

Hebrews

Who Jesus is and who we
are because of Him

Notes and Comments by John Sullivan

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus,
the author and perfecter of our faith,
who for the joy set before him
endured the cross, scorning its shame,
and sat down at the right hand
of the throne of God.*

Hebrews 12:2

Hebrews

Who Jesus Is and Who We Are Because of Him

© 2022 John Sullivan

All rights reserved. This journal may not be copied or reproduced without prior written permission from the author.

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ®. NIV ®.

Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.

Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.



Moline, IL

www.d4yp.com

NOTE TO E-BOOK READERS:

The printed journal, unlike this e-book version, has pages for notes.

You might want to have your own journal, either physical or electronic, because there is a lot of writing recommended in this study.

Hebrews

Who Jesus Is and
Who We Are Because of Him

Table of Contents

Week	Theme	Scripture	Page
	<i>Introduction</i>		i
1	<i>The Superiority of Jesus</i>	Hebrews 1 – 3	1
2	<i>Jesus Our High Priest</i>	Hebrews 4 – 7	7
3	<i>Jesus and the New Covenant</i>	Hebrews 8 – 10	13
4	<i>Fix Your Eyes on Jesus</i>	Hebrews 11 – 13	19
	<i>Conclusion</i>		25
	<i>Summary: Who is Jesus and who are we?</i>		26
	<i>Resources</i>		27

*Let us then approach God's throne of grace
with confidence,
so that we may receive mercy
and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Hebrews 4:16

Hebrews

*Who Jesus is and who we are
because of him*

Introduction

Welcome to this 4-week journey through the letter known as **Hebrews**.

I used the word "letter" in the opening sentence, but this Scripture does not have all of the characteristics of other typical New Testament letters. There is no opening address showing the author and the recipient of the writing, such as Paul's letters do. There is a closing with some of the typical greetings that Paul uses as he closes a letter. But, overall, this Scripture is more of an essay or a book. (So you will often see this journal refer to *Hebrews* as "this essay.")

As mentioned above, we are not told the author of this essay (see **Research Question I**, p. 27, for some ideas), but it has insights that could only come from inspiration by God. So, think of this as we do about all Scripture: God himself is teaching us, rebuking us, correcting us, and training us in righteousness (**2 Timothy 3:16**).

A combination of a 2-point teaching that is found often in this essay (and is in the subtitle of our journal) is:

- ***Who is Jesus?***
- ***Who are we because of Him?***

While this book is not a "Gospel" as we call the first four books of the New Testament, it is totally about Jesus. In particular, this essay extols the superiority of Jesus and explains in more detail than is found anywhere else the priesthood of Jesus and his mediation of the New Covenant. **That's who he is.**

You will notice several "therefore" passages pointing out who we are because of who Jesus is. This essay frequently encourages us to make every effort to focus on Jesus and who he is and then respond in a way appropriately connected to his character. Many of these teachings focus on our loving relationships with our brothers and sisters and remind us to be encouragers in all of these areas. Collectively and individually: **That's who we are.**

God knew that the original recipients of this essay needed to hear this. It was around 67 AD. Many of the readers were second generation Christians. Jesus had not returned as quickly as some of them might have thought he would. Persecution, while not at its highest level yet, was a constant annoyance. They may have been losing some of their original zeal. God knew that what they needed most was a reminder of who Jesus is and an encouragement to keep their eyes fixed on Him. That would also give them a practical teaching about how to live their lives. Hopefully, you will see how God knows we all need both of those today also.

While this study focuses on your personal reading and applications, it will also emphasize many times, because of the practical teachings found in these Scriptures, the importance of encouraging others. Also, if you do this study as a group, the Thought Questions at the end of each week could be used as some of your discussion questions.

God bless you as you continue in your determination to know the Bible better and to know Him better!

John Sullivan
September 2022

Who is Jesus?

Who are we because of Him?

The Superiority of Jesus

Hebrews 1 – 3

Memory Verse for the Week:

Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.

Hebrews 2:11

**Week 1
Day 1**

Superior to the Prophets

Read *Hebrews 1:1 – 3*.

Today's Date: _____

This overture introduces some of the themes about Jesus that will be discussed later in the essay. In particular, his superiority is emphasized. (By the way, one attribute of the excellent writing of this essay that you often see is the way it introduces a theme in one verse and explains it in detail in later verses.)

1. Who is Jesus? (Meditate about these attributes and write your thoughts.)

- He is the Son, through whom God is speaking now, and the Heir of all things. NOTE: He spoke to our ancestors; now he speaks to us. We are blessed to hear from the heir.
- He is the agent of creation. Don't ever forget how powerful he is! Creative and unlimited.
- He is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation (Greek word (used also in 11:1): *hypostasis*, the very essence) of God's character. He is exactly what God is like.
- He sustains everything by his powerful word. He is our Super Glue that keeps us from falling apart!
- He is the Purifier. Do you ever need that?
- He is the One seated at the right hand of God. That's the ultimate location, the hub of all spiritual activity, the command center. The fact that Jesus is seated there is stated 16 times in the New Testament, five times here in this essay.

2. Superior to the prophets

The Jewish religion had tremendous respect for the prophets, such as Moses and Elijah. But as great as they are, Jesus is greater. Hopefully, we respect the prophets also and recognize the importance of Jesus' superiority.

Meditate and pray about your reverence for Christ. Also, pray for your brothers and sisters this week as they also focus on the greatness of the Son.

We saw yesterday that Jesus is superior to the prophets. That short introduction could have been a huge attention-getter for many who read it. It was not being disrespectful to the honored prophets, but it showed how much more honor is due to Jesus. Today's verses would have also been a shock to some of the first century readers. At that time, the thinking about angels had been elevated in some minds to almost angel worship.

1. Jesus' superiority to angels. Read each Old Testament scripture referred to in these verses, meditate on them, and comment on how this essay applies them to Jesus. **NOTE:** It is not always obvious when you read the Old Testament references how they apply to Jesus. Our trust in God as the author of this essay helps us see the way He interprets them.

- Verse 5: He is the Son; no angel can say that. (**Psalm 2:7; 2 Samuel 7:14**)
- Verse 6: All God's angels worship him. (**Deuteronomy 32:43**)
- Verses 7 – 12: The angels are temporary (like wind and flames); the Son is eternal. (**Psalm 104:4; Psalm 45:6 – 7; Psalm 102:25 – 27**)
NOTE: He was anointed with the oil of joy!
- Verse 13: He is sitting at the right hand of God; no angel does that. (**Psalm 110:1**) As mentioned yesterday, this fact is often stated in the Bible. **1 Peter 3:22** is particularly interesting for this discussion, because it states that angels are in submission to him.

2. The valuable role of angels (verse 14)

Saying that Jesus is superior to the prophets is in no way downplaying the importance of prophets and the honor due them. The same is true about angels. We want to avoid two extremes: (1) worshipping angels and (2) not being aware of them and their importance. This verse makes it clear that they are valuable to God's mission and extremely helpful to us. Later on in this essay (12:22), we will be told that we are in the presence of thousands upon thousands of them. (Remember **2 Kings 6:15 – 17**.)

How do you feel about what God is saying here about his angels ministering to you? How does that help you faithfully face the challenges of each day?

For more information about angels, see **Research Question 2**, on page 27.

Continue to meditate about the superiority of Jesus the Son and pray about being a person who will always give him the proper respect. At the same time, thank God for his ministering angels.

I. Warning about drifting away

- Most people don't abruptly turn away from God; it's usually gradual.



"Drifting" (Greek word: *pararreo*) brings to mind a visual picture of a boat carelessly allowed to slip away because it has no anchor. It is a description of a life that is not deliberately running away from God, but it has let go of its passions and convictions that keep it attached to the vine (to use Jesus' analogy from **John 15**).

Or, to look at it another way, it describes a life that has no deliberate purpose or intentional direction. It's like a boat that is tossed back and forth by every wind or wave that comes along (to use Paul's analogy from **Ephesians 4:14**).

Whether it is mindlessly going through life or being too influenced by trends, drifting distracts us from our passion, purpose, and conviction.

- This is the "therefore" (verse 1) that follows the teachings in chapter 1 about Jesus being superior to the prophets and the angels. ("When you see the word 'therefore' in the Bible, always ask what it's there for.") This is the first of several "therefore's" we will see in this study. The prophets and angels brought a very powerful and essential message. It was so crucial that any violation (Greek word: *parabasis*, stepping across a line) or disobedience (Greek word: *parakoe*, deliberately ignoring and disobeying) produced serious consequences.

If the message brought to our ancestors by prophets and angels is that serious, how much more is the Word brought to us by God's Son?

- How to prevent drifting? Pay careful attention to what we have heard.

Literally, it could be translated "*abundantly give heed*" to what we have heard. That involves consistently, persistently giving our full attention to listening to God. It's like what James said about "*intently*" looking into the Word (**James 1:22 – 25**).

NOTE: watch for the analogy of an anchor to keep us from drifting in ch. 6.

2. Application

This warning is meant to help us, not just frighten us. How can we make sure we don't drift away from our passion, purpose, and convictions?

Meditate and pray about this warning about drifting, and don't forget to pray for others who are also desiring to take this to heart.

These verses talk about the amazing Jesus and His view of us.

1. Who is Jesus?

- Fully God.

He is crowned with glory and honor (verse 9). He is the one who makes people holy (verse 11). He broke the power of the devil's hold over death (verse 14). He freed those who have always been held captive by fear (verse 15). He made atonement for our sins (verse 17).

- Fully human.

He was made lower than the angels for a little while (verse 9) and became like humans in every way (verse 17). His suffering perfectly enabled him to fully identify with us (verse 10): he tasted what death is like (verse 9); he suffered in temptation so that he can help us with our temptation (verse 18). He our pioneer (Greek: *archegos* – chief, leader, prince, prime author); he began something for us to follow (verse 10), a thought that will be repeated in 12:2. Let us never forget how totally powerful Jesus is and yet how much he humbled himself for us.

Verse 9 says that "we see Jesus . . ." Spend some time thinking about your view of Jesus. Do we really see Jesus properly? God thought it was important that the Christians of the middle of the first century remind themselves of who he is. Do you see why it is also important today?

How do you really see Jesus?

2. Who are we? (Both collectively and individually)

- We are sons and daughters who have been brought to glory (verse 10).
- We have been made holy, and Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters (verse 11, our memory verse this week). He's even singing with us (verse 12). Wow! Reminds you of **Zephaniah 3:17**.

It is always obvious that God does not want us to be arrogant or think too highly of ourselves. But it is also obvious that God wants us to see ourselves the way he does. As stated above, God thought it was important that the Christians of the middle of the first century be told that Jesus enjoys calling them brothers and sisters. Do you see why it is also important today?

How do you view yourself and your brothers and sisters?

Our view of Jesus and our view of ourselves are connected. **Psalm 8**, which is quoted in this chapter, begins with a profound sense of awe about God and continues with the deep introspection of who we are. Meditate and pray about how you see Jesus and how you view yourself and our spiritual family.

We've seen that Jesus is superior to the prophets and to the angels. Now it is shown that he is superior to Moses. As with the first two comparisons, this comparison is not a put down of Moses – just a praise of the greatness of Jesus.

1. Fix your thoughts on Jesus (verse 1).

This is the second "*therefore*" in this essay. Because Jesus is who he is, it is beneficial to fix our thoughts on him (literally: *to focus our attention in a way to get the deeper meaning*). You will also see this emphasized in chapter 12. God thought it was important that the Christians in the middle of the first century remind themselves of this. Why do you think it is also important today for us to fix our thoughts on Jesus?

2. This chapter continues the thoughts: Who Jesus is/who we are.

- Who is Jesus (verse 1)? He is our high priest, a topic that will be discussed in detail in the next few chapters of this essay. He is also our apostle – that is, *the one who is sent*. This is a unique description of Jesus, only found in this verse. We usually think of Jesus picking and sending out apostles. How do you think he is our apostle?
- Who are we? We are holy brothers and sisters who share in the heavenly calling (verse 1). We are God's house (verse 6). How do you feel about those descriptions of yourself and your brothers and sisters?

3. The big "ifs."

- If we hold firmly to our confidence and hope (verse 6). (You will note how often the importance of "*confidence*" is mentioned in this essay.)
- If we hold our original conviction firmly to the end (verse 14).

God's love is unconditional, but the descriptions mentioned above about "*who we are*" do have conditions. How do you feel about these "ifs"?

4. God's rest

The quote from **Psalms 95:7 – 11** is used as a warning about not hardening our hearts. The theme of God's rest will be continued in chapter 4.

5. See to it: encourage one another (verses 12 – 13). Why?

This is a fairly well known "*one-another*" passage. From what you can see from the context, why does God want encouragement to be something that we "*see to it*"?

Is encouragement an integral part of your relationships?

Fix your thoughts on Jesus as you meditate about who he really is and who we really are, and pray for ways to encourage your brothers and sisters.

Week 1

If you do this study as a group, the Thought Questions could be used as some of your discussion questions.

Thought Questions

1. How do you feel about what is said in 2:11 that Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters?
2. What are some things you are doing to make sure you don't drift away, and how can you encourage others about that as well?
3. Is encouragement an important part of your life's focus?
4. What would you say so far about who Jesus is and who we are because of him?

Notes

Jesus Our High Priest

Hebrews 4 – 7

Memory Verse for the Week:

*Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence,
so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in
our time of need.*

Hebrews 4:16

**Week 2
Day 1**

Rest for God's People

Read Hebrews 4:1 – 13.

Today's Date: _____

The concept of rest was introduced in chapter 3 and is discussed more thoroughly here. This chapter talks about God resting from his creation work on the seventh day, setting the precedence for our understanding of rest. It also quotes (as 3:15 also did) from **Psalms 95:7 – 11** about God not allowing the faithless in the days of Moses to enter the Promise Land as a place of rest. Then, this Scripture refers to the sense of rest for the people who live in the presence of God. That rest is described both in the present tense (verse 4) and in the future tense (verse 9). We have entered that rest through faith, and we want to make every effort to enter it in eternity.

1. Another "therefore" (verse 1)

Since Jesus is who he is and we are who we are because of him, the conclusion that God wants us to see here is to make sure we don't miss out on the rest that he plans for his people. "Be careful" (verse 1) – literally "fear" (Greek: *phobesite*); not the fear that runs away from a challenge, but the fear of missing the one thing that is important, which in this passage is entering God's rest. Do you have that kind of fear?

2. Entering that rest (verses 3 – 11)

This essay has a good combination of a healthy warning (don't be like the people who disobeyed and did not enter the promised land rest) and a challenge that is worth our devotion (make every effort to enter God's rest (verse 11)). How does that warning and challenge about rest impact you?

3. The Living and Active Word of God (verses 12 – 13)

This is another famous passage. It starts with the word "for" which shows its connection with the warning and challenge about entering God's rest. There is nothing that can keep us from that rest more than hidden unbelief in our hearts. We are reminded here that there is nothing hidden before God. His Word penetrates the thoughts and attitudes of our heart. That can be viewed as a threat, or it can encourage us to know that God knows our heart, so we might as well be open and honest with him. Which view do you have?

Meditate about the blessing of being in God's rest and pray about your effort to enter it. Continue to pray for your brothers and sisters also.

This verse marks the beginning of a new section in this essay which continues through chapter 10 and deals with Jesus as the High Priest. The topic was introduced in 2:17 and 3:1 and will now be discussed thoroughly. Many of the teachings found here are not found anywhere else in the New Testament in this detail.

1. Confidence to approach the throne of grace (4:14 – 16)

The next "*therefore*" in this essay deals with one of its frequent themes, the idea of "*confidence*." This confidence is not in ourselves; it is in Jesus. But, while it is not the result of our own merit, it has to be applied to ourselves, both individually and collectively. It is who we are because of who he is.

- We can be confident about the throne of grace. It is a throne – don't forget that. God is to be respected and always viewed with awe. Don't treat him with disrespect. But his throne is the throne of grace. It is where grace rules the day and every day. Don't forget that either. You can be confident that he will help you in your time of need. (See **Research Question 5**, on page 27.)
- We can be confident to approach that throne. Why? Obviously not because of our own merit, but because we have such an amazing High Priest. Jesus was tempted in every way like us. In fact, since he never gave in to that temptation, his temptations may have been much harder than ours. So, be assured that he is able to empathize with us.

Are you approaching the throne of grace with that confidence?

2. Jesus' petitions, submission, learning, and perfecting (5:1 – 10)

These verses have some deep observations about Jesus. Again, much of this is not explained in this detail anywhere else in the New Testament.

- His prayers and petitions were accompanied with fervent cries and tears.
- He was heard because of his reverent submission. We remember him saying, "*Not my will, but yours be done.*"
- He learned obedience through what he suffered. We don't think of the Son of God needing to learn anything. But experiencing the suffering that comes from his humanity was a learning experience for him.
- That all made him perfect for his role. We mistakenly think of "*perfect*" as "*sinless*." Jesus was already and always sinless. He did not become sinless through his suffering. But the word *perfect* also refers to being completely fitted for the purpose to which it is designed.

How does all of this make you feel about Jesus?

3. The concept of Jesus being a priest in the order of Melchizedek is introduced in 5:6 and 10, and it will be discussed later.

Meditate about the confidence you have because of who Jesus is and what he has done. Pray with that confidence as you approach God's throne of grace.

We know that God's Word is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training (**2 Timothy 3:16**). This passage contains a rebuke and a correction.

1. Warning about not growing, maturing, or making progress (5:11 – 13)

This is the third warning in this essay (2:1 about not drifting away and 4:1 about not entering God's rest). This one is even more stern. It is the only time in this essay that God really rebukes the readers. His concern was about not learning, not growing, not maturing, not making progress.

Rebukes are never fun, but they are useful, especially when they come from someone who loves you. Remember that this comes right after the reassuring reading from the previous chapter about the throne of grace. And, as you see near the end of this section (6:9), God gives them more reassurance about his confidence in them. To paraphrase: *"I am concerned, but I believe in you."*

How do you feel about this rebuke?

2. The solution to the problem about which they (we) were warned (5:14)

- Constant use and training. God will feed us. That is his commitment to us. We just have to make sure that we let him feed us – not merely listen, but listen intently (**James 1:22 – 25** and **Psalms 1:2**).
- Training ourselves to distinguish good from evil. Jesus is our ultimate trainer, but we have to be devoted to train ourselves also.

3. The necessity of progress (6:1 – 3)

There is nothing wrong, of course, with the basic principles found in this passage. God is making the point, though, that we should desire to make progress in our faith and knowledge of him.

4. Crucifying the Son of God all over again (6:4 – 8)

This is a very difficult passage to fully understand. It should be interpreted, as all Scriptures are, in light of the rest of the Bible. So, it is not saying that it is impossible for someone who falls away to ever be restored back to God. Otherwise, we wouldn't have instructions like **Galatians 6:1**. But it is warning us that someone could get to the point that they never repent. That has the horrible connection with crucifying Jesus all over again.

5. God's reassurance and call for endurance (6:9 – 12)

- They are *"dear friends."* He is confident about them (verse 9).
- He challenges them to be diligent to the end. Endurance is hard, but it is not impossible. God wouldn't challenge us if it were impossible.

Meditate on God's warning and his reassurance. Approach the throne of grace, and confidently ask help to give you the endurance that is possible through him.

1. Hope as an anchor for the soul (6:13 – 20)



Recall the warning about drifting away (2:1). An anchor is one way to make sure that a boat does not drift away. Hope is the anchor for our soul that makes us firm and secure. Our hope is based on what we see several times in this essay: who Jesus is and who we are as a result of who He is. This passage talks about how reassuring it is that God can be trusted with everything he promises. It is impossible for him to lie.

Verse 20 also mentions Jesus as our forerunner (*prodromos* – one who advances to explore and prepare the way). As a High Priest, he entered the Most Holy Place, the place behind the curtain, on our behalf and allows us to approach the throne of grace also.

2. Jesus, the high priest in the order of Melchizedek (6:20 – 7:10)

That phrase, introduced in 5:6 and 5:10, is discussed thoroughly in chapter 7.

Who was Melchizedek (7:1 – 10)?

- The brief story about Abraham and Melchizedek is found in only three verses, **Genesis 14:18 – 20**. There Melchizedek was described as a priest of God Most High. The only other time he is mentioned, besides the 8 references to him in this essay, is **Psalms 110:4** which is quoted in the next section. His name meant "*king of righteousness*," and he was the king of Salem, which means "*king of peace*."
 - After Abraham rescued his nephew Lot in a dangerous battle, Melchizedek came to him and gave him a priestly blessing. Then Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe – again, relating to Melchizedek's priestly office. The point is that Melchizedek was a priest of God, long before there were Levitical priests as established in the Law of Moses.
3. What is a priest in the order of Melchizedek? (For more information about Melchizedek, see **Research Question 3**, p. 27.)
- The Old Testament priests had to be from the tribe of Levi. Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, not Levi. So his priesthood is not like the priesthood in that system. His priesthood is like Melchizedek's. There is no record of Melchizedek's mother or father, whereas the priests in the temple had to have a record proving their ancestry.
 - There is no record in the Bible of Melchizedek's death. That doesn't mean that he didn't die, but there was no record of his death. The writer of this essay makes the point that Jesus' priesthood lasts forever, a connection that we probably would not see. The priests in the temple only lasted until they died. Jesus remains a priest forever.

To be honest, we may not get excited about this topic. Most of us probably don't think on a daily basis about having Jesus as our High Priest. The amount of detail that God had this writer spend on this subject makes you think it might be more important than we realized. So, for the next few devotionals, think about why it is important to remember Jesus as our High Priest.

Meditate about that as you approach the throne of God with confidence.

1. The power of an indestructible life and its results (7:16)

- Jesus was not a priest because of his ancestry. He is the perfect high priest because of his life – an indestructible life! That is who he is. How does that description of Jesus inspire you?
- It was mentioned in yesterday's reading that Jesus was not born in the tribe of Levi, which means that he was not qualified to be a Levitical priest. That was not an accident, however. It was not something that required some creative way to justify his priesthood. It was God's way of saying that Jesus' priesthood was different from the Old Testament system (verses 12 – 15).
- Perfection could not be obtained through the Levitical priesthood (verse 11). But it is through Jesus. He is able to save us completely and is always interceding for us (verse 25). That is how we are viewed by God because of who Jesus is and what he did. How does that feel to you?

2. The necessity of a new law and a new covenant

- Changing the priesthood requires changing the Law (verse 12).
- That involves making a new covenant (verse 22). This subject, which is introduced here, will be discussed more thoroughly in the passages we read next week.

3. The characteristics of our high priest (verses 26 – 28)

These verses summarize what has been said about Jesus' priesthood and how it continues the important features from the Levitical priesthood, yet is very different from it in other aspects. Comment on how each of these impact you:

- He is holy. Holy means different, set apart, which was also true of the Levitical priests.
- He is blameless and pure. Something that could not be said about the humanly priests, without the purification ceremonies given by God.
- He is set apart from sinners. Not aloof from them (i.e. us). He is like us in every human aspect, yet was without sin.
- He is exalted above the heavens.
- He did not have to offer a sacrifice for his own sins.
- He did not have to repeat his sacrifice.
- He sacrificed himself.

Meditate about the priesthood of Jesus and spend some time in prayer thanking God for what is said here. Remember: our High Priest is always interceding for us.

Week 2

If you do this study as a group, the Thought Questions could be used as some of your discussion questions.

Thought Questions

1. What does the confidence to approach God's throne of grace mentioned in 4:16 mean to you personally and practically?
2. What are you learning about why you need a High Priest?
3. How does it encourage you that Jesus is always interceding for you (7:25)?
4. What would you say so far about who Jesus is and who we are because of him?

Notes

Jesus and the New Covenant

Hebrews 8 – 10

Memory Verses for the Week:

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Hebrews 10:19 – 22

**Week 3
Day 1**

The New Covenant

Read *Hebrews 8:1 – 13*.

Today's Date: _____

1. "The main point of what we are saying" (verses 1 – 5)

Don't you appreciate it when someone summarizes the point for you like this? The first seven chapters of this essay about the superiority of Jesus was to show us how amazing it is to have him as our High Priest. As these verses point out, his priesthood is in the real, the heavenly sanctuary, of which the earthly one is only a copy.

It's interesting, though, that most people in our day do not recognize the importance of Jesus as our High priest. You have probably never heard anyone say "I wish I had a High priest." We need a high priest to take us into God's presence; and we have one! So, after studying this, how would you answer this question: Why is it so great that Jesus is our High Priest?

2. The New Covenant (verses 6 – 13)

This will be the theme for a lot of the readings this week. Jesus said at the last supper "*this cup is the new covenant in my blood.*" (**Luke 22:20**) From the quote from **Jeremiah 31:31 – 34** what do you see that is new about the new covenant?

All this week, keep focusing on the importance of having Jesus as our High priest. Pray for your covenant with God and also continue to pray for your brothers and sisters as they too dig into our covenant with God.

The chapter contrasts the old and the new covenants, especially in the area of forgiveness of sins.

1. The glory, yet limitations, of the first covenant (verses 1 – 10)

- The earthly tabernacle and temple had the outer part called the Holy Place and the inner part called the Most Holy Place which was behind a curtain. It was a glorious place showing God's people the glory of His Presence. But it was limited to a single place. The inner room, which indicated the closest approach to God, was limited to only a single person, the High Priest, and him only once a year.
- The day of atonement was one of the most interesting events in the Jewish yearly calendar. **Leviticus 16** gives a full description of that once-a-year, awe-inspiring showing of God's grace. As you have time study that chapter. You will find the events and implications of that Day of Atonement to be quite interesting and inspiring. But it was also limited in that it wasn't able to clear the consciences of the people.

2. The glory and extended effectiveness of the new covenant (verses 11 – 28)

- The heavenly tabernacle is not a part of this creation. It is the actual throne of God, of which the earthly tabernacle is only a copy. Jesus did not enter the earthly Most Holy Place. (Remember, he was not a Levitical priest.) But he did enter the heavenly Most Holy Place.
- The atonement through the sacrifice of Christ has many similarities to the earthly day of atonement in the Old Testament, but Christ's atonement is much better. It is not limited to a single day and does not have to be repeated. Verse 14 points out that his sacrifice is able to cleanse our consciences from the acts that lead to death (literally: *useless rituals*). Moreover, Jesus did not offer a sacrifice; he offered himself. Let the amazing thought from verse 24 sink in: He is in God's presence "*for us*." How does that feel?

NOTE: The basic ingredients of our covenant with God, as stated in 8:10, involve the co-promises: "*I will be your God,*" and "*We will be your people.*" (For more information about covenant, see **Research Question 4**, page 27). How do you feel about those two promises?

ALSO NOTE: Verse 16 uses the idea of a covenant in a different way, describing it as a "*will*." It's the same Greek word (*diatheke*, which some versions translate here as *testament*). But instead of emphasizing the two-way aspect of a covenant, a will is mostly a one-way document. The one making the will (God) sets out the stipulations for receiving the benefits described in the will. These verses emphasize the need for the death of the one giving that will, which is an unexpected take on the death of Jesus and the shedding of his blood.

Meditate about the new covenant we have with God and thank him for Jesus being the perfect mediator between us and God.

These verses summarize what was said in yesterday's reading. The first covenant, with its tabernacle, its priesthood, and its sacrifices, was only a copy, a shadow of the new covenant. The new covenant is the reality.

1. The weaknesses of the shadow (verses 1 – 11)

- These sacrifices could not make perfect those who drew near to worship (verse 1).
- They were an annual reminder of sins (verse 3).
- They could not take away the sins (verse 11).

2. The strengths of the reality (verses 12 – 18)

- Jesus' sacrifice makes us perfect and holy (verse 14). We've seen the word "*perfect*" before – being completely fitted for the purpose for which we are designed. That's who we are because of who He is! How does that feel?
- Verses 16 – 17 contain another quote from **Jeremiah 31:33 – 34** about the New Covenant. Now our sins are remembered no more! This is a huge contrast between the New and Old Covenants. There is a healthy and an unhealthy way to remember the past. We want to remember how much God has done to rescue us, and we want to remember the lessons we learned from those mistakes. That's healthy; it is our testimony. But when it comes to the guilt of our past sins, God says that these sins are no longer remembered. Dwelling on the guilt and the shame of the past is not healthy. How important is it to you that God forgives and forgets?
- Our sins are forgiven (verse 18). Gone; done; forget about it!

Add to these thoughts what was mentioned before about clearing our consciences (8:14). Do we need this?

NOTE: Verses 12 – 13 highlight again the exaltation to the right hand of the throne of God and the final triumph of Jesus. This is something that, of course, no earthly high priest could say.

3. Imagine the atmosphere of a culture where all of this is understood to be true.

- Because of Jesus, we are holy (10:10). That's the way I see Jesus, the way I see myself, and the way I see you.
- Because of Jesus, we are made perfect (10:14). That's the way I see Jesus, the way I see myself, and the way I see you.
- Because of Jesus, we are forgiven (10:17). That's the way I see Jesus, the way I see myself, and the way I see you.

What will a spiritual family look like if we see ourselves and see each other the way God does: holy, perfect, forgiven because of Jesus?

Meditate again about the amazing blessing of being in the New Covenant. Continue to pray with gratitude about that covenant and about your commitment to stay faithful to it. Also, continue to pray for your brothers and sisters. Together, we are recipients of the blessings of this amazing New Covenant.

This reading contains our memory verses. Granted, it is long, but it is a nice summary of this essay and of who Jesus is and who we are because of him.

I. This is another “*therefore*” passage. This “*therefore*” has two precedents.

- One is the reality of who Jesus is – our great High Priest and the mediator of the New Covenant.
- The other is our confidence to enter the Most Holy Place. As stated before, this is not confidence in ourselves. God is not just trying to build our self-esteem or boost our self-confidence. This is confidence based on what Jesus has done and continues to do.

Confidence to enter the Most Holy Place. Under the Old Covenant, no one would have any reason to expect or even desire to enter the Most Holy Place, except the high priest once a year. Now, because of what Jesus did, we can go behind that curtain and draw near to God anytime.

Recall 4:16, the confidence to approach the throne of grace. These verses are sort of bookends. What is in between them is the reason why that confidence is possible, which is the sacrifice of our High Priest.

- Recall also that at the death of Jesus that curtain in the temple which protected the Most Holy Place was torn in two (**Mark 15:38**).

How is your confidence to enter the Most Holy Place?

2. There are three conclusions to this “*therefore*.” They represent the healthy combination that is often found in Scripture: upward focus, inward focus, and outward focus.

- **Upward Focus.** Draw near to God (verse 22). There's no reason to pull away from Him.
- **Inward Focus.** Hold unswervingly to the hope we profess (verse 23).
We have seen other challenges in this essay to hold on to the things that matter: for example: our confidence (3:6) and our convictions (3:14).
We've also seen that hope is the anchor for the soul (6:19) that keeps us from drifting away as we were warned about in chapter 2.

What is your hope like?

- **Outward Focus.** Stay focused on encouraging others (verses 24 and 25).
Remember the similar charge in 3:12 – 13. We are not in the New Covenant as soloists. “*Spur one another on toward love and good deeds.*” In love and for the purpose of loving, encourage and challenge one another. And don't get in a habit of missing the fellowship (verse 25).

How are you doing about encouraging others?

So, the ability to do these three things comes only from the reality of who Jesus is and who we are because of him. Without those two realities, it would be a frustrating endeavor to try to draw near to God, be hopeful in our personal life, or try to encourage others.

Meditate and pray about how you can do what this passage calls us to do.

What God is showing us in this essay is not just a good idea, it is a matter of life and death.

1. *"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* (verses 26 – 31)

- We have seen the confidence we can have to approach God's throne of grace. This passage reminds us to not abuse that or take it for granted. It talks about the consequences of deliberately continuing to sin. It is not a scare tactic to make you paranoid about any slip up. But it is a realistic reminder of the seriousness of stubbornly and consistently not repenting.
- Trampling the Son of God underfoot, treating his blood as an unholy thing, and insulting the Spirit of grace (verse 29) carry the same seriousness as crucifying the Son of God all over again (6:6). Does that get your attention? As seen in other warnings in *Hebrews*, this is not written to scare us. But it does get our attention and makes us realize all the more how much we need and want Jesus.

How do you feel about all of that?

2. As always, Scripture is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (**2 Timothy 3:16**). This passage not only gives a serious warning; it also gives the correction; i.e. what we can do with God's help in response to this warning.

- Remember the convictions you had when you began your walk with God (verse 32). Look at the relationships they had then. Do you still have the same commitment to your brothers and sisters that they had?
- Do not throw away your confidence (verse 35). What does that mean to you?
- Persevere (verse 36). Don't shrink back (verse 38). Remember that the only way to lose is to quit.
- Remember that he is coming back (verse 37).

If you find this somewhat overwhelming (and we probably should), be sure to personally approach God's throne of grace to get the help you need. Also, don't forget to ask others for help. Don't try to do it solely on your own.

3. You can see his confidence in them from verse 39: *"we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved."* Do others hear that from you?

Meditate and pray about your confidence and perseverance. Tell others about your confidence in them and your desire to continue in the New Covenant with them.

Week 3

If you do this study as a group, the Thought Questions could be used as some of your discussion questions.

Thought Questions

1. How important is the covenant to you on a personal and practical level? How can you make it more important?
2. Now that you have read several verses related to confidence, what are your convictions about it?
3. Now that you have also seen several instructions in *Hebrews* about encouraging others, what are your convictions about that?
4. What would you say so far about who Jesus is and who we are because of him?

Notes

Fix Your Eyes on Jesus

Hebrews 11 – 13

Memory Verse for the Week:

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:2

**Week 4
Day 1**

Inspiring Examples of Faith (Part 1)

Read *Hebrews 11:1 – 16*.

Today's Date: _____

The previous reading ended with the affirmation that we are characterized by faith, not by shrinking back. This chapter then gives an inspiring list of people who illustrated faith. They were not perfectly sinless by any means. The Bible is honest about their sins, but their faith clearly exemplifies trusting and obeying God.

1. Verse 1 says that faith gives confidence (Greek: *hypostasis*, the same word that describes Jesus in 1:3) about hope and assurance about what we don't see.

What inspires you about the confidence and assurance that you see in these people of faith?

- Abel (**Genesis 4:1 – 15**)
- Enoch (**Genesis 5:21 – 24**)
- Noah (**Genesis 6 – 8**)
- Abraham (**Genesis 12:1 – 3**)
- Sarah (**Genesis 21:1 – 2**)

2. Faith and pleasing God (verses 6 and 13 – 16)

Enoch was mentioned as someone whose faith pleased God (verse 5). So, we are reminded that without faith it is, in fact, impossible to please God.

It is that faith that allowed these people to be confident during the challenges of their lives, knowing that God had a better plan for their future. He was pleased with them and prepared a future blessing for them. God said he was not ashamed to be called their God, similar to what Jesus said in 2:11. Now that's something that we definitely hope he says about us also.

Meditate about these examples of faith and pray about the blessing of pleasing God and the amazing thought of God not being ashamed of being our God. All this week pray also for your brothers and sisters and their faith.

1. What inspires you about the confidence and assurance that you see in these people of faith?

- Abraham (**Genesis 22:1 – 18**)
- Isaac (**Genesis 27**)
- Jacob (**Genesis 47:31**)
- Joseph (**Genesis 50:22 – 26**)
- Moses' parents (**Exodus 2:1 – 10**)
- Moses (**Exodus 2:14 – 22; 12:12 – 51**)
- Israelites at the Red Sea (**Exodus 14**)
- Israelites at Jericho (**Joshua 6:1 – 20**)
- Rahab (**Joshua 2:1 – 21; 6:25**)
- The others (verses 32 – 38)

2. They were commended for their faith (verse 39).

- They were commended by God. We're not always told how, but we can be assured that he somehow told them of his pleasure in them.
- We know that the Bible is clear about their mistakes. They were not perfectly sinless people. But we also know of the examples in their stories where their faith gave them the confidence to approach God and approach their situations with courage.
- Yet they did not receive their full reward on earth. You can clearly see that hope was the anchor for their soul. That might be one huge difference between the faithful and the unfaithful: are you willing to please God even if you are not rewarded now?

3. The connection with our faith

Read again verse 40. What an amazing thought: They are not just ancient people of the past; we are connected with them in a way that helps them and encourages us. What do you think about that?

Meditate and pray about their faith and ours.

1. "Therefore"

The faithful men and women from the previous chapter are our "*great cloud of witnesses*." With Jesus as our great High Priest and these faithful people of the past witnessing our lives, we have inspiration to persevere. They are not just people of history; they are cheering us on now.

2. Run your race with perseverance and with a purpose.

- What kinds of things hinder your race, and how can you get rid of these things?
- What sins easily entangle you, and how can you get rid of these sins?

There is a point to our lives, and we are getting closer to the goal. So persevere!

3. Fix your eyes on Jesus. This is certainly one of the key points of this essay.

We saw a similar thought in 3:1, "*Fix your thoughts on Jesus*." Remember the story of Peter, the only person, other than Jesus, who walked on water. What an amazing feat (or was it amazing feet?). He did fine until he took his eyes off of Jesus and started looking only at the difficulties of the situation.

Your life is also pretty amazing. The race marked out for you is not a humdrum, meaningless existence. It is a heavenly calling (as stated in 3:1), and it has an earthly purpose. But there are difficulties and challenges. It's not wrong to be aware of those difficulties and challenges. How else can you approach the throne of grace and get help if you don't know what it is that makes you need help? But if we focus on them without faith, we too will sink.

As we run the race of our lives, looking intently into His eyes gives us strength, encouragement, direction, and motivation. They are the eyes of love. How can you quit when you look into His eyes?

4. The author (same word as in 2:10) and finisher (perfecter) of our faith.

This is true of the faith, in general, and of your own personal faith.

- Reflect on how he started you on this race with his "*Come follow me*."
- With confidence, think also of him as the One who is there at the finish line helping you to finish perfectly. (Recall **Ecclesiastes 7:8** and **Philippians 1:6**.) Believe it! This is who He is and who you are.

5. Look at his example.

"*The joy set before him*." He had to endure unspeakable shame and pain. But his "*therefore*" took him through it. He made it to the right hand of the throne of God. Considering him helps us to not grow weary and lose heart.

Meditate about the witnesses surrounding you and the Son of God who is guiding you on. Spend some time looking into the eyes of Jesus. What do you see?

[You might want to spend more than one day on these last two devotionals.]

1. Discipline from God (12:4 – 13)

- Be encouraged by God's discipline (verse 5). This is a sign of his love. Verses 5 and 6 have a quote from **Proverbs 3:11 – 12**.
- Endure hardship as discipline (verse 7). This doesn't say that all hardships are discipline from God. But it does give us another way of looking at hardships: what can God teach me through this? Consider adding a thought like this to your prayers: *"God, I'm not saying that you caused this hardship, but I am confident that you will help me through it and will teach me a lot from it."*
- Respect God's fatherhood and submit to his discipline (verse 9). He is more interested in helping us be strong than making life easy for us.
- How have you experienced the benefits of discipline (verses 10 – 11)?

2. Peace and holiness (12:14 – 15).

As is often the case with Scriptures teaching us about who God is and who we are as a result of what he has done and continues to do, this essay reminds us about our relationships with others.

- How is your personal holiness related to your peace with others?
- Also, how are bitterness and missing out on grace connected?

3. Godless (12:16 – 17). Approaching situations without God.

"Godlessness" is not only doing immoral acts. It can also show up in situations (like Esau experienced) when we have a need but do not approach God about it. It is just the opposite of confidently approaching the throne of grace to find help in our time of need. Are you ever godless?

4. Reverence and awe (12:18 – 29)

We are reminded of the experience that the Israelites had in the time of Moses coming to Mount Sinai (**Exodus 19**) and the experience we have today spiritually coming to "*Mount Zion*." In our case it is not a literal mountain that can be touched. It is real, nevertheless. Note the contrast and comparisons between the two mountains and write your thoughts about them:

- The Mountain of fear.
- The Mountain of joy.
(**NOTE:** we have come to thousands of angels in joyful assembly (12:22). We thought about some of the awesome attributes of angels in chapter 1. Here we are reminded of the amazing experience of being in their presence – thousands upon thousands of them – as we worship. Is that something you realize as you worship?)

We have come to the kingdom that cannot be shaken. The results are the same as they experienced in the time of Moses: reverence and awe of God.

Meditate about the awesome kingdom that we are a part of and pray about your reverence and joy for God, thanking him for his loving discipline.

Before this amazing writing comes to its conclusion, there are some reminders of who Jesus is and who we are as a result of what he has done.

1. Who Jesus is.

- He is consistent (verse 8).
- He is the great sacrifice for our sin (verse 12).
- He is our Great Shepherd (verse 20).

That's who Jesus was, is, and will always be. Spend some time meditating about who Jesus is and praising and thanking him for these qualities.

2. Who we are. (**NOTE:** some of these are given as statements describing who we are; some are given as commands describing what God expects us to be.)

- We continue to love our brothers and sisters (verse 1). Keep on loving!
- We are motivated to show hospitality (verse 2). Note again the mentioning of angels in this context.
- We care for those who are suffering (verse 3).
- We are concerned about purity (verse 4).
- We are commanded to be content (verse 5). Jesus is our reason why we are content.
- We have confidence that God is with us (verses 5 & 6). (See again **Research Question 5**, page 27.)
- We respect godly leaders (verses 7 & 17). It is so refreshing when leaders and followers show God's kind of respect for each other!
- We continually offer our praise to God (verse 15).
- We try to do good, not harm, and we share with others (verse 16).

Spend some time meditating and praying about these qualities of who we are individually and collectively.

3. The conclusion: a people of grace (verse 25).

Grace is the atmosphere and the culture that God envisions for his spiritual family. We continually receive it, and we continually give it.

Fix your eyes on Jesus and pray to be the kind of people he wants us to be. As we saw in the devotional on chapter 10 (page 15), pray and imagine the atmosphere of a culture where all of this is understood to be true.

Week 4

If you do this study as a group, the Thought Questions could be used as some of your discussion questions.

Thought Questions

1. What stands out to you from the examples given in the *Faith Hall of Fame* in chapter 11?
2. How does fixing your eyes on Jesus (12:2) apply to you personally and practically?
3. As a result of studying *Hebrews*, how would you answer the questions: who is Jesus and who are we because of Him? (See the summary page on page 26.)

Notes

Hebrews

*Who Jesus is and who we are
because of him*

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to get to know the Bible better and to get to know God better.

To say the least, this is a very interesting part of the Bible. It contains some details that are not found in any other Scriptures, such as the priesthood of Jesus. On the other hand, it is consistent with the rest of the Bible with its emphasis on his sacrificial love and constantly powerful and loving presence in our lives. You might want to take some time and go back through this journal and then summarize on the next page your convictions about: ***Who is Jesus?***

In addition to fixing our thoughts on Jesus, this essay, like so many other Scriptures, encourages us to then think about who we are because of him. We saw that in the many "therefore" statements. As always, God teaches us that a huge part of who we are is that we do not just gaze at ourselves, but we also turn our attention to how we can help others as well. It's the healthy combination that is always vital: upward focus, inward focus, and outward focus. It's loving God, loving ourselves, and loving others as Jesus taught. You also might want to take some time and go back through this journal and summarize on the next page your convictions about: ***Who are we because of Him?***

The church in the middle of the first century and the church today need this reminder.

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus,
the author and perfecter of our faith,
who for the joy set before him endured the cross,
scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand
of the throne of God.*

Hebrews 12:2

We have seen that "confidence" is one of the themes of this essay. But it is not self-confidence, it is confidence in our High Priest, Jesus. Hopefully you have a greater appreciation for Jesus as our High Priest and a greater determination to keep your eyes focused on Him. It's amazing how much confidence we have when we fix our eyes on Jesus, no matter what situations surround us. It is also clear about how other-focused we become when we do that.

May God bless you as you continue to strengthen your ROOTS by knowing his word and knowing his heart better!

John Sullivan

Summary

Go back through the journal and summarize your convictions about:

Who is Jesus?

Who are We Because of Him?

How can you encourage someone else with these thoughts?

Resources

Alexander, David and Pat *Erdmans' Handbook of the Bible*, Lion Publishing, 1973.

Barclay, William *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Westminster Press, 1955.

Halley, Henry *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Zondervan, 2000.

Hamilton, Mark (editor) *The Transforming Word*, Abilene Christian University Press, 2009.

Websites and Apps

www.biblegateway.com A free online, searchable tool with the Bible in multitudes of translations and languages, along with many other Bible-study aids.

www.gotquestions.org A searchable tool designed to try to give reasonable answers to Bible questions. For instance, here are some good **Research Questions** related to this study:

1. Who wrote Hebrews? Who was the author of Hebrews?
2. What do angels do?
3. Who was Melchizedek?
4. What is a covenant?
5. What does the Bible say about confidence?

[NOTE: *Hebrews* uses 5 synonyms that could be translated as *confidence, assurance, courage, persuasion, or conviction.*]

YouVersion Bible App A free download of the Bible in many versions to make the Word of God available on your phone or other devices. The audio reading of the Bible is especially helpful.

Notes

Notes