



THE LETTER TO THE

HEBREWS

SERIES 1 | CH 1:1-3:6



The Letter to the Hebrews | Series 1

1:1-3:6 | 2016

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THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

Series 1 | Hebrews 1:1-3:6 | 2016

A 'WORD OF EXHORTATION'

Why should we persevere as Christians? In the face of fatigue, persecution and the temptations of sin why should we keep faithfully following Jesus? And how can we do this, given our weakness and frailties?

The book of Hebrews answers these questions and more. It's a 'brief(!) word of exhortation' according to 13:22 but is packed full of doctrine, biblical theology and practical commands. In fact, doctrines like the incarnation and priesthood of Jesus are covered in a depth unlike any other part of the NT. Yet all of this drives us towards greater love and commitment towards Jesus, the divine Son of God.

Over the next few years (God-willing) we will study Hebrews both at Growth Groups and Sunday church as Greg preaches. By God's Spirit we trust it will lead to great steps in our Christian growth together.

AUTHOR

Who wrote Hebrews has been one of the big mysteries of Christian history. The letter reveals that the author knows Timothy and is with people from Italy (13:23-24). He is also clearly familiar with the OT and has a deeply pastoral heart. Paul has been proposed as the author but 2:3 suggests he received the gospel message via other witnesses (compare Paul's claim to direct revelation in Gal 1:12). Other alternatives are Barnabas, Apollos or an unnamed associate of Paul. Apollos stands out as a contender since according to Acts 18:24-28 he knew the Scriptures well and knew people from Italy (Priscilla and Aquila). But it's likely we'll have to wait until heaven to find out for sure!



*A fragment of Hebrews 1:1-7
from papyrus P46 dated
approx 200AD*

RECIPIENTS

The details of who received the letter are also uncertain. They could be in Rome since people from Italy send greetings (13:24) and an early Christian document, *1 Clement*, written from Rome, quotes it. They certainly are familiar with the Old Testament and some may have been tempted to revert to Judaism, based on the frequent comparisons between Jesus and Moses or priests. For this reason many people think a mostly Jewish audience is likely.

The letter was received sometime between 60-90 AD. If the readers are in Rome it could have been received *before* the persecution of Nero in 64 AD since at the time of writing, according to 12:4, the Christian community had not yet had people put to death.

For more on these introductory questions check out:

The Letter to the Hebrews by Peter O'Brien (Pillar series)

Hebrews by Donald Guthrie (Tyndale series)

'Hebrews, Epistle to the' in *The New Bible Dictionary* (IVP)

1. GOD SPEAKS THROUGH HIS SON

Hebrews 1:1-2

On June 22 2015 podcaster Marc Maron had President Barack Obama personally visit his garage to record an interview.

“This is big day for our country, for me and my cats.”



Speaking about the interview Maron said, “I have a lot of clutter on the desk and the Secret Service certainly helped me with that. I have like a pocketknife on my desk; I have half a hammer, like this weird hammer that's broken...they were like, 'Yeah, the knife and the hammer gotta go.'”

What do you think is the difference between reading a press release from the President and having him visit personally?

THE SPEAKING GOD

Something similar (but way bigger) happens in Hebrews. Read Hebrews 1:1-2 and complete the table:

Verse	Time	Speaker	Hearers	Way of speaking
1				
2				

What are some of the ways God spoke through the prophets? What do you notice?

- Amos 7:10-17
- Jeremiah 1:4-10
- Ezekiel 2:1-3:10

The 'last days' are the time we're in now between Jesus' first and second comings (see also Acts 2:17, James 5:3, 2 Peter 3:3).

Look up Psalm 89:19-29 esp v 27 and Psalm 2:4-9. What does it mean that the Son has been appointed heir (or firstborn) over all things?

Look up John 1:1-4. How is it that God created the universe through the Son (see also Col 1:15-17)?

SPEAKING THROUGH THE SON

The Son is truly awesome! How is it that God has now spoken to us by the Son? See if some of these verses help:

Mat 7:28-29	
John 6:66-69	
John 14:10,23-27	
John 16:12-15	
1 Cor 4:1	
2 Cor 5:20	
1 John 1:1-4	

How would you sum up the message of verses 1 and 2?

LISTENING TO GOD

What does it mean for us to have God speak to us through his Son?

Why do we sometimes want more from God? How does Hebrews correct our thinking and feelings about this?

We asked one of our mission partners Dave Payne for his reflections on Hebrews 1:1-2 in his context. Dave is evangelising skaters and their friends and family in Myanmar.

"Buddhists have nothing like a speaking God, and nothing speaks to them personally. According to their own beliefs, Buddha has reached Nirvana, and has been essentially 'deleted' out of life. So the main figure of their belief cannot help them, or communicate with them. So when we see Buddhists bowing down to statues of Buddha, technically they are not praying to or worshipping Buddha. They are just expressing their thankfulness to Buddha. Although I'm sure it becomes worship in their hearts and they still see these statues as having some sort of luck, good karma or power. So they still cry out to them, in some kind of desperate hope..."



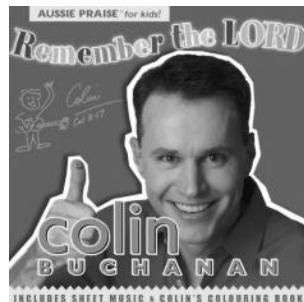
...But when they hear about the LIVING God (not a statue) it blows their mind: a God who actually speaks and listens! When the skaters first

prayed to God they said "It was weird because I was actually talking to someone, and not just a statue!" Buddhists are also amazed that we have access to what the prophets and Jesus said - The Bible!

When Buddha became 'enlightened' he refused to share his way of salvation for a long time as he believed humans were too sinful to understand it. After months and months of his followers begging him he finally told them. However they were not written down for over a hundred years later. They were written in Pali (ancient east language) and still are to this day. That's why many rely on the monks to learn pali and teach what it says, which, as you can imagine, causes many problems (false teaching, greed, power problems, mistranslations etc).

So they are amazed they have a Bible in their own language, and can go directly to his word, which is reliable and true!"

Give thanks for Dave and his ministry and pray that we might rejoice that God has spoken to us by his Son. Ask that we might listen to him speak to us in his word. You might also like to finish with Colin Buchanan's memory verse song for Hebrews 1:1-2 (from 'Remember the Lord')



2. THE SON RULES

Hebrews 1:3-4

Have you ever tried to explain the Trinity to someone? How did that go?

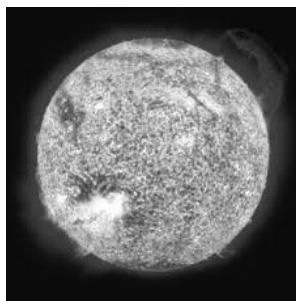


Verses 3 and 4 explain more about the Son, but to recap, what was verses 1 and 2 about? Or you can just sing the Colin song again!

THE SON AND THE FATHER

Read 1:1-4. What is the relationship between the Father and the Son?

Note: 'radiance' is a good translation, and 'representation' is a term used of the mark left by a stamp (on a wax seal or coin for example)



How does this fit with other descriptions of their relationship?

John 1:1-2	
John 14:5-10	
Phil 2:5-11	
Col 1:15-20	
Col 2:9	

THE WORK AND STATUS OF THE SON

What is Jesus' ongoing relationship with creation (see also Col 1:17)?

'Providing purification for sins' is shorthand for what will be explained more fully in Hebrews 8-10. Have a sneak-peek at 9:11-15. What do you think it means that the Son has provided purification for sins?

Why is this so amazing?

Read Psalm 110 (especially verse 1). Where is Jesus now, and what is his status?

THE SUPERIORITY OF THE SON

Verse 4 finishes with the Son's superiority over angels (compare Phil 2:9-11 regarding his *name*). Some commentators have proposed a *chiastic* structure for verses 1-4. This means a structure where the verses move to a central point and back out again. Have a look at this for a moment.

A 1-2a The Son contrasted with the prophets

B 2b The Son as messianic heir

C 2c The Son's creative work

D 3a-b The Son's threefold mediatorial relationship to God

C' 3c The Son's redemptive work

B' 3d The Son as messianic king

A' The Son contrasted with angels.

What do you think? Is this helpful?

THE SON AND US

What do you find so great about Jesus from these verses?

Why is it right that Jesus should rule our lives and everything about our lives?

Are there sins in your life you feel haven't yet been purified by Jesus?

Are there areas of your life where you're resisting letting Jesus rule?

3. THE SON AND ANGELS

Hebrews 1:5-14

We don't think much about angels these days, but in the OT and Jewish tradition they are powerful and impressive guys – the buff superheroes of the OT. Think about the angels destroying Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19), the fearsome commander of the Lord's army (Josh 5:13-15), or the angels guarding Elisha (2 Kings 6:17).



Why do you think the readers of Hebrews might be confused as to how Jesus compares with angels?

Before we look more at angels v Jesus, what was the mood or vibe of Hebrews 1:1-4?

THE SON V ANGELS

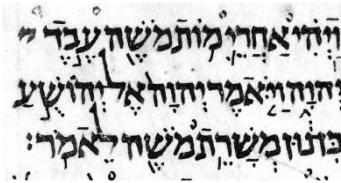
Verses 5 to 14 are highly structured. They're made up of 7 OT quotations with short connecting phrases and a bookend of identical rhetorical questions (5a and 13a). See below:

Section	7 Quotations	Repeated words/ideas
Pair 1 (Heb 1:5)	Psalm 2:7	Son, Father, I, my
	2 Sam 7:14	
Pair 2 (Heb 1:6-7)	Deuteronomy 32:43	angels
	Psalm 10:4	
Pair 3 (Heb 1:8-12)	Psalm 45:6-7	for ever and ever, years never end
	Psalm 102:25-27	
Final quote (Heb 1:13)	Psalm 110:1	-
Summary (Heb 1:14)	-	-

The quotations are arranged as 3 pairs with a final climactic quote in verse 13. Each pair has some common words to bind them together

For this exercise, especially when you read your Bible footnotes, you'll need to know a bit about OT texts.

- The *Masoretic Text* is a Hebrew version of the OT from about 1000AD that has a very good history and is what our English translators use most of the time. It would have had a precursor in circulation during the first century AD.
- The *Dead Sea Scrolls* are Hebrew sections of the OT found near the Dead Sea in the 1940s and dated back to 100BC-70AD. They are incomplete, but very similar to the Masoretic Text.
- The *Septuagint* (abbreviated sometimes to *LXX*) was the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT commonly used by Jews and Christians when the NT was written.



All these texts are very similar and we can be confident in the reliability of the Bible. When NT authors (writing in Greek) quote or refer to OT passages they use one of these text, or sometimes a Greek or Hebrew version that hasn't been found yet.

For a summary of these documents (and others) you can read the article entitled 'Texts and Versions' in The New Bible Dictionary

Split up the different pairs and quotations in your group. For each quote figure out:

1. What did it mean in its original context?
2. How is the author using it in Hebrews, i.e. what point is being made?

<u>Quote</u>	<u>Original Meaning</u>	<u>Point in Hebrews</u>
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

SUMMING UP

What is the big point of this section (include verse 14)?

You would have noticed that verse 5 begins with 'for'. How does this section support verses 1-4?

THE SON, ANGELS AND US

There's no direct applications in this section – it's all about Jesus. What's struck you about him today?

Why is it good for us to sometimes think more about Jesus and less about ourselves?

What are some of the blessings we can be thankful for from Hebrews chapter 1?

4. PAYING ATTENTION TO THE MESSAGE

Hebrews 2:1-4

Have you seen or known people who have walked away from Jesus?
What has been confusing or hard about this?

Chapter two of Hebrews begins with a serious warning for us. But before we get there, see how you go with filling in the blanks for chapter 1 (one word per space):

- “In the _____ God spoke to our ancestors through the _____ at many times and various ways, but in these last _____ he has spoken to us by his _____.”
- “The Son is the _____ of God's _____ and the exact _____ of his _____.”
- “For to which of the _____ did God ever say, 'You are my _____; today I have become your _____.'”
- “He makes his angels _____ and his servants _____ of _____.”

PAYING ATTENTION

Read 2:1-4. What's the simple command in verse 1?

Why do Christians need a command like this?

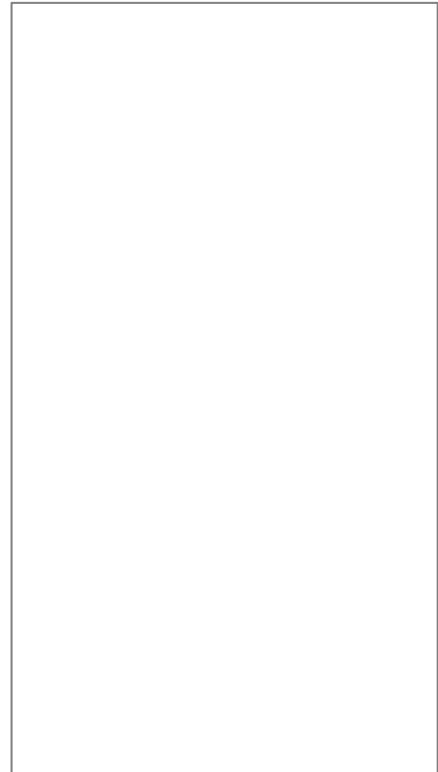
'The peril against which the community is to be on guard is that of 'drifting away', like a boat that is gradually slipping away from its moorings. This suggests a movement that may be subtle and undetected by those on board, and along with the term 'neglect' (v. 3) point to a gradual, unthinking movement away from the faith.'

Peter O'Brien, Commentary on Hebrews



The message spoken by angels is probably the OT law given at Mt Sinai. There was a Jewish tradition, inspired by Deuteronomy 33:2 (LXX), that the law was given to Moses via an angel or angels (see also Acts 7:38, 53 and Gal 3:19).

Draw as much as you can from the passage comparing the old message with the new.



Why should we pay close attention to the new message?

What will this mean for us:

- as individuals?
- as a church?

GETTING PRACTICAL

What are the ways we are likely to drift away (think specifically about the demographics of your group)?

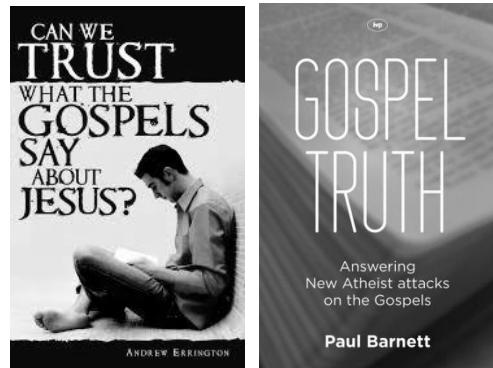
In case you're searching for ideas, here's a few common ones:

- Sin / sins (especially when temptation is strong)
- Regularly opting out of church or Growth Group
- Dating a non-Christian
- Suffering
- Being hurt or let down by Christians (including leaders)
- Something 'more appealing' than God e.g. hobbies, sport, career
- Neglect or mistrust of the Bible
- Prayerlessness
- Travel or moving cities

This passage calls on us to listen to and trust the Bible. Sam Hilton recommends two good books on the reliability of the Bible (especially the Gospels):

Gospel Truth by Paul Barnett

Can we Trust what the Gospels say about Jesus? by Andrew Errington



This passage also raises questions about whether Christians can fall away. There are lots of passages to consider with this question including several in Hebrews (e.g. 3:6, 12-14, 4:11, 6:1-12, 10:19-39, 12:1-3, 14-17, 25, 13:9).

A good article is 'Can Christians Fall Away' by Andrew Heard from Central Coast EV church: <https://goo.gl/g48xoT> (or google it).

5. GLORY AND HONOUR

Hebrews 2:5-9

What's appealing about *Man versus Wild*?

What's Bear Gryll's relationship with creation?



In this study we look at humanity, Jesus and creation and see how they all relate.

OT BACKGROUND

Read Genesis 1 and Psalm 8. What words or ideas are common to both passages?

What do they say about humanity?

PSALM 8 IN HEBREWS

Read Hebrews 2:5-9. See if you can diagram out the logical relationship between these verses (note that the word for 'little' in verses 7 and 9 can mean either 'a little while' or 'a little lower'):

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

What is the main point of this passage?

It's not explicit in the passage, but why do we die according to the Bible (Gen 2:15-17, 3:6, 22-24; Rom 5:12, 6:23)?

What point is being made about the death of Jesus (see also 1:3 and 2:3)?

JESUS, CREATION, DEATH AND US

How should we now personally think about our relationship with creation?

What are some of the ways you respond emotionally to this passage (and Hebrews so far)?

Sometime people in our church come closer to death than others. Rhys Thomas from HBC AM shares his story...

My “taste of death” began in October 2013. I’d been living a pretty “normal” life up until that point but then a trip to John Hunter Hospital for what I thought might be kidney stones, showed up some abnormalities in my lung, and within two weeks I’d been diagnosed with Stage IV melanoma, with metastases in my brain, lungs and abdomen. I was given a median survival of only 3-4 months. That period of time was filled up with neurosurgery, whole brain radiotherapy, major bowel surgery and starting on a clinical trial of a new type of immunotherapy. Six months on, I had lost 25 kg, had ongoing problems with nausea, vomiting and lack of appetite, and I pretty much felt like death warmed up. However, the immunotherapy was working, my symptoms slowly improved, and here I am today, two and half years later.

As you can imagine, these were some pretty dark times for me and my family. During this period I was quite overwhelmed by my diagnosis,



treatments, and the complications and side-effects of my disease, not to mention the prospect of my apparently inevitable decline, physically and mentally. I was left wondering how I could possibly cope with it all. However, since becoming a Christian at age 17, God had been gracious to me, and provided me with many solid Bible teachers, godly Christian family and friends, and many opportunities to study his Word. As a result of this I found that, despite my situation, I wasn't actually fearing death. There was definitely fear and anxiety regarding what I would go through before I died, but instead of fearing death itself, or what would come after it, I almost found myself feeling guilty because I had been given a short cut to Paradise, while my family and friends would have to continue living on in this fallen world.

The book of Hebrews was a big contributor to my understanding of what Jesus had done for me, and I found great comfort within its pages during that time (and still!). It taught me that I had a High Priest in Jesus, who had gone before me into the Most Holy Place, offered his own blood instead of the blood of animals (or me!), experienced death and was then raised to life. This really was an anchor for my soul, especially when I could do nothing but lie on my bed. It also gave me great comfort in knowing that Jesus, through whom God created the universe, had humbled himself, became lower than the angels, shared our humanity, and suffered far more than I ever would. He knew what I was going through. He died a death far worse than the one I was facing. He was not a distant unknowable and uninterested creator, but rather a loving and personal saviour who had given me the Holy Spirit to comfort me in times such as this.

Pray for Rhys, Bronwyn, Isaac, Julian and Elisabeth and other Christians you know who are facing death in some way. Pray for change and maturity in our own hearts and minds.

6. THE PIONEER OF OUR SALVATION

Hebrews 2:10-18 (1)

HEBREWS WORDFINDER

X H X V W S V M S V S L H S Z
B L M E H P Y M U A X R P L O
V K W S G R V Q T N S O N K P
Y D Z Q N W H T P G K F E P O
E M E D J D E F E E G W J D P
K A G A E N Q E N L S Y F C E
E N O I T A V L A S X D C P K
R K O I X H J H H D M Q Q I O
Q I O D A T E G B Q G R A F H
N N D I O H S E Q Q O L U R L
D D Q M B G L O R Y F Y D O X
M S M L I I G V O R N L S S E
K G Y D B R M E B Z Y X P J G
Y Z W V E R E F K B T N M A V
S A J R K G V E S I X L S I K

Angels
Attention
Death
Glory
God

Mankind
Righthand
Salvation
Son
Spoken

Does Jesus ever feel remote?
How do people try to
compensate for that feeling?



THE HUMANITY AND SUFFERING OF JESUS

Read Hebrews 2:10-18. What two words link verse 10 with verse 9?

'Pioneer' in verse 10 translates the word *archegos*. Alternate translations are 'author', 'captain', 'founder', 'source', 'prince' and 'leader'. It means 'an originator or founder of a movement who continues as the leader' (*Louw and Nida*). It's also used of Jesus in 12:2 and Acts 3:15 and 5:31. What does this title for Jesus tell us about him?

How was Jesus 'perfected' through suffering (see also 5:8-9)?

According to verses 11-17, what's the relationship between Jesus and us?

Look up Psalm 22:22 and Isaiah 8:17-18. How does the author use these passages to support his point?

The words 'bringing', 'slavery' and 'free' remind us of the Exodus (e.g. Ex 6:6-8). How does the salvation of Jesus compare to the Exodus?

THE DIVINITY AND HUMANITY OF JESUS

Chapter 1 emphasised Jesus' divinity and chapter 2 has taught his humanity and suffering. Why do you think people have downplayed one or the other over church history?

In 451 Christians leaders met at Chalcedon in Turkey and agreed on a way to explain Jesus being both fully God and man. Understanding the statement fully is a lot of work, so it's mostly here as a reference. But what are your initial impressions?

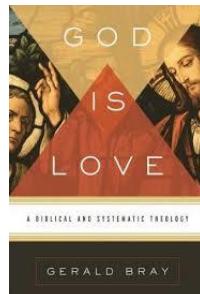
We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [coessential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God,

according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

Source:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds2.iv.i.iii.html>

For further reading try chapter 10: 'The Divine Son of God' in the brilliant theology overview *God is Love* by Gerald Bray.



As we pay careful attention to the message, how does it help to remember Jesus' humanity (especially given your discussion about 'remoteness' in question 1)?

7. A MERCIFUL AND FAITHFUL HIGH PRIEST

Hebrews 2:10-18 (2)

What's a priest? What do they do in various religions or branches of Christianity?



Today we'll begin to look at the priesthood of Jesus. But to recap, secretly write down a key word or idea that has been meaningful to you from Hebrews:

Now shape that idea into playdough and see if your group can guess the word or idea.

SIN AND ATONEMENT

'Sin' (or 'sins') is mentioned in 1:3 and 2:17. Have a look at the following verses and answer these questions. What is sin? Why is it such a big deal?

Gen 3:1-7

Gen 4:2-7

Gen 6:5 and 8:21

1 Kings 8:46

Ps 5:4-6

Ps 40:12

Ps 51:3-5

Isa 59:1-3

Habakkuk 1:12-13

Mark 7:20-23

Rom 1:9-12

Rom 3:23

Rom 6:23

Gal 5:19-21

James 4:17

Read Hebrews 1:3 and 2:10-18. How does Jesus help us?

Hebrews 2:17 talks about Jesus making *atonement* (NIV) or *propitiation* (ESV) for our sins. Have a look at the following verses. What does atonement or propitiation mean?

Rom 3:21-26

1 John 1:5-2:2

1 John 4:10

Heb 7:26-28

Heb 9:11-14

Heb 9:24-28

Heb 10:11-14

A PRIEST ABLE TO HELP

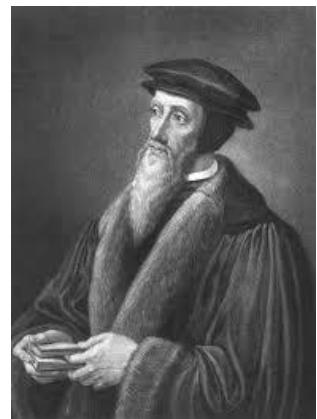
From Hebrews 2 (esp v 14-18), how is Jesus able to help us (see also 4:14-16)?

A Reformation Theologian John Calvin reflected on these verses in his commentary on Hebrews. What do you think?

“For in a priest, whose office it is to appease God's wrath, to help the miserable, to raise up the fallen, to relieve the oppressed, mercy is especially required, and it is what experience produces in us; for it is a rare thing for those

who are always happy to sympathise with the sorrows of others. The following saying of Virgil was no doubt derived from daily examples found among men, - 'Not ignorant of evil, I learn to aid the miserable.'

The Son of God had no need of experience that he might know the emotions of mercy; but we could not be persuaded that he is merciful and ready to help us, had he not become acquainted by experience with our miseries; but this, as other things, has been as a favour given to us. Therefore whenever any evils pass over us, let it ever occur to us, that nothing happens to us but what the Son of God has himself experienced in order that he might sympathise with us; nor let us doubt but that he is at present with us as though he suffered with us."



In what areas of life or temptation are you struggling with at the moment? How can you make use of the help offered by Jesus, our 'merciful and faithful high priest'?

8. JESUS GREATER THAN MOSES

Hebrews 3:1-6

What have you built in the last few years? How did that go?



Hebrews 3:1-6 compares Jesus (a builder) to Moses. What do you know about Moses? Why was he so great?

Ex 4:14-17

Ex 33:7-11

Ex 34:29-35

Num 12:1-16 (v 7 is in Heb 3:5)

Deut 34:7

Deut 34:10-12

Mat 17:1-4

Acts 7:35

Heb 11:24-28

JESUS AND MOSES

Read Hebrews 3:1-6. How are we and Jesus described in verse 1?

What are we supposed to do according to verse 1? How does this compare to 2:1?

How and why is Jesus...

- similar to Moses?
- different to Moses (see notes 1-4 below)?

Note 1: here's a possible structure to these verses. It is chiastic like 1:1-4:

A 1 Fix your thoughts on Jesus

B 2a Jesus was faithful

C 2b Moses was faithful

D 3-4 Jesus is greater than Moses

C' 5 Moses was faithful

B' 6a Jesus is faithful

A' 6b Hold firmly to our confidence and hope

Note 2: God's house is probably referring to the nation of Israel rather than the temple or tabernacle.

Note 3: Jesus says in Matthew 16:18 "...I will build my church".

Note 4: Hebrews 3 is like Hebrews 1, bringing the Son and Father into very close relationship and identity.

HOLDING FIRM

What does verse 6 call us to do? How does the theology and teaching of Hebrews so far help us to do this?

What do you think are the things you'll remember from your study of Hebrews this term?

Hebrews 3:6 reminds us of our hope, and along with 6:19 has inspired the song 'Anchor':

*I have this hope
As an anchor for my soul
Through every storm
I will hold to You*

If you were to write a song or poem about something in Hebrews 1:1-3:6 what would you write about? (Use the next page).

Maybe you should give this a go during the holidays?





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