



JESUS

THE SUPERIOR ONE

A Study Guide On
HEBREWS

Jesus: The Superior One

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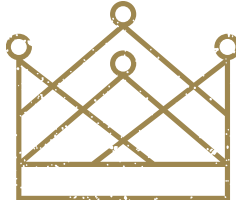
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JESUS

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Long ago, at many times and in
many ways, God spoke to our
fathers by the prophets, but in
these last days he has spoken to us
by his Son, whom he appointed
the heir of all things, through
whom also he created the world.

— HEBREWS 1:1-2 —

LESSON ONE

GOD'S TRUE WORD

Hebrews 1:1-3

The middleman. You know the kind. They sometimes frustrate you to no end. When buying a vehicle, you don't talk to the main man. You talk to the middleman. When you order your food, you don't order from the one in charge. When you work for a corporation, you don't work for the owner. We are all too familiar with the middleman.

The book of Hebrews begins with these earth-shattering, time-stopping, life-changing words: "God has spoken directly and personally." Written by an unknown Jewish author to an unknown Jewish audience suffering persecution, Hebrews comes at a pivotal moment in the kingdom of God. For in the Jewish mind, God did not speak directly or personally. He used a middleman.

OPENING THOUGHTS

1. Why do we have "middlemen" today? What purpose do they serve and how does it compare to the religious middlemen of the Old Testament?

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2. What frustrates us about the middleman today? Do you think the Jews had similar frustrations or disappointments? Did a middleman complicate their lives?

JESUS: THE LIVING WORD OF GOD

The matter of God speaking is the matter of God's Word. What He says to mankind is the most important thing man can know. It is also the most elusive thing man can receive. Unless God condescends to our level of thinking and relates to us in a way we can understand, we will know nothing about Him. An insect in your hand can never rise to understand you, as you can never condescend to relate to it. But, this is exactly what God did for us.

In the Old Testament age, God spoke "at many times and in many ways" through His prophets using visions, parables, types, and symbols. These prophets used narrative and poetry. They spoke of law and prophecy. They taught doctrine. They encouraged. They warned. There were various ways, but it was always God speaking. It was always God's Word.

The prophet's job was to be a divine waiter, of sorts, who carried the message of God untouched to the people of God. He was a spiritual middleman. "But now," continues the writer of Hebrews, "he has spoken to us by his Son." Jesus was not a new middleman. He was no mere prophet—He was more. Jesus did not take revelation to God's people. Rather, He was the revelation to God's people.

Read Hebrews 1:1-2 and answer the questions below.

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3. Why do you suppose these words were so shocking to the Jewish readers of that time? In what ways are they shocking to readers of our time?
4. Hebrews 1:2 describes Jesus as the one whom God “appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.” Why is this significant? What does the writer intend to say and why?
5. With so many religions in the world claiming to have a Jesus, how important is it to meet with the true one? Why does it matter?

JESUS: THE RADIANT IMAGE OF GOD

As the heir of all things, Jesus is rightful ruler and owner of all things made. This includes the very space in the distant span of the universe we have yet to see, all the way to the smallest molecule we have yet to understand. He even owns the laws by which all things work and the elements in which they exist. Everything belongs to Jesus and was made through Him (Heb. 1:2; Jn. 1:1-3). This is because Jesus is God.

All things that were made were created to bring glory to God (Ps. 19:1-4). Who we are should bring Him glory (Is. 43:7). What we do should bring Him glory (1 Pet. 4:10-11). But, the writer of Hebrews says Jesus “is the radiance of the glory of

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God and exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Heb. 1:3).

As the sun radiates its light, God radiates His glory. We don’t look and see the sun. We look and see the light of the sun. Likewise, we don’t look and see God, we look and see the light of God, who is Jesus. He is the precise, accurate, meticulous representation of God’s essence. To see Jesus is to see God (Jn. 14:9). Furthermore, He is the very Word by which all creation is held in order.

Read Hebrews 1:3 and answer the questions below.

6. What does it mean to you that Jesus is the glory of God, the image of God, and the power of God? How does this relate to your life?

7. Hebrews 1:3 and 4 tell us that Jesus, who is God, made payment for sins and returned to heaven to sit on the divine throne. What does this mean for us today in light of this lesson?

8. If Jesus is the way to meet God, how important is it for you to know Jesus more thoroughly? How critical is it that you know Him personally and directly?

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CONCLUSION

The Jews believed the angels were God's highest created beings who carried out nearly all of His will in creation. There was nothing higher. This is why the remaining verses in this chapter focus so much on Jesus being "superior to angels" (Heb. 1:4-14). The truth of Hebrews 1 was indeed earth-shattering. God has spoken. Jesus is God's Word. But this is the tip of the iceberg. All of Hebrews is about Jesus, the superior One, the very self-disclosure of God.

Therefore, we must pay much
closer attention to what we have
heard, lest we drift away from it.

— HEBREWS 2:1 —

LESSON TWO

GOD'S PERFECT MESSAGE

Hebrews 2:1-18

After working the dusty fields of the ranch, the farmer retires to his home for the day. He kicks off his boots on the porch just outside the front door. From there it is easier to slip back into them on the way out to the field in the morning. He heads to his master bathroom only a few steps away, yet it feels like more. He is exhausted.

He pulls the thin string dangling from the ceiling, and the light trips on. He looks in the mirror and is terrified by what he sees. After a hard day's work in the wind and heat, a mixture of dirt and sweat formed a thick coat of mud on his face. What a mess! He gazes down at the sink, just about to turn on the aluminum water faucet. But instead, he turns and walks away. Tomorrow he's going to get dirty again. So what's the point?

OPENING THOUGHTS

1. For what reasons did the farmer refuse to wash his face? What sort of consequences, if any, might have occurred due to his decision?

LESSON TWO

2. How does this story illustrate the way we walk with Christ? (Read James 1:22-25 for help.) Why do we turn away from the clean up we so desperately need?

JESUS: THE RELIABLE WORD

In the Old Testament, God's message was generally delivered by His angels to the prophets (Acts 7:51-53; Deut. 33:2; Gal. 3:19). However, in the New Testament, God's message comes to us through Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:2). He is both the fulfillment and the substance of the message. Therefore, there is nothing greater for us to hear—nothing more important to heed—than the message of Christ. He is the truth in whom we can anchor our lives.

A large ship, if it is not properly fastened to the shore, will slowly drift away. The winds and waters will carry it away from its harbor. But, a ship that is firmly fastened to its haven will remain safe and secure. This is particularly true of the more sturdy docks, for they will resist even the toughest winds and waves. Like a firmly fastened boat, the Christian who is anchored in Christ alone will be safely secured from forces that could draw him away.

Read Hebrews 2:1-4 and answer the following questions.

3. According to this passage, what makes the message of Christ so reliable? Why can we trust it so far as to anchor ourselves in it?

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4. What happens, particularly to our walk with God and our witness to man, when we fail to firmly fasten ourselves to the message of Christ? Does it help or harm? Why?
5. According to verse 2, what are the consequences of not obeying God's Word? Why is it so important for us to heed His Word (consider Numbers 15:31 and Hebrews 10:26-31)? What does this have to do with firmly fastening ourselves to Christ?

JESUS: THE AVAILABLE WORD

We can have confidence in the message of Christ because of the reliability of its source. Further credibility came through signs and wonders throughout Christ's ministry and the early church (Mark 16:20; Acts 2:22). There were also people who witnessed these signs (Acts 5:32). For these reasons, we can be motivated to firmly fasten ourselves to Christ and His message. We can be sure that His Word brings life and righteousness.

Neglecting God's truth is neglecting God's Son, apart from whom there is no salvation. The two are inseparable. This is why He is called the living Word (Jn. 1:1, 14). When we allow the winds and waves of this world to carry us away, we are neglecting the good work of God in sanctifying our hearts (Heb. 2:1-4). Through Christ, the power of God is available to us. Without it, we are lost at sea.

Read Hebrews 2:5-18 and answer the following questions.

LESSON TWO

6. In addition to receiving salvation, what is another result of accepting Christ's message (see Hebrews 2:11-13)? How can this motivate you to firmly fasten yourself in His Word?
7. Since we are warned against drifting, there must be a real danger of it happening. How might Christ's suffering help us with this temptation (see Hebrews 2:14-18)?
8. After reading Hebrews 2, do you view the message of Christ differently? How has it changed your perspective?

CONCLUSION

God has provided countless ways in which His message has proven reliable and true. He desires that we fasten ourselves to Christ, the living Word, and enjoy His sanctifying power. He calls us to war against the temptation to settle and sleep while the winds and waves gently and subtly carry us away. But, lest we grow weary in this fight to firmly fasten ourselves, we have Christ. He provides what we need to hold tightly to the Word of God. And when we do, we experience life transformation.

For Jesus has been counted
worthy of more glory than Moses
—as much more glory as the
builder of a house has more honor
than the house itself.

— HEBREWS 3:3 —

LESSON THREE

GOD'S GLORIOUS LEADER

Hebrews 3:1-6

“Moses.” The name alone was enough to grab the attention of any Israelite. He was the greatest leader in the history of Israel. When he took over, the people were literally in ruins, and when he had finished, they were headed into the Promised Land. He affected big change, and that is no overstatement.

Moses found the Israelites in slavery. He took on the dictator of Egypt, the world's superpower, and extracted the basis of its economy—one million Israelite slaves. After leading them out into the desert, he ensured they had enough food, water, law, and order to keep a holding pattern while he wrote a constitution. With this constitution in place, Moses developed a governmental infrastructure, organized a national military, established a civil leadership system, and staffed all of it. He turned a million slaves into a self-sustaining nation and led them to the Promised Land. In his free time, he wrote Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Moses' leadership was so great, he is named at least 700 times in the Bible. Even Jesus quoted him. If you mentioned his name to any Jew, they would immediately know who you were talking about and many ideas would rush through their mind. Without question, Moses was a great and transformational leader.

OPENING THOUGHTS

1. Is there someone you would consider a spiritual hero, whether a historic or public figure, or even someone in your personal life? If so, why?
2. What makes your spiritual hero great? What transforming impact have they had on your life?

JESUS: THE FAITHFUL APOSTLE

In the first two chapters of Hebrews, the writer explains why Jesus is superior to the angels. In chapter three, he focuses on Jesus' superiority over Moses. He addresses the readers as "holy brothers," or fellow Jewish brothers who have been set apart to "share in a heavenly calling"—a call to be transformed into the spiritual body of Christ (Heb. 3:1). This would provoke a sense of community among them, a sense of belonging together for a divine purpose.

The writer exhorts fellow believers to "consider Jesus" (Heb. 3:1). To consider something means to fix our thinking upon it. To understand the message of God, we must consider Jesus, the living Word of God and epitome of the message. When we reflect on the transformational power of God, we must also consider Christ. In other words, to be transformed from slavery to freedom, from bondage to promise, from sinner to saint, we must fix our thinking on Jesus Christ. He leads us to the calling for which we have been set apart for God.

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Read Hebrews 3:1-2 and answer the following questions.

3. Compare Jesus and Moses. In what ways are they alike? In what ways do they differ? How is Jesus superior to Moses?
4. Why do you think Jesus is called “the apostle and high priest of our confession”? How do those titles influence the way we “consider Jesus”?
5. As a church body, how can we fix our hearts on Jesus in a practical way? What will it take for us to do it collectively?

JESUS: THE CHURCH BUILDER

Moses was so significant to the Jewish people, they missed Jesus altogether. Moses was a foreshadower of Christ. He was lifted up in order to point to the Messiah. But the Jews lifted Moses so highly in their minds, they neglected to see the One whom he represented. They fixed their eyes on the “picture” of the Messiah and missed the Messiah when He came. Jesus is more powerful, more transformational, and more glorious than Moses, Israel’s beloved leader.

The word “house” appears seven times in Hebrews 3:1-6. It is a reference to a family of people rather than a building. The writer uses it to compare the roles of Moses and Jesus. One stewards the family, or house, as one of the family. The other is the builder and owner of the family and oversees its

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stewardship. “Every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things [or all things house-related] is God” (Heb. 3:4).

Read Hebrews 3:3-6 and answer the following questions.

6. Although Moses and Jesus were both faithful in the house of God, one is called “servant” and the other is called “son.” What do you think this implies (consider verse 4)?
7. In your own words, explain why “Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses.” According to this passage, what is significant about Him?
8. What dangers await those who fix their eyes on something other than Christ? What consequences will come? Why is it important that our hearts are fixed on Christ (consider verse 6)?

CONCLUSION

Moses was a glorious leader, but Jesus is more glorious. The Jews let a national hero take their focus off the One who deserved it—the One who built the house and holds all things together. This is what the writer of Hebrews emphasized in this text, in its ancient context. But the same thing happens to us today. As the Jews clung to Moses instead of Christ, we cling to

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heroes and miss Christ altogether. But this should not be. We must hold fast our confidence in Jesus, God's glorious leader.

So then, there remains a Sabbath
rest for the people of God, for
whoever has entered God's rest
has also rested from his works as
God did from his.

— HEBREWS 4:9-10 —

LESSON FOUR

GOD'S BLESSED REST

Hebrews 4:1-10

In a masterful display of power, God created all things by the work of His word. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). Each day of His work, God spoke and His Spirit created. He made the time, space, matter, and introduced the laws of continuum. He made light, water, and land. He formed vegetation, plants, seed, and fruit. He brought about seasons and stars. He fashioned animals and sea creatures. He molded man and gave him life. God did all these things in six days, then He rested.

Interestingly enough, God is a being of unending energy. He is completely self-sustaining and never requires outside help. He doesn't run out of vigor. And yet, He rested on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2). It wasn't because He was tired. It was because He was satisfied. “The heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them” (Gen. 2:1). God was finished, and He was satisfied.

Adam and Eve were also satisfied in God's finished work. It was complete. It had all that they needed done. They could easily work during the day and enjoy the bounty of their labor. They could enjoy the peace between each other, the animals, and, most importantly, God. They walked and talked with Him. They were satisfied in Him and enjoyed the peace of His work. This was ultimate rest.

OPENING THOUGHTS

1. How would you describe rest in light of this story? What was it that conditioned Adam and Eve's rest in God? How did they lose it?
2. How do you experience rest today? Is it something you have? Is it something you can lose or gain? Explain.

JESUS: THE IMMINENT PROMISE

The concept of *rest* in the Hebrew mind was historically loaded. It was first modeled in the creation account where God is said to have “rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done” (Gen. 2:2). It was later developed into a weekly and annual pattern bound by divine law (Ex. 31:15; Lev. 25:4). This observance was a practical reminder that God gives rest.

The concept was further developed in the promise of Canaan, a *place* of rest, which was never fully experienced by the Israelites, for they provoked God “in their heart” (Heb. 3:10). They were “unable to enter” God’s promised rest “because of unbelief” (Heb. 3:19). Since the “promise of entering his rest still stands,” continues the writer of Hebrews, “let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it” (Heb. 4:1). In other words, let their example stir up solemn concern in your heart so that you do not make the same mistake.

By chapter 4 of Hebrews, the concept of rest is wrapped in the idea of inheriting salvation through Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:14).

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Rest takes on a clearer, more theological meaning that “we must pay much closer attention to” (Heb. 2:1) and not “neglect such a great salvation” (Heb. 2:3). Moses led the Israelites to a place of rest, an earthly foreshadower of the heavenly promise that one day Jesus will lead the people to a place of rest. The time has come, says the writer of Hebrews. Don’t miss it again.

Read Hebrews 4:1-11 and answer the questions below.

3. The meaning of rest in the Hebrew mind underwent a series of developments until finally referring to salvation. How would you define rest now? How do you think the Hebrews would have defined it when reading this epistle?
4. According to Hebrews 4:2, what was the reason for the Israelites’ failure to enter into the place of rest? How does it relate to our lesson?
5. Hebrews describes a believer as one who has “rested from his works as God did from his” (Heb. 4:10). What do you suppose this means? Do you enjoy that rest now?

JESUS: THE ACTUAL PROMISE

Plainly speaking, rest is the state of ceasing from intense physical work. It is a time of peace for the body. Theologically speaking, rest is ceasing from intense spiritual work. It is a time

LESSON FOUR

of peace for the soul. The Sabbath rest was established after God created (Ex. 20:11). The Day of Atoning rest was initiated after God delivered (Lev. 16:31). Rest is a reality because of God's work.

This fact remains when it comes to our eternal salvation. Though it is not by works that we attain salvation, it was by works that it was accomplished—the works of Jesus Christ. God is the worker who earns our rest. It is “not your own doing,” but by His (Eph. 2:8).

Read Ephesians 2:8-10 and Matthew 11:28-30, then answer the questions below.

6. What does the Ephesians passage teach us about grace and works? How does it relate to us being God's workmanship meant for good works?
7. Jesus called out to specific sinners in the Matthew passage—those “who labor and are heavy laden.” What does this mean? How does it relate to the remainder of the passage?
8. How do you see rest differently today? Do you enjoy it now and anticipate it more fully in the future? Why or why not?

CONCLUSION

To the Old Testament Israelite, rest was found in a place. To the New Testament Christian, rest is found in a person—Jesus Christ. We can have rest in Him because He has completed the work to please God on our behalf. We can rest from worry, guilt, pressure, anxiety, and all other concerns of pleasing God ourselves (Heb. 4:10). The peace available to us—peace with God won by Christ—can be enjoyed in our hearts today, developed in our lives over time, and fully realized in the future when we see our Lord face-to-face. But, we must believe. Heed the prophetic words of David and the writer of Hebrews: “Today, if you hear God’s voice, do not harden your hearts,” but “strive to enter that rest” (Heb. 4:7, 11).

And being made perfect, he
became the source of eternal
salvation to all who obey him,
being designated by God a high
priest after the order of
Melchizedek.

— HEBREWS 5:9-10 —

LESSON FIVE

GOD'S HIGH PRIEST

Hebrews 5:1-10

Imagine you are a priest before the time of Christ. It is your divine responsibility to sacrifice offerings for the sins of your nation. You are responsible for the transgressions of your family, friends, and fellow countrymen. Additionally, you make reparation for your own sins. This is your duty day in and day out, sacrifice after sacrifice.

There is seemingly no end to the repetition of ritualistic slaughters. The butchering of innocent animals today makes no account for the sins of tomorrow. Your offerings, though commanded and rightly administered, are not permanent. This is your life for your remaining years in the priesthood.

The Levitical priests wrestled with this truth. They repeatedly bore the weight of sin's great cost each day in the temple. No matter how many sacrifices, they were not enough to make amends with the holy, eternal God. No amount of animal blood could permanently erase the sins of man. Though critical, the work of the priests was imperfect. Each knife to the neck of an animal reminded them of this reality.

OPENING THOUGHTS

1. If you were a Levitical priest, how would you feel about making these repetitive sacrifices for you and your people? How emotionally difficult would it be? Why?

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2. How does this affect your perspective of the Levitical priesthood? In what new way do you think about the priests of old and what they experienced?

JESUS: THE FINAL PRIEST

In Hebrews 2:17, Jesus is identified as the “merciful and faithful high priest.” In chapter 3, He is the “apostle and high priest” (Heb. 3:1). However, in chapter 4 His humanity is the focus. He is described as the “great high priest” who sympathizes with our weaknesses as one who was tempted but without sin (Heb. 4:14-16). Because of this aspect of Jesus’ atoning work, we are told to “draw near to the throne of grace” to receive His salvation and to do so “with confidence” (Heb. 4:16). This confidence is rooted in two realities: Jesus’ final and *sympathetic* work as High Priest.

Contemporary Jews were familiar with Aaron. During the time of Moses, God appointed him and his sons to be priests of Israel (Ex. 28:1). They were to work as mediators between God and His people, making offerings for their sins. Their role was temporary and foreshadowing, an illustration of Christ’s redemptive work so that He would be clearly recognized when He arrived. The Psalms describe Him as a “priest forever after the order of Melchizedek,” signifying His uniqueness (Ps. 110:4). Jesus is a Priest of priests, a distinct and superior mediator for mankind.

Read Hebrews 5:1-6 and answer the following questions.

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3. Can you identify the three characteristics of priests according to Hebrews 5:1? How important are these characteristics?
4. What does Hebrews 5:3-4 teach us about the limitations of the priests and their duties before God? Why were they unable to perfectly fulfill the priesthood?
5. When compared to the Levitical priests, how does Christ fulfill their role? What makes Him so unique?

JESUS: THE SYMPATHETIC PRIEST

Christ embodies all characteristics of the priest: He is human, appointed by God, and He sacrificed for the sins of man. However, He is unique as a priest. He has no limitations in His priesthood and perfectly performs His duties. Inasmuch as He is sinless, His sacrifice was pure. Since He is eternal, His sacrifice stands forever. Jesus didn't need to sacrifice for Himself, nor did He need to repeat His sacrifice time and time again. It was pure and perpetual. No other sacrifice is needed—ever.

In light of Christ's sinlessness and our sinfulness, we might be tempted to feel like He is unable to relate to us. We might feel disconnected from Him, but that is not the case. Christ is fully human and fully able to sympathize as one who deeply understands our weaknesses. He suffered as a human

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and grew in His obedience to the Father (Heb. 5:8; Phil. 2:8). He became our perfect mediator, not only because of sinlessness, but also because of His enduring humanity. He knows firsthand the struggles we face.

Read Hebrews 5:7-10 and answer the following questions.

6. Why is it significant that Jesus was fully God and fully human? What is so critical about His humanity? What is so critical about His divinity?
7. In what ways did Jesus “learn obedience through what he suffered” (consider Philippians 2:8 and Matthew 26:39)? How can we make sense of this in light of God’s omniscience?
8. What is the result of Christ’s suffering and obedience to the Father (consider Hebrews 5:9 with Hebrews 2:9-10)? How does this help you today?

CONCLUSION

Jesus and the Levites served as God’s priests. The Levites, however, served a temporary purpose. Their priestly duties pointed to a perfect priest to come in Christ. He fulfills the priestly role without fault and without end. He is God’s eternal, sinless Son. His work on the cross makes Him our infinitely perfect and final mediator before God. Turn to Him in your

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earthly struggles, for the heavenly Priest understands and hears you.

Therefore let us leave the
elementary doctrine of Christ and
go on to maturity, not laying again
a foundation of repentance from
dead works and of faith toward
God, and of instruction about
washings, the laying on of hands,
the resurrection of the dead, and
eternal judgment.

— HEBREWS 6:1-2 —

LESSON SIX

GOD'S MATURING TRUTH

Hebrews 5:11-6:12

Who could forget those iconic images in magazines? You would encounter them right when you were engrossed in an article and then directed to continue reading on another page. On your way there, you would flip to a peculiar picture of a celebrity, proudly sporting a white liquid moustache, with a simple caption: “Got milk?” After a pause to savor the advertiser’s message, you continued with the main story.

Just as advertisers appealed to us mid-story to consume milk for our benefit, the writer of Hebrews was also making an appeal to believers. He interrupted his story with a profound message about milk to his readers, as well. In short, the message was, “You’ve got milk. Now, get meat.” Having milk was not enough.

OPENING THOUGHTS

1. In what physical ways might a person who only consumes milk differ from a person who also consumes solid food? When the Bible refers to milk and solid food, what comes to your mind?

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2. Just as our physical diet progressively changes over time, why do you think it is necessary for our spiritual diet to change as well?

JESUS: THE SAVING TRUTH

In chapters 4 and 5 of Hebrews, Jesus is established as our great High Priest. Though He is the Son of God, Jesus understands our earthly struggles and invites us to draw near, especially in our weaknesses (Heb. 4:14-16). As the suffering servant of God, He is “the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Heb. 5:9).

There are still more wonderful aspects of Jesus’ priesthood to believers, but as the writer of Hebrews made plain, they are for spiritually mature audiences only. The Hebrew believers were rebuked for their lack of maturity in God’s Word, being described as “dull of hearing,” needing to be taught again “the basic principles of the oracles of God” (Heb. 5:11-12). In other words, instead of being promoted to the rank of teachers of God’s Word, they were content with repeating the same grade level year after year, learning no more than the basics of Christian life. They were satisfied with a spiritual diet of milk alone.

Read Hebrews 5:11-14 and answer the following questions.

3. What distinctions did the writer of Hebrews make between immature and mature believers? What other distinctions have you observed between these groups?

LESSON SIX

4. Based on the verses, how would you describe your spiritual diet as a believer? How does it relate to your level of growth since your spiritual birth?

JESUS: THE SUSTAINING TRUTH

As it relates to God's Word, the writer of Hebrews drew a line of distinction between the spiritually immature and the spiritually mature. The former are described as dull hearers, sluggish learners, and "milk" drinkers who are "unskilled in the word of righteousness" (Heb. 5:13). In contrast, the spiritually mature are disciplined listeners, skilled learners, and "meat" eaters who are "trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil" (Heb. 5:14).

When Scripture is taught or preached, believers who "live on milk" tend to "check out" mentally if the meaning of the text is not immediately apparent or applicable to their perceived need. Mature believers welcome the solid food of God's Word, mentally digesting and processing the text. The Hebrew believers were instructed to build upon their foundation of basic doctrine and grow deeper in God's Word (Heb. 6:1).

It is important to understand having Bible knowledge is not equivalent to spiritual maturity. However, spiritual maturity is not possible without Bible knowledge. To grow in Christ, we must study His Word and practice it in our daily living.

Read Hebrews 6:1-3 and Philippians 1:9-11, and answer the following questions.

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6. The writer of Hebrews mentions elements of Christian spiritual foundation in verses 1 and 2. Why is this foundation important? While not dispensing with the foundation, why is it important to move beyond it to reach spiritual maturity?
7. According to Philippians 1:9-11, what characteristics of spiritual maturity were included in Paul's prayer for the church? How do you think scriptural knowledge relates to the other characteristics listed?

JESUS: THE SECURING TRUTH

The writer of Hebrews warned that those who are unwilling to go beyond basic knowledge and digest the deeper teachings of the faith are at risk for abandoning the faith altogether. Apostasy, which means “to fall away,” occurs when a believer, who initially chose to follow Christ, makes a willful, deliberate decision to abandon Him, usually after suffering a crisis of faith. If we refuse to grow deeper in God's Word, digesting the meat of it and savoring His truth, the inevitable storms of life will test our spiritual strength and whether we are securely anchored in Christ. Spiritually immature believers are in danger, possibly one major crisis from falling away from the faith.

Read Hebrews 6:4-8 and answer the following question.

LESSON SIX

6. What major crises could possibly cause believers to abandon faith in Christ? Why will God not restore them again to repentance, according to verse 6? Consider the attitude, actions, and scriptural knowledge of those who crucified Christ. How do they compare to those who fall away?

After a stern rebuke concerning maturity and a warning against apostasy, the Hebrew believers were commended for their love and service toward God's people. Collectively, they were moving toward maturity and fruitfulness in Christ. But, there were immature individuals who needed to take heed to the warning.

Read Hebrews 6:9-12 and answer the following question.

7. In what practical ways can each of us move deeper into God's Word? How can we encourage other members to move toward spiritual maturity for the well-being of our church?

CONCLUSION

As believers in Christ, we are called to mature in Him through learning and living His Word. It begins with desiring the milk of basic doctrine and then developing an appetite for the meat of teachings that require higher levels of thinking and constant practice. The good news is that Christ, our High Priest, has also given us the Holy Spirit. He is working even now to take us

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deeper into God's Word—collectively and individually. May we lean into His work and not resist Him.

We have this as a sure and
steadfast anchor of the soul, a
hope that enters into the inner
place behind the curtain, where
Jesus has gone as a forerunner on
our behalf, having become a high
priest forever after the order of
Melchizedek.

— HEBREWS 6:19-20 —

LESSON SEVEN

GOD'S FAITHFUL MESSAGE

Hebrews 6:13-20

We've all seen them: the infamous weight-loss commercials. They're fast paced, explosive, and extremely motivating. "Lose 30 pounds in 30 days!" Their promises amaze us. Their energetic music incites us. Their photos assure us. "You, too, can shed those unwanted pounds in one month or less!" The commercials are so typical, it's humorous. The problem is identified. The promise is incited. The program is announced. And the prototypes are paraded to incentivize you.

Not to trivialize the subject matter, but Hebrews 6 closes like one of those commercials. However, it is not selling a weight-loss program. Rather, it is calling readers to a kind of faithfulness that endures to the end. It is God's Faithful-to-the-End incentive program. And, He wants to enroll you today.

OPENING THOUGHTS

1. If someone were to ask your family and friends about your faithfulness, how would they describe it? Are you constant and loyal to God? Or, do you find yourself giving up often, like most people in their weight-loss programs?

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2. As Christians, what do you think we lack when persevering in the faith? What do you think we need to be faithful to Christ and constant with God? And, where can we get it?

JESUS: THE MOTIVATION FOR THE FAITHFUL

God's incentive program begins with a promise: "We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:11-12). The promise is heaven. The program is perseverance. In other words, we can be fully confident that eternal life awaits us when we faithfully and patiently hope in Christ until the end.

Abraham is God's success story of faithfulness. According to Genesis 12, God called him to a foreign land and promised him a son through which He would bless him and make him a great nation. The problem was Abraham was seventy-five years old and his wife was barren. They had no children. But God's promise remained: Be faithful to Me, and I'll bless you and the world through you. However, Abraham's faithfulness was tested when he was told to sacrifice the very son God had given him (Gen. 22). Though we are not Abraham, a similar promise is given to those who believe.

Read Hebrews 6:13-18 and answer the questions below.

3. What is the connection between oaths and our faithfulness? How do oaths relate to our encouragement "to hold fast to the hope set before us" in verse 18?

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4. Hebrews describes the faithful ones as those “who have fled for refuge” in God. How does this relate to God’s incentive program? What does it have to do with His character and oath?
5. Has hope in God’s unchanging character been a motivation for faithfulness in your life? Does recognizing that God never lies drive you to persevere? Why?

JESUS: THE FORERUNNER OF THE FAITHFUL

The Old Testament has numerous foreshadows of Christ. One in particular is Joseph. He was uniquely blessed by God, but hated by his brothers. They despised him so much that they sold him into slavery in Egypt, a foreign land ruled by Pharaoh. Through God’s providence, Joseph won favor with the king and was seated with him in power. Years later a famine spread, and his brothers came to Egypt in need. However, Egypt did not give life sustenance to foreigners, much less shepherders. The brothers were unworthy. Fortunately, Joseph went ahead of them and won favor with the king—so much favor, he had more than enough to cover his brothers.

Jesus went ahead of us. He lived a perfect life and won favor with the King of a foreign land that we strive to enter. Heaven is abundant with sustenance. In fact, it is where eternal life is lived. There, Jesus sits with the Lord in power. And, when we who are unrighteous foreigners come to the foot of heaven and beg for life, Jesus has more than enough. This is the idea behind Hebrews 6:19-20.

LESSON SEVEN

Read Hebrews 6:19-20 and answer the questions below.

6. Explain what a “forerunner” is in your own words. What does it mean that Jesus was “a forerunner on our behalf”? How does this motivate you to faithful living before God?

7. The writer of Hebrews describes Jesus as entering “the inner place behind the curtain” as a “high priest forever.” What do you suppose this means? How does it relate to our lesson?

8. How can this reality be our “sure and steadfast anchor of the soul”? How does Jesus’ perfect work give us hope for the future?

9. Do you still lack motivation? Are you taking refuge in Jesus alone? What things can you do to make sure you find your hope in Him?

CONCLUSION

Jesus has gone before us. He has obediently and perfectly lived according to the laws of God and entered the holiest place with God the Father. He sits at the right hand of the throne and exerts His gracious and sovereign power for all who come to Him seeking refuge. His track record is without fault. His

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promises are without change. His words are without deception. His oaths are without failure. He is the hope set before us. There is no need for another. Jesus is our motivation and our persevering power.

For on the one hand, a former
commandment is set aside because
of its weakness and uselessness (for
the law made nothing perfect); but
on the other hand, a better hope is
introduced, through which we
draw near to God.

— HEBREWS 7:18-19 —

LESSON EIGHT

GOD'S INDESTRUCTIBLE PRIEST

Hebrews 7:11-20

It's the fourth quarter of the championship football game, and the head coach is very concerned. The opposing team is frustrating his offensive line. They are tired and falling apart. Disappointment compiles. It's mistake after mistake. Nothing seems to work. It is apparent that the offensive coach has an antiquated system. It is no longer effective.

With the clock counting down, their chance of victory is slim and getting slimmer. The game ultimately falls on the back of the head coach, so he steps in to make adjustments. He rushes to the offensive coach and calls for a change in his system. "Your system is not working. You have to do something new!"

The offensive coach is puzzled. He knows no other system, but he doesn't object. He turns to his team and calls out a number of unfamiliar plays. Unsurprisingly, the offense is unprepared. Things get worse. The head coach is even more desperate. He hurries to the defensive coach and yells at him to step in and "Do something!" It was a disaster. No, it was worse than that. It was a catastrophe. And the game was inevitably lost.

OPENING THOUGHTS

1. Where did the head coach go wrong with his decisions? Why did the offense choke on a new system? And, why did the defensive coach fail with the offensive line?
2. What do you think is necessary for a coach to completely change from one system to another? What will it take for a new system to be integrated?

JESUS: THE PRIEST PICTURED

God established a system to reconcile His people to Himself. He formed a Levitical priesthood known as “the order of Aaron” to run the system. In it were laws and sacrifices that brought about peace with God and among the people. But, this system was inadequate in the long run. It would eventually run its course. It would serve its purpose. It would grow old and become antiquated. It was intentionally imperfect.

As a part of this priestly system, sacrifices were repeatedly required to make atonement for the sins of the people. They were constantly breaking the laws of God, and sin was ever in need of payment. Of course, the priests were not sinless. They also needed to make amends (Heb. 5:1-3). All of the people—priests and lay alike—needed salvation. The recurring sacrifices reminded them like a nagging indictment. It was designed to work this way. This unrelenting reminder pointed to a coming priest who would be perfect in every way and make atonement

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once for all. In other words, their current system was antiquated and ineffective. A new system was needed.

Read Hebrews 7:11-14 and answer the following questions.

3. What do you think is significant about the “order of Melchizedek”? What do you suppose it meant for the Levitical priesthood (consider Genesis 14:18-20)?
4. God required the Old Testament priests to come from the line of Levi. However, Christ descended from the line of Judah. What did this signify (see Hebrews 7:12-14)? What does this teach us about Jesus’ priestliness?
5. With Christ coming from the line of Judah, what does this tell us about the Old Testament system? What might it imply about the Mosaic Law?

JESUS: THE PRIEST REALIZED

Melchizedek’s priesthood pointed to the fact that there was a priestly order far more superior than that of Abraham’s line, namely Levi. Man needed a new intercessor who was better than any mortal priest. He needed a divine mediator. Since sin brought death and priests were sinners, death repeatedly claimed the priests, and the order was replaced by many men throughout the years (Heb. 7:23). As one died, another took his place. An eternal priesthood required a priest with an eternal,

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indestructible life. Death would only bow to an undying conqueror.

Furthermore, this conqueror would need to be completely innocent and perfectly righteous in order to cover the sins of man once for all. Man needed an eternal, perfect high priest to accomplish a true atoning victory. With the arrival of this new priest, the old law would be annulled since it was unable to bring salvation. The new law, however, was powerful to save forevermore. A change in priestly order meant a change in law.

Read Hebrews 7:15-20 and answer the following questions.

6. What was the main reason for the failure of the Levitical priesthood? How did it lack? How was it antiquated (consider Hebrews 7:23-25)?

7. What evidence do we have that the Mosaic law is no longer in effect? What event in redemptive history signifies that something better has arrived?

8. According to verse 19, what benefit comes through the salvation we receive in Christ? How does this shape your confidence in the Lord?

CONCLUSION

The Levitical priesthood failed to bring salvation for two reasons: their sinfulness and mortality. Only a completely

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righteous and indestructible priest could bring salvation to mankind. In Christ, we have this perfect High Priest. He conquered death through His work on the cross and resurrection from the dead. He proved that a superior system had arrived and salvation had come. Through Him, the antiquated law has been nullified and a new law is now in place.

But as it is, Christ has obtained a
ministry that is as much more
excellent than the old as the
covenant he mediates is better, since
it is enacted on better promises.

— HEBREWS 8:6 —

LESSON NINE

GOD'S CHOSEN PRIEST

Hebrews 8:1-6

There is something undeniably interesting about an eclipse. As the earth makes its way into the path of the sun and casts its massive shadow across the surface of the moon, it's a fascinating natural phenomenon. Watching an eclipse can be an awe inspiring moment.

Consider a shadow. By looking at it, you can usually identify what it actually represents. But the overlying truth about shadows is this: There is no substance. How absurd would it be to try climbing the shadow of a tree or to shake the hand of a person's shadow? Even as awesome as an eclipse, a *shadow is merely the evidence of something real, something of substance.*

The Old Testament is filled with shadows. It is full of pictures and symbols that, upon examination, show us they reflect something of real substance. So many of the promises and practices of the Old Testament point us to the tangible flesh and blood of Jesus Himself.

Today, we worship the substance found in the new covenant, or the promise given to us in the New Testament. The salvation we have is real and tangible and found only in the work of Jesus Christ, not in the work of human hands.

OPENING THOUGHTS

1. What are some of the Old Testament figures, stories, traditions, or practices that point to Jesus?
2. Like the Hebrews, are there ways we trust more in shadows rather than Christ in our spiritual walk? How?

JESUS: THE HEAVENLY PRIEST

The main focus of the writer of Hebrews was to convince the reader that the purpose of the Old Testament was to point to Jesus Christ. Everything they believed in, everything they practiced, and the very promise given to the Israelites was fulfilled in Him. The example the writer provides is the Israelites' primary mode of worship: the temple and the high priest.

For the Israelites, worship meant a person and a place. The person, a high priest, would go into a place, the temple, and offer up a sacrifice for the sins of the people. The high priest's role was to intercede, or stand between, the people and God, much like a lawyer who represents a client in front of a judge. But when Jesus entered our world, He established a new tent, a new priesthood, and a new sacrifice for sins. And this would change everything.

Read Hebrews 8:1-3 and answer the questions below.

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3. As the true High Priest, why is the current location of Jesus (seated at the right hand of the Father) significant to us today? How does it change the way we can relate to God?
4. Why is the “true tent” greater than the old temple? What does this imply for us today about God’s presence?
5. What was the purpose for sacrifice in the Old Testament? How was this a shadow pointing to Jesus?

JESUS: THE HIGHER PRIEST

The difference between the shadow and the substance is rooted in the differences between the old and new covenants. The old covenant is based on the law and the sacrificial system facilitated by priests. The new covenant is based on the grace of God and the one final sacrifice provided from the High Priest Himself. The difference is in the gift offered. Earthly priests can only offer earthly things, according to the law. The writer of Hebrews says it plainly: The ministry of Christ is more excellent. The covenant He mediates is much better. The promises offered are much greater (Heb. 8:6).

How does this relate to us today? We must rely completely and only on the work of Christ in the heavenly throne room to get us to God and keep us safe in Him until the very end. Jesus has paid the price for sin in full. His atoning work is complete

LESSON NINE

and perfect. Trusting in anything else is trusting in a copy or a shadow.

Read Hebrews 8:3-6 and answer the questions below.

6. What are some promises of the new covenant (see Romans 8:1; 1 John 5:4, 2 Corinthians 5:21, and Hebrews 8:12)? What do these promises have in common?
7. What are common shadows that people trust in rather than Jesus? Why do you suppose they find these things trustworthy?
8. Once these shadows are identified, how can we shift our focus to Jesus? Is there something you need to change in your life?

CONCLUSION

We must continually remind ourselves of what Jesus has done for us. He is the substance of our salvation. The tendency of the human heart is to cling to shadows, or things in this world that point to Jesus, rather than clinging to Christ Himself. It is important to identify those shadows in our life and recognize them for what they really are—the evidence of a loving High Priest of a new and better covenant.

He entered once for all into the
holy places, not by means of the
blood of goats and calves but by
means of his own blood, thus
securing an eternal redemption.

— HEBREWS 9:12 —

LESSON TEN

GOD'S PERFECT COVENANT

Hebrews 9:11-14

Due to America's strong bent for consumerism, we know all too well about the "new" thing. When the "new" thing comes out, we rush to buy it. Lines wrap around the storefronts when a new iPhone is launched—and we spend a premium to get it. But less than a year later, the iPhone is now old. It was replaced with the launch of the new one.

New has a premium in our society. We want the new car, the new television, the new house, the new shoes. The old things are just too old for us. They are so last year, so obsolete, so imperfect, so ... well, *old*.

The Israelites were not so eager to get the new thing, as we see in Hebrews. They failed to see that everything connected with the ceremonial law was pointing to the new covenant in Christ. The old covenant was limited, imperfect, and temporary. Its purpose was to prepare them for the eternal and heavenly covenant that would come. It was designed to be the "old" thing that infused anticipation for the "new" thing. Yet, the Hebrews failed to see it

OPENING THOUGHTS

1. How familiar are you with the “new” market? Do you rush to get the latest device or clothes? What is it about the “new” thing that makes the “old” thing less valuable?
2. What was it about the old covenant (particularly the ceremonial laws) that was limiting, imperfect, and temporary for the Hebrews? How did it point to the coming Christ and His unlimited, perfect, and eternal salvation?

JESUS: THE PERFECT PRIEST

Hebrews 9 compares the old with the new. Verses 1 through 10 focus on the limiting, imperfect, and temporary use of the ceremonial laws of the old covenant. They are like last year’s model. The new covenant, from verse 11 and on, is *this* year’s model. In fact, it is the supreme model, and there is no model to come after it. For it is an eternal model, an eternal covenant, perfect in every way. When comparing the two covenants, it is critical that we understand the former as a contemporary audience.

In the old covenant, sinners would enter through a single door to bring their sin offering into the outer courts of the temple. The priests would ritualistically offer their gifts on the bronze altar and then wash themselves in the bronze basin. After this, they would carry the offering into the Holy Place, where there was a lampstand for light, a table of showbread for food, and an altar of incense as fragrance of prayer.

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Once a year, a high priest would take it further. He would go past the Holy Place and into the Holiest Place, also called the Holy of Holies, where the ark of the covenant resided. The rituals performed in this place happened only one day each year, the Day of Atonement.

All of these aspects symbolically prepared the people for the “new” thing. Jesus called Himself “the way” (Jn. 14:6) and “the door” (Jn. 10:9) through which all who enter will be saved. He was the sin sacrifice (Mk. 14:24) and the cleansing wash (Eph. 5:25-27). He is called “the light” (Jn. 8:12), “the bread” (Jn. 6:35), and the One who intercedes (Rom. 8:34). He is the perfect High Priest who enters the “perfect tent” of heaven, the Holiest Place, where the atoning work is once for all completed.

Read Hebrews 9:11-12 and answer the following questions.

3. Why is attention focused on the “more perfect tent” in comparison to the tent in the prior verses (see Heb. 9:11 and 9:2)? What do you think is significant about the new priest and the new tent?

4. The writer of Hebrews compares the “blood of goats and calves” with the blood of Jesus, stating His sacrifice was superior. Why do you think this is? What is significant about Jesus’ sacrifice?

JESUS: THE PERFECT SACRIFICE

The comparison is not over. There is not only a new sanctuary and a new service found in the new covenant, but new significance. The old covenant had limited access (only the priest would enter), limited cleansing (only a superficial washing), and limited extent (only lasted temporarily). For this reason, these ceremonies had to be repeated time and time again.

Still, this did not mean the old covenant was useless. Rather, this repetition was meant to be a constant reminder of the sinner's need for a perfect sacrifice and priest. In this way, it was full of purpose and accomplished what it was designed to do. However, the Hebrews were so involved with the ceremony, they failed to see the real thing—the new thing—when it came.

Read Hebrews 9:13-14 and answer the following questions.

5. This passage compares the effectiveness of the old covenant sacrifice with the new covenant sacrifice. What can we learn from this? What does it tell us about the two covenants?

6. According to this passage, what was it about the new covenant that made it a better covenant than the old? What role does purity play in the covenants?

7. How has the comparison of the ceremonial rituals with the work of Christ changed your thoughts about Him?

CONCLUSION

The Hebrews were so focused on the picture of the Messiah, they failed to see the real Messiah had come. It was as if they were staring longingly at a picture of a loved one while standing right next to them.

The new covenant frees the sinner eternally and perfectly. Yet, many of us still look to the fashions of ceremonies and rituals year after year to erase our guilt. But Jesus is standing right next to us. Turn to Him and be perfectly and eternally cleansed from your sin. Then, keep your eyes on the real thing.

For by a single offering he has
perfected for all time those who
are being sanctified.

— HEBREWS 10:14 —

LESSON ELEVEN

GOD'S SANCTIFYING PRIEST

Hebrews 10:11-18

“Boys, take your wrestling outside!” Some things are inescapable and unavoidable. Boys will be boys. And, boys being boys inside the house makes mom nervous, especially moms with the glass cupboards displaying and protecting the formal china. These hutches were always set apart from the other furniture in the house and usually tucked away for special uses.

The china behind the glass was even more distinct than the cupboard. It was usually prized among all the tableware in the house and only used for special occasions. Other plates and eating utensils were usual. They were for everyday use, not special day use. In fact, some of the common tableware was used once and then thrown away afterward. But this was never the case with the china. It was unique among the glassware. Mom would never allow it to be misappropriated, misused, or damaged. So the wrestling had to go outside.

OPENING THOUGHTS

1. Besides china, what things or people are set apart for particular use? How are these things or people revered by others?

2. Why are things set apart today? What is the purpose? And, what does it mean to others who see these things?

JESUS: THE ONE WHO SETS US APART

The writer of Hebrews has been connecting the dots between the old and new covenants, as well as drawing the line of distinction. These connections and distinctions are gradually becoming more and more clear. The law and rituals of the old covenant were shadows of the good things to come in the new and was never able to “make perfect those who draw near” (Heb. 10:1). If it were able, then it would have ended and not been repeated each year (Heb. 10:2). But, “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:3). This is why, in sending Jesus, the Father “does away with the first in order to establish the second” (Heb. 10:9). By that work, “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:10). The blood of Christ was perfect where the blood animals was not.

God takes no pleasure in burnt and sin offerings. He desires obedience. “Behold, I have come to do your will,” said Jesus (Heb. 10:7). Living a holy life on earth, Jesus’ single work on the cross brought sanctifying grace to man. In contrast, the priests of old continued to work in the temple bringing nothing of the sort. In Jesus’ single atonement, we are made holy. In the priests’ continuous atonement, we remain sinful. Christ accomplished what the priests could not. He brought salvation.

Read Hebrews 10:11-14 and answer the following questions.

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3. When comparing verses 11 and 12, we see that the priest “stands daily at his service” while Christ served once and “sat down” when completed. What does this say about the work of the priests and the work of Christ? Why is it significant?
4. Compare the use of the word “sanctified” in verses 10 and 14 and explain the differences. What does this teach us about God’s sanctifying work in our lives? How does it relate to Christ’s once-for-all work on the cross?
5. Thinking through the lesson so far, what are we learning about our sanctification and God’s work on our behalf?

JESUS: THE ONE WHO GIVES US PURPOSE

To *sanctify*, in this context, means to set apart for a specific purpose. It primarily refers to an instantaneous act whereby God declares an item or person exclusively His and for His purpose. In the Old Testament, the synonym “consecrate” was generally used. In Exodus 40:9, God told Moses to “take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and all that is in it, and consecrate it and all its furniture, so that it may become holy.”

The term “holy” in this passage also introduces to us another sense than what we are typically used to. It means to be distinct. The chair in the temple was anointed with oil because it was set apart for God’s specific use and made distinct from

LESSON ELEVEN

the other chairs in the city. It was unique. So was the altar and its utensils (Ex. 40:10). The basin and the stand (Heb. 40:11), as well as the priests and their garments, were all consecrated (Ex. 40:12-15). These things were set apart for singular use. The knife that was set apart for use at the altar could not be misappropriated and used elsewhere.

To borrow a more contemporary example, marriage is a consecration of man and woman. When the ceremony is complete, the man becomes set apart for one woman and the woman for one man. Of all the other men and women in the world, these two are exclusively given to each other. In the New Testament context, those who are born again by God's Spirit are instantly consecrated to God. We are made distinct, set aside as God's people for God's use. We belong to Him—body, mind, and heart—and He to us.

Read Hebrews 10:15-18 with Jeremiah 31:31-34 and answer the following questions.

6. When comparing the two passages, what do you think the Spirit means when saying, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more"? How does this relate to being sanctified and consecrated in Christ?

7. In keeping with the idea of "being sanctified," what truths can we glean from verse 16, where God says, "I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds"? How does this shed light on distinctions between the old and new covenants?

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8. How do you see yourself as a Christian now that we've studied these passages? What new truths are resonating in your heart? How do you see things differently?

CONCLUSION

While the priests repeatedly stood and worked, Jesus worked and sat down. He accomplished the work of gathering up God's people to Himself once for all. He not only won their salvation, but set them apart as holy in Christ and to be made holy in Christ. Positionally, we are consecrated for a singular purpose in God. Practically, we are being sanctified to fulfill that purpose perfectly. And, while we will never be practically holy now, we will indeed when God brings us home. For now, we should be mindful that we are distinctly given over to Him—body, mind, and heart.

Now faith is the assurance of
things hoped for, the conviction of
things not seen.

— HEBREWS 11:1 —

LESSON TWELVE

GOD'S FAITHFUL FRIEND

Hebrews 11:1-7

In the summer of 1859, a famous tightrope walker known as “The Great Blondin,” armed himself with 1,100 feet of rope and prepared for his greatest stunt ever—crossing the Niagara Gorge. It was a raging and unforgiving torrent. A large crowd of spectators paid to see his performance. It was going to be an impressive feat and lucrative fanfare.

Blondin crossed the river multiple times, each one more impressive than the last. His first crossing involved him standing on one leg and lowering a bottle into the hands of the passengers of the Maid of the Mist ferry floating underneath him. Every time, he crossed with more and more risk. Blondin crossed the river forward, backward, blindfolded, bicycling, stilting, and even while stopping to cook and eat an omelette!

Unsurprisingly, the people were amazed every time. Blondin’s ability to balance across a tightrope was evident. He had a sure talent. Seeing their confidence in him, he asked if anyone was certain that he could carry a person across the rope. They responded with cheers and hands raised. But when Blondin asked for a volunteer, the hands went down. Although convinced of his skillfulness, not one soul was brave enough to act.

OPENING THOUGHTS

1. What caused the people to renege on their belief? Why were they so reluctant to put their belief into action and their trust into the hands of The Great Blondin?
2. What does “faith in action” mean to you? Has your faith ever been put to the test? What was the result?

JESUS: THE OBJECT OF OUR FAITH

Ultimately, it is in *whom* we have placed our faith that matters most. Every Christian is called to a life of active faith in Christ. Through faith, we believe and understand that the universe was created and sustained by God (Heb. 11:3). Through faith, we see what is not yet visible. Because we see what others cannot see, we are able to do what others cannot do.

The Hall of Faith is not a long list of extraordinary people. It is a list of ordinary people who had extraordinary faith. Faith is simply allowing everything based on the absolute reality of the living God to inform our daily lives in a broken world. God delights in blessing those who walk by faith in Him.

Read Hebrews 11:1-3 and answer the questions below.

3. What are some practical ways we can begin to build up our faith? What is the difference between faith and faith in action?

LESSON TWELVE

4. What does this biblical definition of faith tell us (Heb. 11:1)? Explain words like “assurance”, “hoped for,” and “conviction.”

5. Read Hebrews 11:39-40. The people in the Old Testament received commendation but not the promise. What was the promise? What does it mean for us today?

JESUS: THE ASSURANCE OF OUR FAITH

The writer of Hebrews used the stories of well-known characters from the Old Testament to illustrate that the boldness of their actions was due to the magnitude of their faith. They didn't please God because they were good men and women. Rather, they pleased God because they trusted in Him enough to act against all odds. Verse 6 confirms that without faith, it is impossible to please God.

Abel demonstrated faith by offering an acceptable sacrifice. Enoch had such a unique and approved faith, he never had to experience death. Then there was Noah, charged with a massive undertaking based on something he had never seen before: rain. Each person received their commendation, or reward, from God because of their great faith.

Read Hebrews 11:4-7 and answer the questions below.

6. What does it mean when we fail to have faith? What are we communicating about our belief in God?

LESSON TWELVE

7. Repeatedly in the verses, we see that they were “commended” for their faith. What are some rewards we receive by exercising our faith?

8. What are other examples of great faith in the Bible? Why did the examples in verses 4 through 7 stand out?

CONCLUSION

Eventually, it was The Great Blondin’s manager who volunteered to be carried across the river. Why did he do it? He had spent so much time with Blondin, he had complete and full trust in his abilities.

Do you want to have that kind of faith in God? Spend time with Him. Learn about Him. Read His Word. Allow God to prove Himself faithful and true to His Word. Surround yourself with others who are living out their faith on a daily basis. Finally, act. Faith untested will never be great. God delights when you step out and take action on the assurance of His Word.

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

— HEBREWS 12:1 —

LESSON THIRTEEN

GOD'S HEAVENLY INCENTIVE

Hebrews 12:1-2

Marathon runners are no joke. Few people in this world apply their training to such an extent as these enthusiasts. They push through hours of pain and suffering, days of training and discipline, and weeks of mental and physical development. Seeing these runners tirelessly push themselves some twenty-six miles without breaks is a sight to behold.

Obviously, something made the task worth the effort to them. Crossing the finish line, there was discernibly something inside the runners that made the past years of reorganizing their lives worth all the trouble.

OPENING THOUGHTS

1. In your life, what has been so troublesome to undertake but so worth it to endure to the end? What motivated you to keep going?
2. How does your Christian walk relate to this kind of endurance? What is it about your life in Christ that is troublesome but worth enduring? What keeps you going?

JESUS: THE ETERNAL REWARD

Hebrews 11 is famously referred to as the “Hall of Faith” of the Bible. Here, the writer of Hebrews recognizes the heroes of our faith. Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain (Heb. 11:4). Enoch had a true faith that believed in eternal reward (Heb. 11:5). Noah prepared the ark while others ridiculed (Heb. 11:7). Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and others are also mentioned for their relentless commitment to reach the finish line of faith and to maintain loyalty to God (Heb. 11:8-40). Each of these heroes had something that made it all worth it to them. They had hope.

Though our times and situations are different from theirs, we do and will experience troubles in this world. We don’t have to look for distress. It comes to us freely and often. To make matters worse, Christians suffer more since this sinful world hates Christ (Jn. 15:18). And, the scandals in our American Christianity compound the troubles even more. These troubles make faithfulness and loyalty to God a difficult reality, but not impossible.

Read Hebrews 12:1-3 with Hebrews 11:4-40 and answer the following questions.

3. In light of Hebrews 11, how do you understand the “great cloud of witnesses” mentioned in Hebrews 12:1? How can they motivate you to be faithful to the end?

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4. According to Hebrews 12:2, why are we encouraged to look to Jesus in order to endure to the end? How does this relate to the Old Testament heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 (consider Moses in Hebrews 11:26)? How can focusing on Christ motivate faithfulness?
5. Why is it significant that we see Jesus as “the founder and perfecter of our faith”? What does this mean for life ahead of us? How can it build hope in us?

JESUS: THE ENDURING HOPE

In our race of faith, we not only have a cloud of heroes who can testify to reward and set motivating examples for us to follow, we also have a God who has gone before us, endured far more than us, and paved the way for faithful living. Now, through His Spirit in us, He helps us along the way, teaching and guiding us to walk in His steps.

The race of faith involves serious internal conflicts. The residue of our old life of sin remains in us and joins with the enemy of our soul to wage war against us, slowing us down and distracting us from the race. The writer of Hebrews calls it “weight” and “sin” (Heb. 12:1). Weight carries the idea of earthly excesses and worthless practices. The Hebrews had to set aside the legalistic rituals that were cumbersome and unnecessary. Sin is more obvious (see Lk. 21:34-36; Col. 3:8; 1 Pet. 2:1-2; Ja. 1:21), but the emphasis is on those secret sins that tend to cling to us and re-awaken from time to time. In both cases, we are told to lay these aside and run.

LESSON THIRTEEN

Read Matthew 13:44 and answer the following questions.

6. How does the story of the man who sold everything for the field relate to our lesson in faithfulness? How does it speak to you practically today?
7. What are some “weights” in your life? What are some things that might become weights in the future? How easily can you lay them aside if needed?
8. How has this lesson refined the way you see your walk of faith? Will you make changes this week? If so, how?

CONCLUSION

Jesus is the eternal reward and enduring hope of salvation. He goes before to pave the way. He sets in our midst the people who model the way. And, He dwells within us to encourage us along the way. The race of faith—the Christian walk—involves the laying aside of every single thing, good or bad, if it hinders our run. This means our life, our priorities, our activities, even our schedules, must be rearranged in such a way that we can run freely toward Christ, who is our prize. What is it that you need to lay down today?

Let brotherly love continue.

— HEBREWS 13:1 —

LESSON FOURTEEN

GOD'S SIN CONQUEROR

Hebrews 13:1-6

“Sin is crouching at your door.” God’s warning to Cain was shockingly truthful and horrifyingly prophetic. Cain was unmoved by God’s presence, and his heart grew apathetic to worship. It became a hollow routine, a mere ritual. Obedience to God was an inconvenience. Honoring God was annoying. He’d rather be tilling the ground, and it showed. One day the Lord rejected his dishonest worship and, with a deep sense of love, apprised him with this warning: “If you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it” (Gen. 4:7).

Cain heard but didn’t listen. He was unconcerned with the Word of God. It was just certain noise in a good garden. So he disregarded it, ignored it, and brushed it off, and sin did exactly what God said it would do: it conquered. It took Cain by the heart and turned his affections to aggravations, his ethics to evil. He was so aroused by wickedness that he grievously murdered his own brother. Sin was crouching at the door of his life, and since he didn’t conquer it, it conquered him.

OPENING THOUGHTS

1. In your own words, what was the real evil behind the story of Cain and Abel? Where did Cain go wrong? What were the affects of his error?
2. Is this still true of sin? Does sin still crouch at the door of our lives? What happens if we ignore God's warning? What must we do to prevent further sin?

JESUS: THE CONQUEROR OF PRIDE

Although we've been born again, we cannot coast in this life and do nothing. Sin still crouches at our heart's door. If we fail to drive it out, it will remain there and continue to fight against us. We must conquer sin. The writer of Hebrews mentions three major areas of sin to conquer. The first is pride, or selfishness.

Pride sits on the throne of our lives—our heart—and desires to please and worship itself. It wants all things its way and hates anything that goes against it. And yet, when we surrendered our heart to Christ, we pushed pride off the throne. It no longer had rule in our lives, but it doesn't sit still. It crouches at the door and attacks at the right times. We must go to battle against it. Through Christ, we can win. He is the conqueror of pride.

Read Hebrews 13:1-3 and answer the following questions.

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3. According to these verses, what are three practical ways you can combat selfishness in your life and in the life of the church? How would each look in your immediate context?
4. Why is pride a threat to you, your family, and your church? What effect does it have on your testimony? Why must it be conquered?

JESUS: THE CONQUEROR OF IMMORALITY

The second major area of sin discussed in Hebrews 13 is sexual immorality. It involves all forms of sin that are outside of God's standard for human intimacy. We see God's picture most clearly in the marriage of one man and one woman. The two become one, not superficially or theoretically, but literally. God supernaturally intervenes in the hearts of the two and knits their souls together. Physical intimacy is then God's provision for the knitting to be realized. So much of marriage is rooted in physical intimacy. It affects most, if not all, of the other aspects of the relationship. Sexual purity can be accomplished through Christ, the conqueror of immorality.

Read Hebrews 13:4 and answer the following questions.

5. How are marriage being held in honor and the marriage bed being undefiled connected? In what ways are they intertwined?

LESSON FOURTEEN

6. What is at stake in sexual sin? How does God deal with sexual sin? How will rebuilding the walls of sacredness around physical intimacy help us to live free in Christ?

JESUS: THE CONQUEROR OF GREE

The third and final major area of sin, according to Hebrews 13, is the love of money. “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matt. 6:24). It is not the sin of money, but the sin of loving money. It is a sin of craving the wrong thing, seeking to find satisfaction in the wrong source. It misappropriates the means of joy. God is more than enough to satisfy our soul. True happiness is found through Christ, the conqueror of greed.

Read Hebrews 13:5 and answer the following questions.

7. What guidance does this passage give us to live free from the love of money? How can we do this practically?
8. What does the quotation in verse 5 mean to us today? How can it encourage you as you seek to love God instead of money?

CONCLUSION

Selfishness, immorality, and greed are crouching at the door of your heart, and their desire is to conquer. To fight the sin of pride, we must let brotherly love reign in our hearts, show hospitality to those around us, and meet the needs of those who suffer. To battle sexual immorality, we must rebuild the walls of sacredness around physical intimacy with the help of Christ. To war against the love of money, we must be content with what the Lord has provided and trust that He will meet our needs. With these practical tools in hand, we can faithfully and successfully drive sin out of our lives and vigilantly guard against it. Sin will be crouching at your door until God takes you home. Safeguard yourself and conquer it.

Through him then let us
continually offer up a sacrifice of
praise to God, that is, the fruit of
lips that acknowledge his name.

— HEBREWS 13:15 —

LESSON FIFTEEN

GOD'S SOVEREIGN MESSIAH

Hebrews 13:7-17

The author of Hebrews had a goal for his reader: to understand and know that Jesus Christ was the Old Testament promise fulfilled. He was the sacrifice to end all sacrifices, and the High Priest that connected us to God in a way we never could before. He was the promised Messiah. The Old Testament saints believed in this promise and were justified, but now that promise had a name: Jesus Christ.

As Hebrews comes to a close, the writer turns from the call and the doctrine of our faith in chapters 1-10 to the practical steps in obeying the call. He focuses first on having strong faith in chapter 11 and then on sanctification in chapter 12.

Finally, to conclude the book, we get the instruction of how to sustain our walk for the long haul. As Christians, we are to endure. We don't burn brightly and burn out, but rather, our light shines throughout our entire lives. Do you want to finish strong? The writer of Hebrews closes his letter by looking to the future and instructing believers how to bear the most fruit in their walk with Jesus.

OPENING THOUGHTS

1. What lasting principles you have taken from the book of Hebrews? How have they impacted your life?
2. How does endurance relate to bearing fruit as a Christian? Could your life be characterized by enduring? If not, why?

JESUS: THE CENTER OF THE GOSPEL

The author of Hebrews once again reminds us of the gospel—who Jesus is (13:8); from what He has set us free (13:9-11); His work (13:12); our call (13:13); our hope (13:14); our worship (13:15); and our response (13:16). We would do well to remind ourselves of this gospel, since our tendency is to forget our “first love” (see Revelation 2:4). We have to be reminded often of our sinfulness and the ever present grace of God.

This passage is a reminder of what we have been saved from: a dead religion. The call to leave the city was a call to leave the religion behind—the old covenant, the law—to follow after Christ, who, like the sin offerings, was sacrificed outside of the city.

Remember the gospel and your joy in Christ. Our natural response to accepting the gospel is to walk in faithfulness to Jesus. We desire to do good and offer praise to His name. The life of the believer described in Hebrews 13 is one full of exceeding gladness and joy found in a faithful walk with Christ.

Read Hebrews 13:8-16 and answer the questions below.

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3. What is our natural response when we are reminded of the gospel? Is it gratitude, joy, apathy, discouragement?
4. *Read Revelation 2:4-5.* What is the cure for a dead religion? What do you suppose that looks like? How would you describe it?
5. How does Jesus' work set us free from the things mentioned in Hebrews 13:9-10? What can we do to enjoy that freedom?

JESUS: THE KING OF THE SHEPHERDS

How else do we finish strong? By recognizing the God-placed authority in our lives. God has given us leaders, shepherds, and pastors to teach, encourage, and strengthen us in godly living. Finishing strong in Christ not only means relating constantly to the gospel, but relating biblically to His church and His pastors. Pastors oversee and lead the local church and are charged with speaking the Word of God to a congregation.

Why is submission and obedience to our pastors important? Because they have been given a very important job. They are called to keep watch over our souls and will give an account to God over how they stewarded what they were entrusted. Our role is to allow them to do their job with joy, not making their lives miserable.

Pastors play an important role. Without the weekly teaching of a pastor led by the Holy Spirit, we would fail to grow

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in our faith. This position is deserving of honor, respect, and imitation. The preaching ministry on Sunday mornings is the primary way our pastors protect our souls. There is a warning to believers in Hebrews 13: If you aren't coming to church, hearing God's Word, and obeying it, your soul is being exposed to subtle, seductive, false teaching that will lead you and your family astray.

Read Hebrews 13:7 and 17 and answer the questions below.

5. Why is our response to the authority of our pastors so important? How can we motivate our pastors to shepherd us with joy rather than groaning?
6. How do you respond biblically to the Christian who believes active membership in a local church isn't necessary to grow in their relationship with God?
7. How has this lesson, or this series, affected your life and relationship with Christ? Have you grown in Him?

CONCLUSION

A popular hymn contains the lyric, "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it." Like sheep, we are indeed prone to wander without a good shepherd. We must be on guard and not be led astray by "diverse and strange teachings."

LESSON FIFTEEN

The Christian life is not a sprint—it is a marathon. It is a lifetime of devotion and commitment to Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Our success in the Christian race is dependent on how we relate to the gospel and to our church. To help you remember what Christ has done for you, God has placed pastors in your life—modeling the heart of the Great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20)—to care for your soul and help you finish strong. Let them do so with great joy.



ABOUT NATHAN LINO

A fourth generation African, Pastor Nathan Lino was born in South Africa, where he lived until he was 11 years old. After his family immigrated to America, Nathan earned his Bachelor's Degree from Texas A&M University and then his Masters of Divinity with Biblical Languages at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is ordained by Forest Cove Baptist Church.

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