

# Maturing Faith

A JOURNEY THROUGH HEBREWS

VOLUME #1

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## Maturing Faith: A Journey Through Hebrews

You are in for a treat...and a challenge!

For the rest of the Easter season and through the summer we will be living in the letter of Hebrews. Or better say we will be listening to it, because this letter has all the signs of an early Christian sermon.

It is one of the most beautifully written and powerfully argued New Testament documents. Yet, we do not know much about the author, Origen is believed to have said, "who wrote Hebrews, in truth God only knows." Similarly, we do not know much about the congregation to which the sermon is addressed. However, we know that they have been struggling. One of the New Testament scholars, Thomas Long, believes that this congregation is exhausted:

"They are tired - tired of serving the world, tired of worship, tired of Christian education, tired of being peculiar and whispered about in society, tired of the spiritual struggle, tired of trying to keep their prayer life going, tired even of Jesus. ... The threat to this congregation is not that they are charging off in a wrong direction; they do not have enough energy to charge off anywhere."

So, this sermon was meant to encourage them, to locate them in the true reality of their life, and to re-orient them by helping them to keep their focus on Jesus.

Journeying through Hebrews will challenge us in many ways:

- It is filled with the Old Testament quotations and allusions
- It is one long sustained argument
- It is shaped by both Hellenistic philosophy and Jewish understanding of worship
- It is theologically and practically demanding

However, the major challenge for us, as today's readers and hearers of this document, is not primarily to understand it intellectually, but to let Jesus speak to us and articulate our situation and life circumstances in reference to Himself.

- How is your faith being stretched at the moment?
- What are the marks of spiritual maturity in your life?
- Where do you see Jesus at work in your life?
- How is He speaking to you in and through suffering?
- What is the next step of obedience He is inviting you to take?



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## How to use this booklet:

It takes us through the first 8 weeks of the series. Each week contains the sermon text, space to take notes on the sermon, the group inductive Bible study, and a journal section to record your journey.

The space for sermon notes gives you an opportunity to follow the series week by week and integrate the sermon with your own look at Scripture in a group. At the back of the booklet you will find some notes from different commentaries, which would help you to engage the text better.

For a helpful introduction to this letter Google "The Bible Project: Hebrews."

If you are leading a study, please take an hour a week to prepare by going over the passage, looking at the questions, rephrasing them if needed, and allowing the Lord to work on the soil of your heart through this text.

As we journey through this letter together, my prayer is that we will be inspired and transformed by how it portrays Christ. May we see Jesus, love him, follow him and obey him ever more!

Thank you to Dixie Daggett, our Communications Team member, and to the Outreach and Evangelism Pastor, Keith Boschman, for your help with this study guide.

In Christ,

Yelena Pakhomova

*FBC Connection Groups Coordinator*

If you would like to be a part of a Connection Group to get the most out of this resource, please contact Yelena at [yelenap@firstbc.org](mailto:yelenap@firstbc.org).





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## Gather

As you are getting ready for your Bible study, take a couple of minutes to think about what helps you hear God. Feel free to share with each other and then pray for your time together.

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## Word

Have someone read Hebrews 1, 3:1, and 12:1b-2 out loud.

Take 5-10 minutes to have a closer look at the passages, particularly focusing on the prologue – Hebrews 1:1-4 (the rest of the chapter is covered in detail in the next study and sermon).

See what contrasts and similarities you can find. How about repeated words or ideas? Any indications of continuity or discontinuity? Time references? Circle titles/roles of Jesus.

Briefly share your observations.

1. These 4 verses are the introduction to the rest of Hebrews highlighting the focus of the whole book. It is one sentence in Greek, with one main point! Can you identify this center of gravity? What is one point around which all 4 verses are built?
2. What do we learn about who the main agents of action are in vv. 1-4 and what they do?
3. What is the relationship between God and his Son according to the author?
4. How does the author describe the work of the Son? Why do you think he zooms in on these particular metaphors and actions?
5. Why do you think the author is using this idea of inheritance: “heir of all things”, “the name he has inherited”?
6. How do you understand verse 4? What does it mean, “he became as much superior to the angels”? And why is it important?
7. What is this superior name?
8. Look at Heb 3:1 and 12:1b-2. How do they relate to the prologue of Hebrews? And what do they have to do with us?

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## Application and prayer

Reflect on how this introduction to Hebrews gives the whole sweep of biblical history, culminating in Jesus. Think about your own personal history with God and how God has spoken to you in Jesus. Pray and praise as you feel led.







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## Gather

As you gather for your study and are catching up on the previous week, think and maybe share how our culture or maybe even people in your family challenge or misunderstand Jesus.

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## Word

Have someone read Hebrews 1 out loud.

Do you remember from last week what the focus of the first 4 verses was?

We read in v.2 that God has spoken to us in his Son. Now, in vv.5-14 we get to hear what God actually has to say about this Son.

Spend some time (10 -12 min) actively reading the text. This would include paying attention to:

- All the titles God gives to his Son (circle them)
- Any definitions of roles or persons
- Actions that are described or prescribed
- The scope of activity of either the Son, or angels, or the Father
- Time references, similarities and contrasts
- Promises
- The OT passages quoted

Share your findings! At this point you should share the facts you observed and keep the explanations for further discussion. The more well-rounded the observations you make as a group, the better your interpretation will be.

1. What is God saying about his relationship with his Son and who this Son is in vv.5-6? Why do you think Ps 2 and 2 Sam 7 are quoted?
2. Who was worship reserved for in Judaism? What is God saying by commanding the angels to worship the Son?
3. Consider vv.7-9. How does the nature of the Son compare to that of the angels? What does v.8 convey about who the Son is?
4. What do vv.10-12 emphasize?
5. What is the main contrast between the activity of the Son and those of the angels in vv. 13-14?
6. How is the promise of Heb 1:13 (quoting Ps 110:1) connected with Heb 1:3(b) and Heb 1:5?







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## Gather

If you were to trace your faith journey, could you remember what attracted you to Jesus? Or what was the deepest need that moved you towards Him?

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## Word

Since we are looking at a 1st century sermon, have someone read Hebrews 2:1-18 out loud. It is an oral document, meant for hearing. Even though the focus of this study is Heb 2:5-16, it will be helpful to hear that section in its whole context.

Take about 10 minutes to actively read the text by making careful observation of 2:5-16.

- Mark all the repeated words or ideas that you can find
- Underline all the contrasts, or mark points of continuity and discontinuity
- Circle the names given to the Son and things that He does
- Note all the family imagery
- Anything else that you find striking, or do not understand

Briefly share your findings.

1. Consider vv.6-9. Why do you think the preacher quotes Ps 8 to introduce Jesus by name in v.9?
2. What do we learn from this whole passage about God's plan or goal for us? And how has it been accomplished?
3. Why did Jesus have to suffer and to taste death?
4. According to the preacher, what is the role of suffering in the life of Jesus?
5. In Hebrews 1, we listened to what God has to say about and to his Son. In vv.12-13 we get to hear Jesus' response to the Father. (He quotes Ps 22:22 and Isa 8:17-18.) How do these verses speak into Jesus being "the pioneer of our salvation"? How does he represent us?
6. Why did we need a Saviour, according to vv.14-15? (Notice that the word "free" can also be translated as "heal".)
7. Based on the whole chapter, what has Jesus accomplished by his incarnation, death and resurrection?

What image of Jesus from this chapter connects with you the most and why?







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## Connect

As you gather together, reflect on faithfulness, what helps people to be faithful to a person, or an idea, or an action and what can undermine faithfulness?

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## Word

Hebrews is one connected argument, and in chapter 3 the author moves to the next stage of it.

“Having shown the superiority of the Son to the angels in terms of status and power, and that the salvation brought by the Son was for humans – specifically the descendants of Abraham – the composition now turns to a lengthy consideration of these ‘people’ for whose sins the “faithful and merciful high priest” Jesus died (3:1-4:13).”

*Hebrews, Luke T. Johnson, 105*

Have someone read the whole of Hebrews 3 out loud. Then take a few minutes to actively read the passage on your own. Notice how it is structured and any other textual features, by which the author communicates, and which will help you engage with the text. Circle everything that pertains to the person and role of Jesus.

1. “Therefore” usually introduces an appeal, or a logical outcome, or a consequence. What is that heavenly calling mentioned here? And why is the preacher encouraging us to fix our eyes on Jesus? (Notice that this is the first time the author addresses his audience and calls them ‘holy brothers and sisters’.)
2. How does the preacher compare and contrast Moses and Jesus in vv.2-6? Is it possible that the mention of Moses is somehow connected with Heb 2:15? It might be helpful to look up Numbers 12 to see what God had to say about Moses and why the preacher of Hebrews would compare Jesus with him.
3. Consider the metaphor of us being God’s house, what does it mean that God is the builder, Moses the servant, and Jesus the Son? What does the author mean by saying that we are God’s house? What are the implications of this statement?
4. Why does the preacher narrate Ps 95:7-11 in vv.7-11? What is the connection between the wilderness generation of Israel and his current audience?
5. Notice how the condition of the heart is described in vv.7-19. What is the root problem that the preacher is addressing?
6. What were the consequences of the ancestors’ “not hearing” and rebelling? How does the preacher encourage his hearers to stay faithful?







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## Gather

As you prepare to continue our journey through Hebrews, think about something you got to learn this past year, a lesson or a skill. What was involved in you learning it, was it easy?

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## Word

Have someone read Hebrews 2:17-18 and 4:14-5:10.

Take 10-15 min to read it again on your own paying attention to the following:

- names and titles, circle those that are applied to Jesus
  - who are the main characters/agents of action
  - tasks and responsibilities
  - comparisons and contrasts
  - repetitions of words or ideas (some things you have seen before in the earlier chapters)
  - how the text is structured, logical flow (4:14-5:10 in particular)
  - any other important observations that you can make
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## Share your findings!

1. Look at Heb 2:17-18. How does being made fully human make Jesus fit for the office of high priest? What characteristics of Jesus as high priest does the author highlight and how do they resonate with you?
2. What enables believers to approach the throne of God with confidence in vv. 14-16?
3. Consider the chiastic description of a high priest and Jesus as high priest in Heb 5:1-10. How does Jesus fulfill and surpass this "job description"?
4. What is the significance that Jesus is designated as high priest in the order of Melchizedek and not Aaron? (Melchizedek also comes up in ch. 6-7).
5. What is the connection between suffering, obedience and Jesus identity in v.8? What is the connection between suffering, obedience, and who we are as Jesus' disciples?
6. What is the exhortation of 4:14-5:10, what are we encouraged to do? And on what basis can we actually do what this exhortation invites us to?







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## Connect

As you gather today, take turns each reading a paragraph of Numbers 13:26 - 14:23, the story of the scouts exploring the promised land and how Israel refused to enter in. It will provide the context for today's Bible study.

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## Word

Have one person read Hebrews 4:1-13.

Take 10-12 minutes to actively read the passage making observations that would help you interpret it. Some of the things you could do are:

- Go back and re-read Heb 3:7-19 noticing any connections
  - Divide the passage into logical units
  - Identify comparisons and contrasts, continuities and discontinuities
  - Mark the time references
  - Underline repeated words or ideas
  - Circle or mark the agents of action and their actions
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1. What kinds of rest are described in this whole passage? And how are they different from each other?
  2. How did Israel fall short of the promise of entering rest? What prevents us from entering the "rest"?
  3. What does it mean that God who never gets tired rested from all his works?
  4. Consider the fact that "entering rest" is referred to in the present tense. Why do you think that is so and how is it connected with "Today"?
  5. What does God's word do according to vv. 12-13?
  6. How does God speak and how does one hear His word? (See for e.g. 3:7-11; 4:7)
  7. What is the preacher trying to say by connecting the idea of God's rest with God's word?

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## Respond and pray

Ask the Lord to show you what would help you to enter and live out of the rest of God. Read Psalm 95, allowing it to speak to you and guide your prayer.







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## Gather

As you prepare to engage God's Word today, take a few minutes to reflect on your discipleship journey, what key turning points have helped you grow in trusting God, and what has slowed down your growth in faith? How has suffering of any kind shaped your discipleship? Feel free to share while being mindful that we are covering a lot of ground today in Hebrews. You can always continue the conversation later.

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## Word

Have one or two people read today's passage to the group. In the next 15 minutes take a good look at the text individually, trying to:

- Divide it into logically connected segments
- Identify similarities and contrasts (this passage is filled with the latter, in particular)
- Mark the repetitions - words, ideas, pronouns
- Note the agents of action that are mentioned
- Circle the titles or roles of Jesus and others (e.g. how the author addresses his hearers)
- Put a question mark around anything you do not understand or have a question about

Briefly share your findings - what you see in the text, helpful details and connections, without yet interpreting them or explaining your findings in depth. This is a challenging text and there is a temptation to get into explaining your point of view at length.

1. Consider Heb 5:11-14. What is the nature of maturity the author is talking about (is it intellectual, moral, practical)? How does he distinguish between those who are mature and who are not?
2. What is the problem with the congregation of Hebrews? What prevents them from maturing in faith? How does Heb 5:8 shed light on the process of maturing in 5:14 ("maturity" can also be translated as "perfection")?
3. What are the elementary truths that the preacher urges his hearers to move beyond?
4. Consider Heb 6:4-8. What point does this stern warning make against falling away from God? How is this warning related to the one in Heb 4:1-11?
5. Why do you think people find this particular warning problematic? How do you reconcile it with what you know about the character of God and with what the author says in vv. 9-12?







<sup>23</sup> It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. <sup>24</sup> For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. <sup>25</sup> Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. <sup>26</sup> Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. <sup>27</sup> Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, <sup>28</sup> so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

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## Gather

As you gather today, reflect on the recent changes in your life or the life of the community that you have experienced. Does change make you favour the old over the new? To get more context for today's study read Hebrews 8, particularly focusing on verses 8-12, which is a quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34.

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## Word

Have three people read Hebrews 9 out loud to the group: 9:1-10; 9:11-16; 9:17-28.

This is a long chapter, which means you will need to mind your time not to get carried away by making observations and sharing. So, take a few minutes to look over the text yourself paying attention to:

- Comparisons, repetitions, contrasts
- Objects
- Locations
- Agents of actions
- Time references
- Circle names/roles of Jesus (notice that He is addressed as "Christ")
- Cause and effect clauses
- Any confusing or unfamiliar concepts

Briefly share your findings.

1. What purpose did the tabernacle serve in vv.1-10? Why was it needed?
2. What was the purpose of the sacrifices in vv.11-14? Has it ever been achieved?
3. What has Christ achieved by dying on the cross? How was His sacrifice different from the sacrifices under the first covenant? Why was it superior (9:11-15, 23-28)?



## Background Notes

Resources used:

- Thomas G. Long, *Hebrews*, John Knox Press, 1997
- Luke T. Johnson, *Hebrews*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2006
- James W. Thompson, *Hebrews*, Baker Academic, 2008
- Edgar McKnight & Christopher Church, *Hebrews-James*, Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2004
- The IVP Bible Background Commentary
- N.T. Wright, *N.T. Wright for Everyone: Bible Study Guides, Hebrews*, IVP Connect, 2010

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### About the audience:

“Evidently the first readers of Hebrews were undergoing some sort of distress (see, for example 12:3-13), and, as a consequence, they were having difficulty holding on to their faith... Surely Jesus shared their suffering, but sharing suffering is not the same thing as transforming it. The problem with Jesus was that he was too human, too vulnerable. The objection to Jesus was that he appeared to be less than God, indeed he even seemed “lower than the angels”... In short, the first readers of Hebrews were tired of being Christians, tired of even Jesus.” (Long 20-21)

“True, judging by what the eye could see, Jesus was broken, shamed, and defeated by the powers of the world. But the whole truth about Jesus is not visible to the eye, and the Preacher’s main theme is that the hope and steadfastness of the congregation depends upon their ability to pay more attention to what is *heard* than to what is seen (2:1).” (Long, 21)

“The weary congregation of Hebrews longed for a gospel without a cross, a redemption without sacrifice, a faith without pain - something pristine and holy, something that does not exhaust the faithful with calls to put one foot in front of the other in daily obedience, something beautiful like an image of God in an unspoiled heaven surrounded by lovely angels singing untroubled hymns. Anything but a weeping, suffering Jesus marching through tragic history with his head bowed and his face bloodied.” (Long, 22)

“Readers of Hebrews need confidence and courage to sustain them. They have a rich heritage of work, love, and service (see 6:10), but they are now exhausted. The writer of Hebrews does more than talk about courage and confidence. The writer creates a world in his sermon. It is a world in which God spoke and speaks still.”

“The book of Hebrews does not present a difficult thesis. It is a simple thesis that is stated in 1:3b: “When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right-hand of the Majesty on high.” The readers’ major involvement is not in understanding the presentation of Jesus Christ in the book of Hebrews. The readers’ major involvement is the articulation of the readers’ own situation vis-à-vis that understanding of Jesus.” (McKnight & Church, 38)

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### Hebrews 1:1-5

“All was not revealed to each one prophet; but one received one portion of revelation, and another another. To Noah the quarter of the world to which Messiah should belong was revealed; to Abraham, the nation; to Jacob, the tribe; to David and Isaiah, the

family; to Micah, the town of nativity; to Daniel, the exact time; to Malachi, the coming of His forerunner, and His second advent; through Jonah, His burial and resurrection; through Isaiah and Hosea, His resurrection. Each only knew in part; but when that which was perfect came in Messiah, that which was in part was done away (1 Co 13:12).” (*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, R. Jamieson, R. Fausset, D. Brown.)

“In a word, the prophets were the *friends* of God but Jesus was the *Son*. The prophets grasped *part* of the mind of God; but Jesus was the mind of God.” (*The Letter to the Hebrews*, W. Barclay, p4)

“**by** His Son” – literally “**in** His Son”

“The word translated “exact representation” (*charaktēr*) is not found elsewhere in the New Testament, and is found only three times in the Septuagint.” Septuagint is a Greek Translation of the Old Testament. (McKnight & Church, p32)

“Sitting down at the right hand of the supreme king was an image of the ultimate honour and alludes to Ps 110:1” (*The IVP Bible Background Commentary*)

“Purification of sins was the work of priests; mention of it here anticipates a theme that appears later in the book” (*The IVP BBC*)

“Comparison is an important strategy in Hebrews, with the word “superior” being one of the book’s most characteristic adjectives (6:9; 7:7,19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24).” (McKnight, Church, p36)

Glory – *doxa*, it is a Greek translation of the OT term *kabod*, which maybe rendered as “weight”, “heaviness”, or “honour.” In the

NT, *doxa* refers to the visible splendour of God’s presence. In Romans, Paul uses *doxa* to describe the direct presence of God and the communion with Him that was forfeited by humanity at the fall. (Rom 3:23). (D. Seal, Logos)

“In a patriarchal society, the notions of ‘sonship’ and ‘inheritance’ are naturally linked. The extent and nature of one’s inheritance depends on the wealth and power of one’s father and one’s position among the offspring. In the biblical narrative, God’s promise to Abraham and to ‘the fathers’ (Heb 6:13-14) is spelled out in terms of an inheritance.” They were promised to inherit the land. The NT uses a similar language but reinterprets the promise in light of the experience of Jesus. “As the unique Son of God, Jesus is simply ‘the heir’ and his followers become ‘fellow heirs’ through their connection to Him (Rom 4:13). The inheritance, furthermore, is not of a material “land”, but of participation in God’s rule over creation... which can also be described in terms of ‘eternal life.’” (Hebrews, L.T. Johnson, p67)

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## Hebrews 1:5-14

“The Son enters fully into this inheritance following upon his work of purification for sins and as a consequence of his exaltation to the right hand of the majesty on high (1:3). It follows, then, that the ‘more excellent name’ is precisely his designation as ‘Lord’ (*kyrios*). In the biblical tradition, the name (*onoma*) is more than an arbitrary designator; it evokes the identity of the one named. And in the Septuagint, the ‘name’ *kyrios* is used to translate the Tetragrammaton (YHWH), the proper name of Israel’s God.” (Johnson, 73)

"The underlying issue being addressed in this section (1:5-14), indeed a crucial matter throughout the whole of Hebrews, is not that the readers find too much glory in angels but that they find too little of it in Jesus" (Long p.20).

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## Hebrews 2:5-16

Heb 2:7a - The Greek can be translated either "a little lower than the angels" (A statement about the distance and rank) or "for a while lower than the angels" (a measure of time). (Long, 36)

"Why was it 'fitting' for the Son to suffer? Because it was through suffering that Jesus was made 'perfect' (2:10); that is, suffering was a fitting way for Jesus to become 'perfect'. The Preacher considered Jesus to have been without sin (4:15), so there is no idea here of an impure Jesus being morally perfected. Rather, the idea is that Jesus was made 'fit' vocationally and functionally, not morally." Jesus' roles as redeemer and mediator" involve more than standing in the gap between God and humanity; they involve deep participation in both that elite of God and the life of humanity. Through suffering, Jesus is made perfect in both directions." (Long, 41)

"God's love does not protect us *against* suffering, but it protects us *in* all suffering." (Hans Küng)

Heb 2:9 elucidates "the manner in which Jesus was for a short time 'made lower than the angels.' It is not, as we might expect, due to his incarnation, but rather due to his suffering of death... Simply taking on a human nature would not, for Hebrews,

have 'lowered' the Son below the angels, for the Son never ceases to be the one who sustains the universe. But the Son has been fitted with a body (10:5) and has therefore so completely entered into the sphere of human existence as to embrace mortality, in contrast to the 'ministering spirits' (1:14) who need not face death. But Hebrews adds another note: the 'suffering' (*pathema*) of death. This time of suffering is key to the author's conception of Jesus' priesthood and to his understanding of discipleship. Jesus' death is significant not merely because he shares mortality with other humans, but also because he has participated fully in the distinctive experience of death under the reign of sin, namely fear and suffering." (Johnson, 91)

"The noun *doxa* [glory] ...refers to God's own being and presence. The Son, we have learned, has been 'crowned with glory and honour' precisely because he has entered that presence 'at the right hand of the Majesty on high.' God's intention, then, is to draw all other human beings into that same transcendent sphere, that same elevated form of existence. 'Glory' here is synonymous with 'so great a salvation' (2:3) and 'the world to come.' We learn, therefore, that God's plan is not to elevate only Jesus to his presence and power, but other human beings as well, who are his 'many sons' [and daughters]." (Johnson, 95)

"Pioneer"- "The description of the Son as "pioneer" (*archēgos*) is a distinctive contribution of Hebrews... it can refer to a ruler, to the first in the series. The significance of the word in Hebrews becomes evident in the author's usage. In 12:2, its combination with "perfector" suggest that the term means "originator." Similarly, the term "forerunner" (6:20) and the phrase "source of salvation"

(5:9) are synonymous with *archēgos*. Christ is thus the one who opens the way for others to follow. The language allows the author to exploit both the solidarity of the Son with his people and the Son as the one who opens the way." (Thompson, 62-63)

"Hebrews 2:5-9 also highlights how Jesus has already attained the status which God marked out for humans in general. Here we meet a point, which we shall discover to be typical of the way Hebrews understands the Old Testament (OT). Psalm 8, quoted in Hebrews 2:6-8, speaks of humankind in general as set in authority over the world, with 'everything subjected to him.' But, says Hebrews, this clearly hasn't happened yet. Humans are not ruling the world in a way that brings God's order and justice to bear on the whole of creation... The answer is that it has happened - in the case of Jesus. He is the representative of the human race. He has gone ahead of the rest of us into God's future, the future in which order and justice - saving order and healing justice - will come into the world." (Wright, 19)

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## Hebrews 3:1-19

"Jesus is designated as "high priest" and as "apostle," titles that are otherwise never used of him in the New Testament...As the *apostolos* (apostle) is sent by God to deliver the summons from God to humans through the proclamation of the good news, so the *archiereus* (high priest) is preeminently the one who responds from the side of humans to God (See Heb 5:1). The two terms combine to form Hebrews' understanding of Jesus as "mediator" (see 8:6; 9:15; and especially 12:24)." (Johnson, 106-107)

"In Scripture the word 'today' is used most notably in the speeches of Moses

in Deuteronomy, where the people are told repeatedly about the demands of the covenant on them 'today' (Deut 4:1, 2, 26; 5:3; 6:2, etc). ...In the Psalms, however, the term occurs only twice: in Ps 2:7 (which Hebrews quoted in 1:5) and in Ps 95:7 (cited in 3:7)." It summons people to obedient hearing and emphasizes the "sense of continuing and open-ended revelation by God: God speaks 'today.'" (Johnson, 114)

"The "today" of Scripture, then is marked not only in terms of time but also in terms of quality. In the New Testament, different words are used to express 'the extent of time' (*chronos*) and the quality of time (*kairos*). *Chronos* is sequential time, time we perceive as passing. *Kairos* is "the right time", "just-in-time", "the time of your life". The "today" of Scripture does not refer to a date on the calendar, but to "a critical time", "the propitious time to decide," "an urgent time." It is time in the sense of *kairos* - the eternal now." (McKnight & Church, 100)

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## Hebrews 4:14-5:10

"Christology is the primary focus of the book of Hebrews. Christology deals with the question of who Christ is in relation to God. Hebrews is interested in the question because its answer affects the question of who Jesus Christ is for us." (McKnight & Church, 78)

In the Jerusalem temple, only the high priest could enter the most holy place - and only once per year on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16; Heb 9:7).

The Lexam Bible dictionary: "Melchizedek - the king of Salem and priest of God Most

High. Blesses Abram in Gen 14:18-20, referenced in Ps 110:4 in God's promise to bless the Davidic king, and invoked in the letter to the Hebrews to affirm the priestly status of Christ." The name means "righteous king" or "my king is righteousness." Scholars argue that this can be both a personal name and/or a formal title meaning "righteous king."

5:3: The law required that priests offer an unblemished sacrifice for their own sins before performing their priestly service on behalf of the people (Lev 4: 3-12; 9:7).

"The 'boldness' with which Christians draw near is not a subjective experience but the right of access to God. In the political sphere the term meant freedom of speech or the candor to speak the truth to power. In the Septuagint and Jewish literature, it is a gift of God. Boldness characterizes friends of God who, like Moses, fearlessly bring their complaints before God. This background suggests that boldness here is the right to stand before God in prayer made possible by the Christ event." (Thompson, 105)

v5:2 "'Deal gently' means 'to moderate one's feelings'. It was often used of one who did not display excessive anger. It does not appear anywhere else in the Bible." (106)

4:15 "Jesus is able to sympathize (*sympathein*) with believers because of his total solidarity with his people... The term *sympatheō* is used elsewhere in the New Testament only in Heb 10:34, where it describes the care that the more fortunate members of the community extended to prisoners. The term is closely related to mercy ascribed to the high priest in 2:17. The term means participating in the pain of another." The author suggests, "the one who

expresses sympathy also has the resources to help." (107)

"At the center of the author's description of Jesus' humanity is the claim that, although he was a Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered (5:8). Here the author employs a well-known Greek wordplay that is common in Jewish and Greek literature to express the idea that humans learn through suffering." (116)

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## Hebrews 4:1-13

"The word "rest" has different uses in this section. "(1) The word 'rest' is used positively, somewhat as we use the word 'peace'. (2) However, the 'rest of God' refers historically to more than a general feeling of peace and goodwill. It refers to the experience of entry into the promised land after years of wandering in the wilderness. Numbers 14:12-23 tells how the children of Israel came to the borders of the promised land... and were doomed never to enter the peace of the promised land [having listened to the advice of the majority and distrusted the Lord]. (3) There is a 'rest' that remains. This rest is the Sabbath rest. The rabbis noted that in creation stories, God rested on the seventh day after creation had been completed... Also, the creation story does not speak of the seventh day as having an ending. The first six days had mornings and evenings, but the seventh day has no evening. The rabbis concluded that the day of God's rest was eternal and everlasting. So the rest remains. It remained for those addressed by Psalm 95, hundreds of years after Joshua led the people of Israel into the promised land, and it remained for those addressed by the writer to the Hebrews." (McKnight and Church, 103-104)

“Joshua (“Yahweh is salvation”)... The similarity of the names ‘Joshua’ and ‘Jesus’ caused early Christians to see Joshua as a ‘type’ of Jesus.” (106)

“The character of the rest promised to the people of God is clarified by the term ‘Sabbath.’ The term ‘Sabbath’ means a segment of time belonging especially to God. It emphasizes praise, festivity, joy and adoration. The rest spoken of here transcends time and place, but it is experienced here and now.” (108)

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## Hebrews 5:11-6:20

Hebrews 5:8-9 is “the diving board from which the Preacher will spring... One could hardly find a single sentence that more comprehensively sums up the message of Hebrews. Indeed, this complex, many-layered claim stands at the theological heart of the sermon.” (Long, 70)

In 5:11-6:12, “everything is at stake. If the congregation is to move toward spiritual maturity, then they must become good and willing students; theological truths must be mastered and allowed to take root in their lives.” (Long, 71)

5:11 “You no longer try to understand” - literally, “you have become and are lethargic/careless/dull/reluctant to listen”. “Obedience as we have seen in 5:8 is a form of responsive *hearing*. The listeners’ reluctance to learn more about such a messiah, therefore, may have much more to do with their perception that such learning leads them into the same path of suffering. The difficulty faced by the author is not simply mental laziness, but spiritual reluctance.” (Johnson, 154-155)

6:1-3 “The author does not mean abandoning, but rather building on the earlier knowledge. For Hebrews “laying a foundation again” is an exercise in futility. The author assumes the basic teaching about Christ and wants to start building on it.” (158)

6:12 “patience” - literally, long-suffering, which can mean an active posture of “putting up generously with another” and be applied towards God’s attitude to human beings and a generous human attitude toward suffering. (Johnson, 167)

“Righteousness” can also be translated justice. “*Justice* does not catch the full flavour, either, but at least it makes the point that the purposes of God in the gospel are focused on God’s longing to put the world right, and to put people right as part of that work. The writer here longs for people to understand the entire message of God’s healing, restoring, saving justice. He wants them to be able to handle this message in relation to their own lives, their communities and the wider world.” (Wright, 32)

“The preacher continues the discussion about Jesus being high priest in the order of Melchizedek in Ch. 7. In this chapter he uses a number of rhetorical devices to communicate the importance of faithfulness.

5:12 “adult acceptance of responsibility and infantile regression are compared” W. Barkley calls this infantilism a “case of arrested development of Christian faith”.

“Maturity has ethical as well as theological consequences” (McKnight & Church, 128-129)

5:14 “Here, metaphors from athletics are used. Mature people have their sense organs trained through practice or habit. The author

suggests how maturity is to be achieved – through practice or exercise.” (McKnight & Church, 130)

“Enlightened” is used in the NT to refer metaphorically to removal of ignorance through the preaching of the gospel and the action of God. (138)

McKnight and Church see the language of the warning as a rhetorical device to draw attention to the message.

“For the readers of the OT, Abraham is the prototype of those who trust in God.” (152)

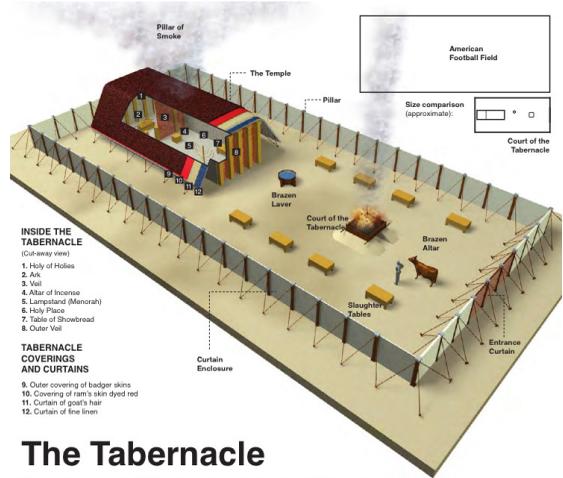
“Hope here does not signify a subjective attitude, but the gift of God extended to God’s people through Christ. The hope here is the promise that has been realized through Christ.” (154)

“The inner sanctuary represents a relationship with God. This relationship has been made a reality for Christians through the life and death of Jesus, his earthly career of suffering and obedience.” (156)

“Verse 6 raises an interesting question, which the writer does not pursue here: is it possible first to become a genuine Christian and then to lose everything after all? To this question Paul, in Romans 5-8, gives an emphatic answer, “No!” In Hebrews the writer quickly goes on to say that he does not think his readers come into the category he is describing (6:9), but chooses not to unpack this wider theological question.

The normal way of holding what he says together with what Paul says is that the people described in vv.4-5 are those who have become church members, and have felt the power of the gospel and the life that results from it through sharing the

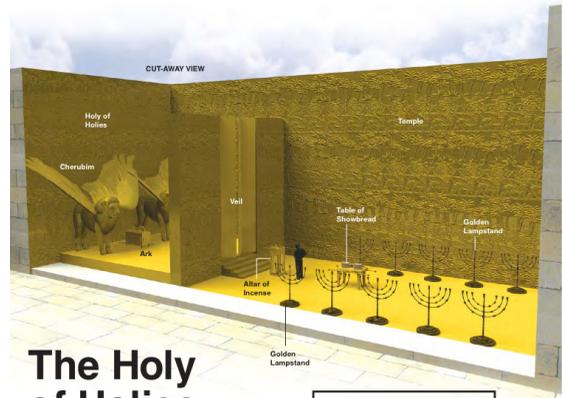
common life of Christian fellowship but who never really made it their own, deep down inside.” (Wright, 36)



## The Tabernacle

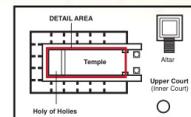
This portable temple was built in the wilderness by the Israelites circa 1450 BC after they were freed from Egyptian slavery. The tabernacle was the first temple dedicated to God and the first resting place of the ark of the covenant. It served as a place of worship and sacrifices during the Israelites' 40 years in the desert while conquering the land of Canaan.

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## The Holy of Holies

The holy of holies was the innermost chamber of Solomon’s temple; it contained only two gold-inlaid cherubim and the ark of the covenant (1 Kgs 8:6). The high priest was permitted to enter the holy of holies only once a year to bring an offering of blood. This was the Day of Atonement, now known as Yom Kippur.



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## Hebrews 9:1-28

“In the Bible, heaven is not simply a “spiritual”, in the sense of non-physical, dimension. It is God’s space, God’s realm, which interlocks with our realm in all sorts of ways. The Israelites believed that the temple in Jerusalem was the place above all where heaven and earth met, quite literally. When you went into the temple, especially if you went into the holy of holies in the middle of it, you were actually going into heaven itself.”

“The promises God made to Abraham and his family, and the requirements that were laid on them as a result, came to be seen in terms either of the agreement that a king would make with a subject people or sometimes of the marriage bond between husband and wife. One regular way of describing this relationship was ‘covenant,’ which can thus include both promises and law. The original covenant with Abraham was renewed with Moses at Mount Sinai with the giving of the Law. Jeremiah 31 promised that after the punishment of exile God would make a new covenant with his people, forgiving them and binding them to himself more intimately.” (Wright 45-46)

“Having brought up the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 in ch.8, the writer of Hebrews is now reminding his readers of some key aspects of the old covenant.” (Wright, 50)

“The idea of no pardon without bloodshed can seem primitive or barbaric. Yet our modern society tolerates, even fosters, so many things that previous generations, and other civilizations today, would consider barbaric. The point of sacrifice within the Old Testament system was a combination of at least 3 things: 1) humans offering to God something which represented their own

true selves, 2) the outpouring of life signify dealing with sin, and 3) the effects of both of these in the cleansing and purifying of the worshipper... Somehow, it seems, the blood of the sacrificial animals was pointing forward to the deeper truth still: that at the heart of the sacrificial system there lies the self-giving love of God himself.” (Wright, 51)

“Why should the heavenly sanctuary need to be purified? The answer, it seems, is that there was nothing wrong with the heavenly sanctuary itself, but that it needed to be made ready for the arrival of people with whom there had been a very great deal wrong – namely sinful human beings. We can’t come into the presence of the holy God this way. Jesus, then, purifies the heavenly sanctuary itself so that when other human beings are welcomed into it they will find, as the Israelites found in the earthly sanctuary, that everything there too bears marks of God’s self-giving love.” (Wright, 52)



# connection groups

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