Study Guide

Studying Hebrews in Search of Something Better

Introduction

Take some time to work your way through the following questions before reading the introduction.

In what areas of your life have you felt a nagging sense of disappointment? At this point, what are your thoughts about the suggestion that upping your amazement and affection for Jesus could make any difference?

Looking back, what are the primary influences that have shaped your understanding and expectations of Jesus?

How satisfied are you now in terms of closeness to and intimacy with God? In what ways would you like that relationship to change?

Chapter 1

Take some time to read Hebrews 1:1–2:4 and work your way through the following questions before reading chapter 1.

List at least six things we are told about Jesus in verses 1-4.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Which one of these aspects of who Jesus is do you find especially meaningful, and why?

What do you think it means that God “has in these last days spoken to us by His Son” (1:2)?

Some say that Hebrews 1:1-4 expresses the most important idea of history. How would you express this idea in your own words?

What is the common concept of angels today? Compare that view with what the writer says about the duties and position of angels in 1:4-7, 14.

What does each of the following passages add to your understanding of the role of angels?

1 Kings 19:5-7

Psalm 34:7

Luke 1:13, 30

Acts 10:3-5

Acts 12:23

Revelation 5:11-12

As you follow the line of argument in 1:5-14, what does the writer intend to prove about Jesus Christ’s position in relation to angels?

What responsibilities and authority does the Son have according to 1:8-9?

The writer has shown Jesus as superior in rank and in power to the prophets and to angels. What is Jesus shown to be superior to in 1:10-12?

According to 1:13-14, where is the Son? Where are the angels? How does this add to the superiority of Jesus?

Put into your own words the warning in Hebrews 2:1-4.

How does the culture we live in entice us to drift away from what God has said? What difference does an understanding of who Jesus is make in our tendency to drift?

Do you see yourself as paying careful attention to Jesus or drifting away? What changes can you make in your life and what deivine promises can you cling to in fueling these changes to guard against drifting away?

What was the reason for signs, wonders, and miracles of Jesus according to verses 2:3-4? (See also John 10:38 and Acts 2:22.)

Chapter 2

Take some time to read Hebrews 2:5-18 and work your way through the following questions before reading chapter 2.

What point do you think the writer was trying to make to his readers by quoting Psalm 8 in 2:6-8?

Hebrews 2:5 says God did not intend angels to be in charge of the world to come (when the world is redeemed and returns to its original perfection). According to 2:6-8, who did God make to rule over the earth?

Understanding that Psalm 8 celebrates humanity’s original destiny, and is also a prophetic or messianic psalm, who is the ultimate “son of man” who fulfilled our original destiny”?

Hebrews 2:8 says that “we do not see everything subject to him” (referring to both humanity and the ultimate man, Jesus)? What are evidences of this you observe in the world and in your own life?

What truth from 2:9 is also expressed in 1 Timothy 2:6; 4:10; and Titus 2:11?

How does this truth equip you to talk about Jesus to people who are offended by the exclusivity of Christianity?

In what way was Jesus “made perfect” through suffering (2:10)?

Think about your own brother(s), if you have one, or about someone who has been a brother figure in your life. What is the significance of Jesus calling himself your brother (2:11)?

In what ways was Jesus qualified to be the author or pioneer (one who initiates and carries through) of salvation, as revealed in verses 9, 11, 14, and 18?

According to 2:11-18, in what ways does Jesus identify with human beings? How does this help you appreciate Jesus more?

In what way was the devil destroyed by Christ’s death (2:14)?

In 2:17-18 we see that Jesus’ humanity was essential to be come our mediator (high priest), the sacrifice for our sin, and our helper in overcoming sin. How can you appropriate and enjoy each of three aspects of Christ’s humanity?

According to 2:18, what are two specific experiences that Jesus has shared with us? What difference does it make in your life that he has shared these things with you?

Chapter 3

Take some time to read Hebrews 3:1–4:13 and work your way through the following questions before reading chapter 3.

How would you summarize what the transition (“therefore” or “and so”) in verse 3:1 refers back to?

Based on the instruction in 3:1, in what practical ways can you “fix your thoughts on,” “consider,” or “think carefully about” Jesus?

In what ways is Jesus similar to and superior to Moses according to 3:1-6?

Similar Superior

Why was Moses so esteemed by the Hebrew people? Why was it important for the Hebrews to see that Jesus is greater than Moses? (see John 1:17 for insight)

Who or what do you tend to esteem too highly—someone or something that threatens to take priority over the authority and influence of Jesus in your life?

What do you think it means to “hold fast our confidence” or “hold on to our courage and the hope in which we boast” (3:6)?

Describe what a person is like who fails to hold on to the courage and hope provided for us in Christ.

Read Hebrews 3:7-14, along with Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:1-13, which describe the two events referred to in Psalm 95 quoted in Hebrews 3. What did the people in the wilderness do wrong? What was the result for them?

What is the warning in this passage? Who is it for? What are the results of not heeding this warning?

In the series of questions found in 3:16-18, we discover that the people rebelled, sinned, and disobeyed. How are these attitudes and actions related to unbelief (3:19)?

While we don’t like to label ourselves as “rebellious” against God, are there areas in which you would have to admit you have rebelled against God?

From reading through Hebrews 3 and 4, what was the “rest” God offered to the Israelites?

What rest is offered to us as believers to experience here and now?

What rest is still ahead for believers?

What is the implied warning of 4:2?

According to 4:2-3, how does a person enter God’s rest?

How do you reconcile the offer of rest with the command in 4:11 to “make every effort” to enter that rest? How are both true in the life of a Christian?

In what ways would you like to have more rest in your spiritual life?

Read 4:12 in two or three different translations. What are at least four things you learn about God’s Word from this verse?

Chapter 4

Take some time to read Hebrews 4:14–5:10; 7:1-28 and work your way through the following questions before reading chapter 4.

What are six things the writer tells you about Jesus in 4:14-16? Tell how each one is meaningful to you.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

According to 4:14-16, what specific things are we to do because we have such a high priest? What do these things mean to you in practical terms?

In what specific area of your life do you sense a special need to “approach the throne of grace”? Based on this passage, how do you anticipate being received?

Read Leviticus 16:1-34. What key words would you use to describe the ancient Jewish sacrificial system and the work of a priest?

What does Hebrews 5:1-4 teach about:

the work of a high priest?

the attitude of a high priest?

the appointment of a high priest to office?

From 5:7-10, what were the results of Christ’s obedience?

What is an area in which you are tempted to disobey? What blessing to others might result from your obedience in this area?

Read Genesis 14:17-20 and Psalm 110:1-5 for the Old Testament background on Melchizedek. Then list some of the key facts given about Melchizedek from Hebrews 7:1-3.

In what ways was Jesus similar to Melchizedek according to 7:1-3, 15-17?

What was the author trying to convince the Hebrews of in his question in 7:11?

According to verse 16, what is the unique qualification of Jesus that was common to Melchizedek but not to the priestly descendents of Aaron?

In 7:18-19, what conclusion does the writer come to about the law? What conclusion does he come to about our “better hope”?

What did the Old Testament high priests do that Jesus never had to do (7:27)?

What did Jesus do that the Old Testament high priests never did (7:27)?

Note the descriptions and qualifications of Jesus in 7:26-28. Verse 26 says this kind of high priest “meets our need.” What fundamental need do you have that Jesus is uniquely equipped to meet?

Chapter 5

Take some time to read Hebrews 5:11–6:20 and work your way through the following questions before reading chapter 5.

What is the writer’s frustration with the Jewish Christians, expressed in 5:11-14?

What are marks of spiritual maturity, according to 5:12-14?

What would you say is the root cause of any spiritual immaturity that you may have, and what are you willing to do about it?

What spiritual experiences are described in 6:4-6? How would you explain what they each mean?

Do you think it is possible for a person to be “enlightened,” to “taste” and “partake” of God and yet not put faith in him for salvation? Why or why not?

What do the following verses indicate about the impossibility for someone who has genuinely partaken in the spiritual experiences described in verses 4-6 to fall away from faith?

John 10:27-29

Philippians 1:6

1 Peter 1:3-5

If the writer says in verse 9 that he is “confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation,” what does that imply about the spiritual condition of those described in 6:4-6??

What are these believers encouraged to do and what are they warned against doing in 6:9-12?

According to 6:13-18, what twofold basis is there for confidence in the truth and sure fulfillment of God’s promises? What does this tell you about God?

In what way does placing your faith in the promises of God serve as an anchor for your soul (6:19)?

When have you held on to the promises of God as an anchor for your soul in the midst of a storm in your life?

What specific promise of God do you need to cling to this week? Where is this promise found in the Bible?

Chapter 6

Take some time to read Hebrews 8:1–10:18 and work your way through the following questions before reading chapter 6.

What does Hebrews 8:1-5 reveal about why such specific instructions were given in the Old Testament about the building of the Temple?

What is superior to what in 8:6, and why?

In what specific ways, according to Jeremiah’s prophecy quoted in verses 8-12, does the new covenant differ from the old?

Which aspects of the way God relates to us under the New Covenant (8:10-12) are most meaningful to you personally?

What were the duties of the priests in the tabernacle, and where did they carry them out (see 9:6-7, 13)?

Considering that God dwelled in the Most Holy Place in the Hebrew tabernacle, what are some practical ways our experience with God is different from that of the Hebrews under the old covenant?

According to 9:9-10, why couldn’t the gifts and sacrifices offered in the tabernacle clear the conscience of the worshipper?

What is it like to live with a guilty conscience? How have you experienced the freedom of a clear and cleansed conscience?

According to verses 9:11-14, what does the blood of Christ do that animals’ blood could not do?

According to 9:15-22, for what two reasons did Christ have to die?

What is the warning/promise in 9:27-28?

According to 10:1-4, in what three ways did the sacrifices of the Old Testament prove inadequate?

What does the quotation from Psalm 40 in 10:5-10 reveal about King David’s understanding of the sacrificial system?

From 10:11-18, what is the significance that Jesus died "once for all"?

Chapter 7

Take some time to read Hebrews 10:19-39 and work your way through the following questions before reading chapter 7.

Until now, the writer to the Hebrews has been telling us what God has done. Now, he transitions into what we are to do in light of what he has done for us through Christ. Read 10:19-25. What four things does the writer exhort us to do?

What examples have you seen of believers who live this way?

In what specific way could you apply these three exhortations to your own life?

Read 10:26-31. What is the warning, and who is this warning for?

According to 10:29, what are those who deliberately continue to sin doing to the Son of God?

According to 10:32-34, what had these Christians experienced in earlier days? How did they respond, and what enabled them to respond that way?

According to 10:35-39, what choices are open to those Christians and to us when we are persecuted for our faith? What are the consequences of each choice?

In what ways have you experienced suffering, insult, persecution, or loss?

In what area of your life do you need to persevere right now?

When a friend is discouraged in her faith walk, how can you encourage her to persevere in obeying and trusting God, based on this passage?

Chapter 8

Take some time to read Hebrews 11 and work your way through the following questions before reading chapter 8.

What are some ways people today would define faith?

Based on Hebrews 11:1, how would you define faith (in your own words)?

In what ways did God enable each of these people to live out their deep confidence in God’s promises?

Abel

Enoch

Noah

Abraham

Isaac

Jacob

Joseph

Moses

Israelites

Rahab

List at least six characteristics that describe the people of faith mentioned in 11:13-16.

Do you find yourself longing for a better country—a heavenly one? If so, what are you most looking forward to? If not, why do you think that is?

According to 11:24-28, what specific things did Moses believe that influenced his actions?

In what way do the experiences of faith in verses 35b-38 stand as a stark contrast to the faith achievements described in 32-35a?

According to 11:39-40, what three things were true for both the victorious and the suffering heroes?

Finish this sentence: I would like to have the kind of faith that . . .

Chapter 9

Take some time to read Hebrews 12 and work your way through the following questions before reading chapter 9.

To whom does the “great cloud of witnesses” refer in 12:1? And what are they testifying about to us?

Who are some people you know or know about whose lives serve as a witness to you about how to run your faith race well and why?

According to 12:1-3, state as specifically as you can:

what we must reject

how we should run

where we must focus

What are some of the weights that drag people down in their spiritual journeys?

Are there certain sins you find yourself falling into over and over again? (You may not want to share this in a group discussion, but identifying it for yourself and writing it down is the first step toward overcoming it.)

How can considering carefully the description of Jesus in 12:2-3 keep us from giving up when things are hard?

What perspective does 12:4 offer to us in our struggles against sin?

According to 12:5-11, how should we think about and respond to the difficulties in our lives?

According to 12:5-13, what are the benefits of responding in submission to God’s discipline?

According to 12:12-17, what actions are Christians urged to take in order to persevere in their race of faith? Which one of these actions do you want to work on this week?

How does Deuteronomy 29:18 help us understand what the writer means by a “bitter root” that can “cause trouble and defile many”? How is Esau an example of this (see 12:16)?

Read Exodus 19:12-13 and Deuteronomy 4:11-13, which describe the Israelites approaching God to receive the law on Mount Sinai. In what way was that different from the new way believers are invited to approach God in 12:18-25?

What is the warning in verse 25? What actions can you take to heed this warning?

Since we are receiving a “kingdom that cannot be shaken” (see Hebrews 12:28), what are four ways we should respond? Can you think of a situation in your life when God gave you the faith to respond in one of these ways?

Chapter 10

Take some time to read Hebrews 13 and work your way through the following questions before reading chapter 10.

According to Hebrews 13:1-6, what are at least five qualities that should characterize us as Christians in our day-to-day lives?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Which of these qualities would you like to develop more fully in your life? What could you do to make them more of a reality in your life?

How does this list of practical matters of life for the Christian relate to the main message of the letter to the Hebrews?

What is the message of 13:7 and 17? What is a specific way you can obey this instruction over the coming days and weeks?

What are ways we can honor our spiritual leaders even if we don’t agree with them?

What should a person do when his/her leaders do not exercise their spiritual responsibility properly?

What does it mean to continually offer a sacrifice of praise as described in 13:15-16? In what situations or circumstances do you find it especially difficult to obey this instruction?

Take a few moments to use the prayer in 13:20-21 for others in your group or in your family. What are you asking God to do for them? What are you asking God to do in them?

If someone asked you what the book of Hebrews is about, how would you summarize it?

What is the most potentially life-changing truth you have learned in this study of Hebrews?

How has this study changed a belief, an attitude or behavior in your life?