



CHRIST CHURCH SMALL GROUPS

Study Guide for the Weekends of October 6 & 13: The Book of Hebrews

For the month of October, we will hear from the Letter to the Hebrews, one of the most impressive and perplexing texts in the New Testament. This guide will give you a primer on the history, authorship, and themes of the book and will offer lectionary texts and questions for Small Group study.

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

Date: Likely 80s AD, could be as early as the 60s AD

Author: Not specified, but there are greetings extended from “those in Italy.” Once believed to be Paul, but now scholarship has abandoned Pauline authorship. The true author is known only by history (and God!).

Intended Not identified, but from the content of letter, we can surmise the recipients of the letter were

Audience: intended to be followers of Jesus attracted by the values and teachings of Judaism, likely in Rome or Jerusalem. They may or may not have once been Jews.

Themes: **The Jewish tradition and Jesus**

Followers of Jesus slowly began to understand themselves as separate from Jews and Judaism, beginning in the time after Jesus’ death. The recipients of this letter were either Jews, former Jews, or people exploring Judaism. The author respectfully explores major facets of Judaism (Abraham, Torah, Jewish priesthood, covenantal life) and shares how Jesus fulfills these promises.

The high priesthood of Christ

Jesus is the ultimate priest-king. Jesus is morally perfect and always superior to any other human mediator to God. In Jewish antiquity, priests were the Jewish people’s only intermediary to God, through the offering of sacrifice. Jesus, in his sacrifice on the cross, once and for all time, ends the need for perpetual burnt or sacrificial offerings; save for, of course, the sacrifice of our praise and thanksgiving, which we most fully offer to God through Holy Eucharist.

The comfort of Jesus in suffering

The audience of this letter—indeed, all first-generation followers of Christ—faced great persecution as people of The Way. The author urges followers that, despite hardship, they should not abandon their faith in Jesus. Followers of Jesus are eternally connected to Him and to the martyrs and followers who came before us.

FIRST STUDY PASSAGE

Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12 (Epistle reading for weekend of October 5 and 6):

¹ Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³ He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. ⁵ Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. ⁶ But someone has testified somewhere, “What are humans that you are mindful of them or mortals that you care for them? ⁷ You have made them for a

little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, ⁸ subjecting all things under their feet.” Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, ⁹ but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. ¹⁰ It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹ For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, ¹² saying, “I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.”

Study Questions:

1. How does the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus reflect the glory of God?
2. Do you believe in angels? Have you ever had the feeling that a celestial body was keeping watch over you?
3. Jesus is made perfect through suffering (Hebrews 2:10). Suffering is a universal part of the human experience. Must one suffer to be perfect? How can we talk about suffering without glorifying it?
4. Has your faith ever helped you in a time of suffering?

SECOND STUDY PASSAGE

Hebrews 4:12-16 (Epistle reading for weekend of October 12 and 13):

¹² Indeed, the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. ¹⁴ Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Study Questions:

1. Do you feel God completely knows you? Does God know our thoughts from afar? If so, why does God let us make mistakes or get hurt?
2. In what ways do you turn to God in times of trouble? How do you turn to God in times of celebration?
3. How did Jesus know suffering? How did Jesus know temptation? In what ways did he overcome each?
4. When we experience suffering or tough times, how can we lean on our loving savior, Jesus Christ? What is a prayer that has worked for you? Share it with your group.



CHRIST CHURCH SMALL GROUPS

Study Guide for Weekends of October 20 & 27: The Book of Hebrews

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The comfort of Jesus in suffering

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FIRST STUDY PASSAGE

Hebrews 5:1-10 (Epistle reading for weekend of October 19 and 20):

Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness, ³ and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. ⁴ And one does not presume to take this honor but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵ So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest but was appointed by the one who said to him, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you”; ⁶ as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.” ⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with

loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸ Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered, ⁹ and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰ having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Study Questions:

1. We do not speak much about Jesus' obedience. Here, the author of Hebrews suggests Jesus' obedience to the Father contributes to his perfection. American culture has long idolized the rugged individual. What are examples of obedience that can inspire us? How can we maintain our obedience to God?
2. The author suggests our obedience to Christ will lead to our eternal salvation. Do you agree with this view? What else does scripture say about eternal salvation?
3. The ancient role of the priest was to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin. Do priests still do this? In what way? Is it necessary for priests to make these types of offerings to God?
4. What is the role of the priest today? Why is it important to maintain the role of the priest?

SECOND STUDY PASSAGE

Hebrews 12:1-3:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary in your souls or lose heart.

Study Questions:

1. How do we "lay aside" the weight of sin? Our mistakes so often cling to us and stay lodged in our memory. How can we find new life?
2. Who comprises the "cloud of witnesses" that support you in the faith, alive or departed? Think of one person and share what they mean to you with your small group.
3. How can you support others in their faith journey?
4. How did Jesus "perfect" faith? How does his life, his sacrifice, and his rising to new life clarify our life in him?