

Study Group 1: Heb 1v1 - 2v8: Christ Superior to Prophets and Angels

For the Hebrews, these were “last days” (1v2) – urgent days just before the Roman Invasion of AD70. Hebrews was written to the Jerusalem ecclesia to emphasise the superiority of Jesus Christ. In early days it had been a large, thriving ecclesia (Acts 2v41-47; 4v4,29-37). But now there was a weariness amongst them – they were turning their backs on Jesus Christ by going back to Judaism and the Jewish law. Seven O.T. quotations are used in Heb 1 to prove that Jesus Christ is superior in to the prophets and to angels.

God had previously spoken in many portions, and by various methods (1v1). Over thousands of years, by narrative, psalm, ritual, poetry and prophecy. But in “these last days” God’s character is shown in His Son. He is the perfect reflection of God’s glory (1v3) – the character revealed to Moses in Exodus 34v6-7. And if Jesus is the Son, he has inherited his Father’s property (1v4-5). He has a superior worthiness – angels will worship him (1v6). He is the one who will fulfill the promises to David (2 Sam 7v12-17).

He has a superior future destiny (1v7-12) – God is going to give the world’s government into his hands (1v13-14; 2v8). Christ will have the world in subjection because he is best qualified to do so (2v5). As **Son of God** he has authority to raise the dead (John 5v25-27). But as **Son of Man**, he overcame sin on our behalf and is therefore best qualified to be our judge (2v7-8). Let us therefore be thankful for Jesus Christ as the centre of our hope (8v1), and earnestly grasp hold to the hope we have been given (10v23).

Study Group 2: Heb 2v9 - 3v19: A merciful and faithful High Priest

The Son’s life of suffering and sacrifice qualifies him to be a merciful and faithful High Priest (2v9-18). This is what makes Jesus superior in all respects. If Jesus came in the nature of angels he could never have sympathised with our weaknesses (2v16-17). Sin could never have been destroyed on its own territory. However, Jesus came **in our nature**. He **overcame sin** in his life by being perfectly obedient to his Father. In fact he became obedient even to the point of dying on the cross. He was tested and tried to that extent. God raised him from the dead and in so doing he conquered death on our behalf. Paul says in 2 Cor 5v14 that “the love of Christ compels us”. His life, death and resurrection compels in us an emotional response.

When we become part of God’s family by belief and baptism **into** the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, he becomes our mediator. God forgives us for Christ’s sake (Eph 4v32). Because of the love God has for His Son, and given that Jesus pleads to the Father on our behalf, God sees us as righteous, even though we are not (John 15v4-5). When we repent, He forgives our sins - because instead of seeing our sins, he sees his Son! Without Christ’s victory over sin, this could never have been possible.

Hebrews 3 explains how Christ is greater than Moses. Moses had been a faithful **SERVANT in** God’s House. Jesus however was **A SON over** God’s House. That was the difference. **WE** are part of God’s house if we hold fast until the end (v6). The Hebrews are then exhorted to learn the lessons of Israel’s past and endure unto the end (3v7-19). Yahweh is a **living** God (3v12)– His **ways** are seen in people! (3v10). Is the character of God seen in *our* lives? Our relationship with His Son will help us develop that character and show it in our lives.

Study Group 3: Hebrews 4:1 – 6:6 – “Jesus superior to Joshua and Aaron”

Hebrews 4 continues on from the theme of ch. 3, but the focus changes from Moses to Joshua. Hebrews 5 however begins a new theme – the priesthood of Christ, and this theme continues until ch. 10v18. Christ’s priesthood is the greatest theme of Hebrews. Moses was not permitted to take Israel into the Land, and therefore he typified the Law itself, which could not give eternal life. Joshua typified Jesus by taking Israel into the Land. Paul now describes how that “rest” was only typical of the future “rest” – yet to come!

Would the Hebrews therefore learn the lessons from Israel’s wilderness wanderings? Would they allow God’s Word to penetrate their hearts and minds - to change them? We have a Great High Priest, who understands our weaknesses, and who is our perfect representative. **He overcame sin on our behalf**. Jesus is not only a priest, but he will also be King of the World! (Heb 5v5; Psa 2v6-12).

So why did Jesus Christ have to suffer as he did? **Why did he have to die?**

- He **inherited Adam’s dying nature** through Mary (Rom 8v3; Gal 4v4)
- Jesus **willingly submitted to God’s will** rather than his own - right to the point of death (Matt 26v39). His death on the cross was the last act of obedience in a whole life of perfect obedience (Rom 5v19; Phil 2v8). In doing so he “declared God’s righteousness” (Rom 3v25-26).
- He **defeated sin** by living a perfectly sinless life right to the point of death (Rom 6v6-7, Heb 2v14).
- Jesus **overcame death** by actually dying first and then being resurrected to immortality (1 Cor 15v55).
- He has a **fellow feeling** for all those he came to save, including those killed for their beliefs. Therefore, no-one can say Jesus doesn’t understand (Heb 2v14-18; 4v15).

Study Group 4: Heb 10:32 - 11:22 – “Without Faith it is Impossible to Please God”

Hebrews 10v32-39 is an appeal for **patient endurance and faith**. The Hebrews were now failing to look beyond the immediate problems and material aspects of life. Here was a plea for them to now **recapture** their faith (the faith of “former days”). Hebrews 11 has a **special application to the Jerusalem Ecclesia**. It was written in the context of impending judgment (hence the example of Noah in 11v7). Jesus had already warned of what was to come in his Olivet prophecy many years earlier. The Roman Invasion of **AD70** was now only 7-8 years away. They would soon have to flee the city. The examples of faith are specifically chosen for their circumstances. Many of these examples are very obscure. Some of the other well known characters have very obscure events recorded – because those events were directly relevant to the ecclesia it was written to. We are also living “last days” - like Noah (**Luke 17v26-27**).

Abel (**11v4**) offered a “*more excellent sacrifice*”. He understood the *principle* behind his offering - that it pointed forward to the Lord Jesus Christ. Did the Hebrews? Enoch was “*translated that he should not see death*” – The Hebrews were also going to be translated that they should not see death when the Romans invaded. Abraham had to depart from his native land (**v8**). So to with the Hebrews. Abraham at any time could have gone back to Ur (**11v14**) – but his FAITH prevented it. Abraham attributed to God the power to perform something never done before – a resurrection from the dead! This was real faith! Isaac (**11v17**) was a type of Christ (**Heb 11v15-19**). Would the Hebrews be able to see **God’s Son** as the Lamb provided? Did they understand what this type represented? In **Heb 11v20-21** we have 2 examples where fathers stood firm against the pleas of their children whom they dearly loved – because of their faith in what God said. Would the Hebrews allow ties to family and loved ones hold them back? The lesson from Joseph also – His bones were taken out of Egypt (**11v22**). Were the Hebrews going to leave Jerusalem or were their *bones* going to be strewn throughout the city? (cp. **Heb 3v17**). The lessons for us in these last days are obvious.

Study Group 5: Hebrews 11:23 – 12:13 – “Of Whom the World was not Worthy”

Remember again that **Hebrews 11** has a **special application to the Jerusalem Ecclesia**. It was written in the context of impending judgement.

Moses’s parents were not afraid of the King’s commandment (**11v23**). The Hebrews also needed to overcome their fear of the Romans - by **FAITH**. God can “draw out” his children from seemingly hopeless situations. So too in AD70! Moses led **an exodus** out of Egypt. Would the Hebrews have enough faith to lead an exodus out of Jerusalem? Moses had to make a **very unnatural decision** (**v24**). Because his mind was on things “**NOT SEEN AS YET**”. Rahab also is a highly appropriate example for the Jerusalem ecclesia. Why? She developed faith in the **imminent destruction** of her city and way of life. What was Rahab’s attitude towards the city? She couldn’t wait to leave! Rahab is also the only example (in detail) in **Heb 11** of one who lived after the Law was given. Look at Rahab’s faith in **Joshua 2**. She believes in **ONE** God who created all things & she knows Him by His Name Yahweh. She believed in the promises to Abraham. Why couldn’t the Jerusalem ecclesia be just as clear about the destruction of their city as Rahab was about the destruction of Jericho? What about us? Jesus Christ endured for the joy set before him (**12v2**) – Is that joy alive in our minds also as we await his return? Do we appreciate it and strive for it?

Study Group 6: Heb 12:14 – 13:25 - “Let Brotherly Love Continue”

Paul is drawing his letter to a close. In **v15**, he exhorts them to “*look diligently*” at their walk and actions. He cites from **Deut 29v18**, and warns them to beware of the temptation to turn away from the truth, to be a poisonous influence on God’s people, who had been drawn out of the nations of the earth (Egypt) – The warning to the Hebrews was to beware if they were the person responsible for encouraging people to forsake Christ and stay behind in Jerusalem. In **v18-22** they are again reminded of what they now had Christ, and how the mercy that had been extended to them was far superior to the fear that they had under the Law, as illustrated by the Israelites response at Mt Sinai when God spoke to them.

Paul gets on to the crucial argument in **v9**, they must leave the Law (“*meats*”) and go unto Christ (“*established in grace*”). Why? Because the Law was “*unprofitable*”, in that it did not provide true Fellowship with God. Paul shows from the Law itself, and in particular the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, that the Law did not provide provision for them to gain true fellowship with God. Even though the Law did not provide a sacrifice which could give true fellowship with God, it did point forward to one that could, that being Christ. The Hebrews were then faced with the ultimate decision.... Stay with the Law and the City of Jerusalem and perish, or come to Christ, leave the city and be part of the eternal city of the future age. Are we not faced with the same decision?

He concludes by considering what should then be their response to such a sacrifice, it should be a “**sacrifice of praise**”. (**v15**). They should be exceedingly thankful for the sacrifice of Christ and it should be thanks that will show forth in the way they lived their lives. How do we respond to the wonderful Blessing of Christ? Does our thanks spill forth into the way we live our lives?