through whom you can confidently approach God.

# Better Access: Hebrews 8-10

This is another long study. You'll work hard, but the main idea, repeated often, is that Jesus is the priest who offers a new sacrifice that actually works. The OT sacrifices didn't work.

## Read 8:1-6

1. What is "the sanctuary, the true tabernacle" where Jesus serves, mentioned in v2?
2. From v5, why did Moses have to make the earthly tabernacle exactly as God showed him on Mt Sinai?

Verse 3 talks about the gifts and sacrifices a high priest must bring into the sanctuary. In v6 we read that Jesus has a superior ministry to the earthly high priest. 8:7-9:10 talk about what is wrong with the sacrifices the earthly high priest brings. From 9:11 on, the sacrifice Jesus brings is described.

## Read 8:7-13

3. What does the introduction of a new agreement say about the old one (7, 13)?

## Read 9:1-10

4. The priests entered the outer room, the Holy Place, regularly, but only the High Priest entered the inner room, the Most Holy Place, and he only went in once a year. When he did, he had to offer blood sacrifices. What was God showing by this (8-10)?
5. From 9:11-14 fill in the following table.

	Old Covenant High Priest	New Covenant High Priest - Jesus
Where he went		
The sacrifices he offered to enter		
How often he entered		
What he obtained for his people		

**Read 9:15-22**

6. From v16-21, how is a will like the first covenant God made with his people through Moses? (Note that in the original language of this letter the words “will” and “covenant” are the same)
7. What is not possible without the shedding of blood (22)? Why?

**Read 9:23-28**

8. What was the purpose of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross (28)?
9. In what 3 ways was Christ’s sacrifice better than the sacrifices of the old covenant? (see v24-26)

**Read 10:1-4**

10. What does the fact that the old covenant sacrifices had to be repeated year after year show about them?
11. From this passage, how is the law a shadow of Christ?

**Read v5-10**

**A Misquote of Psalm 40?**

10:5-7 is a quote from Psalm 40:6-8. However if you compare the two you will see that the second line is different. Hebrews has, “but a body you prepared for me” whereas Psalm 40:6 reads, “but my ears you have pierced”. Is this a misquote? No, it is a quote from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint. Did the translators make a mistake? That is unlikely. It is more likely that the Greek translators interpreted the Hebrew phrase. Literally the Hebrew phrase is “ears you have dugged for me”, that is, God carved out the shape of his ears. It is a way of speaking about how God made his body. So it was translated, “a body you prepared for me.” The meaning of the two phrases is the same. (from F.F. Bruce, “Hebrews” New International Commentary on the New Testament.)

12. What is the writer’s point in quoting Ps 40 (v9)?
13. What was God’s will for Jesus (10)?

**Read v11-18**

14. How is Jesus greater than the old covenant priests?
15. From this whole passage, what would you say to a Christian who told you that they were troubled by feelings of guilt?

**Read v19-25**

- a) In v22 we are urged to “draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith”. From v19-21, what enables us to do that?
- b) From v22, how are we to do that?

16. What do v24 and 25 tell us about why we meet together as Christians?

17. “The Day” in v25 is the Day of Christ’s Second Coming mentioned in 9:28. Why should the approaching of this Day motivate us to encourage one another all the more? How can you do this more effectively?

**Read v26 to 39.**

18. What sort of sin is this passage about? What will happen to someone who sins in this way?

**Deliberate and Unintentional Sins**

A distinction was made in the Old Testament between deliberate and unintentional sins. See Numbers 15:22-36. Unintentional sins could be forgiven through sacrifices (15:22-29). Deliberate or defiant sins were punishable by death (15:30-36). The same distinction is drawn in Hebrews. When we sin against the Lord unintentionally, not meaning to reject him, and we come to him confessing our sin, we find a merciful high priest. We find a throne of grace and we receive mercy, as Hebrews 4:14-16 says. But if we sin deliberately, that is, reject Jesus and his death for us knowingly and completely, then we are rejecting God’s mercy and inviting his judgement. Jesus made the same distinction in Mark 3:28,29.

19. Why has God included this warning here?

20. Verses 19-25 is the encouragement to persevere. Verses 26-31 is the flip-side of the same coin – a warning against Not persevering. What point is the writer making in v32-39?

21. How should we treat people who seem to be moving away from Christ?

22. In what ways does Jesus provide better access to God than the Jewish sacrificial system? What difference does this make to you?

**Prayer Points:**

**Praise God for** Jesus’ obedience to his Father’s will - coming into the world, taking a body, his perfectly obedient life, dying, Jesus’ sacrifice which takes away sin once for all

**Pray for** the coming of the day when all Jesus’ enemies will be defeated. **For Ourselves** - we will draw near to God confidently through Jesus. That we will remain faithful right to the end. **For those drifting away** - name them if appropriate - that they will come back and not reject Christ totally. We will be diligent in helping them and loving them.

# Better Endurance:

## Hebrews 11-12:17

Ch 10 has finished with the encouragement to persevere (36) and not to throw away our confidence (35), but to believe and be saved (39). Ch 11 is a history lesson, showing us what this sort of life looks like. These faithful saints speak to us from the grave (4).

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” v1. Many people today would say you can’t be sure of anything in the future and you can’t be certain of anything you can’t see. Is Christian faith, blind faith? How is faith possible? This is an important question because as verse 6 says, “without faith it is impossible to please God.” This passage is about the faith that pleases God.

### Read 11:1-6

1. How does the end of chapter 10 connect to chapter 11? What does perseverance have to do with faith?
2. According to v1-3, what is faith? What does v6 add?

The author gives examples of faith in the Old Testament right from Genesis chapter 1 to the end. We won’t have time to look at all of them. Let’s look at Abraham.

### Read 11:8-19

## The Story of Abraham

Hebrews refers to a few incidents in the story of Abraham. If you want to read the original story, here are the passages:

### Hebrews 11

v8 Abraham called from Ur to Canaan

v9 Abraham settles in Canaan

v11 Sarah’s barrenness

v11 Abraham a father despite his age

v12 Promise of numerous descendants

v18 God says Abraham’s offspring will come through Isaac

v17-19 Abraham offers Isaac as a sacrifice

### Genesis

12:1-7

12:8,9

15:1-3; 16:1

17:15-19

15:1-5

21:1-13

22:1-18

3. From v8,9 how did Abraham show faith, as defined in verse 1?
4. From v11 how did Abraham show faith as defined in verse 1?
5. How did the people of old receive their commendation from God? In what did they place their faith? How is their faith the same as ours? How is it different?



6. From v13-16, what were all these people of faith looking forward to?

**Read Hebrews 11:20-40.** After listing many more people of faith in v20 to 38, the author summarises and applies the lessons to us in v39 and 40.

7. What has God planned for them and us? (There are hints of this already in v10, 13-16)
8. How should God's faithfulness affect how we understand our circumstances?
9. How do those who suffered for their faith encourage you to endure?
10. What does it mean to have a future-looking faith?

How do all the examples in this chapter demonstrate it?

In what ways might new covenant believers do so?

11. What does it mean that "only together with us would they (Old Testament saints) be made perfect"? What does the new covenant have to do with their perfection?
12. **Read 12:1-17.** The readers seem to be undergoing persecution (4). What encouragements does the writer give them in the face of this persecution in:

V1 (looking back to Ch 11)

V2-3

V5-13

Jesus is both our **example** of persevering faith in the face of suffering (12:2b-3) and **the author and perfecter** of our faith (12:2a, see also 2:10b) – the one who begins our faith and provides its foundation, as well as the one who will ensure that it achieves its goal, and that we make it to the end.

13. What is the relationship between the Lord's discipline and the exhortation to strengthen tired hands and weak knees? How does v11 lead to the exhortation of v12?

Why are Christians able to run with the kind of strength described in v12?

**The life that endures hardship (7), and makes level paths (13) is described in practical terms. Attitudes seem to be the key idea – peacefulness, bitterness, and gratitude.**

14. "Make every effort ... to be holy; without holiness no-one will see the Lord." v14.

- a) What does it mean to be holy?
- b) Is there a specific area you need to be holy? If so, what is it and how can you be holy in that area of your life?

**v16,17** summarise two incidents in Genesis. God's promise was to bless Abraham's descendents. Abraham and Sarah had one son, Isaac, and Isaac had twin boys, Esau and Jacob. Esau was the first born. There was great rivalry between them. In Genesis 25:27-34 Jacob gets Esau to give him his rights as firstborn in exchange for a meal. And in 27:1-40 Jacob tricks his father Isaac into giving him the blessing meant for Esau.

15. What was Esau's sin? How could we sin in that way?

16. In what ways does Jesus provides better endurance than our own? What difference does this make to you?

### **Prayer Points:**

**Give Thanks** for the example of the faith of past saints.

**Praise God** for Jesus, who endured the cross for our sake.

**Ask God** to help us endure hardship as discipline, trusting him as our loving Father. Pray specifically for any enduring hardship.

# A Better Kingdom: Hebrews 12:18-13:25

## A Tale of Two Mountains

Read 12:18 to 24

This passage brings us face to face with the holiness of God. He is awesome and frightening in his absolute holiness and purity. So how can we sinners know and serve Him?

**The First Mountain.** v18-21. These verses refer back to what happened after God rescued the Israelites from Egypt and brought them to Mt Sinai and appeared to them there as recorded in Exodus 19:9-19; 20:18,19 and Deuteronomy 19:9.

1. In a few words, how would you describe this meeting with God? Why was it like that?

**The Second Mountain** v22 to 24.

### **“The Church of the Firstborn”**

What is the “church of the firstborn”? “Firstborn” is plural, unlike in 1:6 where it is singular and refers to Jesus. “Church” is a common word meaning “assembly” or “gathering”. So the phrase means, “the gathering of the firstborn people, whose names are written in heaven.” It is a way of talking about God’s chosen people taken from the Old Testament. In Exodus 4:22,23 God told Moses to say to Pharaoh, “This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, “Let my son go, so he may worship me.” But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.” The picture of the names of God’s people recorded in a book is common in the Bible. It also goes back to Exodus (see 32:32,33) and was referred to by Jesus (Luke 10:20).

Mt Zion was literally the mountain on which Jerusalem was built (for example Psalm 48:1,2). But the city was destroyed in 587 B.C. by the Babylonians. Despite this, prophets like Isaiah foresaw a glorious future for Jerusalem and “Mt Zion”. For example, see Isaiah 60:13-22.

2. What actually is the mountain described in v22-24?
3. The “sprinkled blood” is the blood of Christ shed for us. What word does it speak? See 10:22; 9:13,14
4. How does this mountain compare to the first mountain?

Read v25 to 29

5. On the basis of v18-24 what command does the writer give in v25?

Verse 26 and 27 speak of the removal of this creation and the coming of the eternal kingdom of God.

6. From v28,29, since we are receiving this unshakeable kingdom, what should we do? Why?

**Read Hebrews 13.**

**Love**

7. What is the connection between worshipping God acceptably (12:28) and loving others (13:1)?

**Love for Strangers.** "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it." 13:2. Abraham showed hospitality to three men and at least one turned out to be the angel of God. See Genesis 18. (Also perhaps Gideon in Judges 6:11-24 and Manoah in Judges 13)

8. a) Should **we** expect to entertain angels if we take in strangers?

b) What sort of strangers should we show hospitality to? What about stranger-danger?

**Love for Those Suffering** "Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering." v3. These are most likely fellow Christians imprisoned unfairly for their faith. See 10:32-34.

9. What is the principle being taught here? How could that principle apply in our situation?

**Love in Marriage** "Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." v4

10. How can you honour marriage, yours (if you're married) and others (whether you're married or not)?

**Don't Love Money** "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" v5,6 Remember these people had had possessions confiscated. See 10:34

11. From these verses, what is the key to not loving money and being content with what we have?

**Leadership among God's People.**

12. V7-8 are about past leaders, perhaps the founders of the church, as opposed to the present leaders mentioned in v17. What attitude does the writer want his readers to have to their former leaders?

13. **Read v17.** What attitude should we have to our present leaders?

How can you make your leaders' job of leading you a joy and not a burden?

What does this verse teach about being a Christian leader?

### **Christian Service (v9-16)**

14. Remembering their past leaders and the Word of God that they taught (v7), they are not to be carried away to believe teaching different to that Word - v9. What clues does this section give as to what the "strange teachings" may have been?

What is the altar that we have which those who still serve at the earthly tabernacle have no right to eat from?

15. What is the writer telling his readers to do in v13,14?

16. From v15,16, if you are forgiven completely through Jesus' sacrifice, what are the sacrifices you should now be offering to God?

17. What do you think of the benediction in v20-21? How does the description of God in v20 connect to the request of v21?

18. In what ways is the new kingdom Jesus has introduced better than the old kingdom of Mt Sinai? What difference does this make to you?

### **Prayer Points:**

**Give Thanks** for the kingdom we are receiving. **Praise God** that we haven't come to the fearful mountain but to the gracious one. **Ask God** to help us in serving him with reverence and awe **Pray** for our Christian leaders, that they would work hard at caring for people's spiritual well being. Pray for ourselves - that we would make their task a pleasure not a pain, and that we will be willing to share the disgrace of Jesus, if need be.