













Hebrews

Introduction			p 2	
Study 1	Heb ch 1	creation & angels	p 4	
Study 2	Heb 2:1-3a	religion	p 7	
Study 3	Heb ch 2	rule	p 11	
Study 4	Heb 3:1-4:13	Moses & rest	p 14	
Study 5	Heb 4:14-5:10	priests	p 18	
Study 6	Heb 5:11-6:12	basics & advanced	p 21	
Study 7	Heb 6:13-7:21	Abraham, Melchizedek & new order	p 24	
Study 8	Heb 7:22-8:13	new covenant & rest	p 27	
Study 9	Heb 9:1-10:18	heavenly tabernacle	p 31	
Study 10	Heb 10:19-12:17	faith	p 35	
Study 11	Heb 12:18-13:25	Mt Zion	p 39	
Appendix 1	“our”, “perfect” and “suffering”		p 42	
Appendix 2	“learned obedience”		p 43	

Notes

In preparing these studies I've used the following sources: Tyndale commentary on Hebrews by Donald Guthrie, Hebrews for Everyone and Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright, Bible Briefs on Hebrews by Tony Payne and Greg Clarke from The Briefing #274 July 2001, by David Starling #288 September 2002, by Simon Roberts #352 January 2008 and by Russell Williams #376/7 January-February 2010, the Matthias Media Interactive Bible Study booklet From Shadow to Reality by Joshua Ng, 7 Bible studies on Hebrews from St Andrews, Roseville, 2012, Hebrews: Got to admit, it's getting better . . . by Bill Salier, The Lion Handbook to the Bible, review session on Hebrews 1988, “Don't Underestimate Jesus” the message of Hebrews 1989 and 7 talks and notes from 24/4 to 11/12/2015 by Tony Golsby-Smith on Hebrews from www.gospelconversations.com.au , 2012 sermon and Bible study series, the Fifth Gospel and Hebrews, at St Andrews, Roseville by John Dickson and www.biblecharts.org.

Introduction

Hebrews confronts one of the pressing problems of the emerging church in the first century i.e. the 'Judaizing' of Christianity. We will explore this more fully later but the question that this raises is 'How is it relevant to us in the 21st century?'

How is the struggle with religion a modern and defining characteristic of Christianity? Is the gospel a form of religion or is it fundamentally not a religion and in fact is at odds with religion? Indeed is religion hostile to the gospel and suffocating?

One modern thinker who has helped confront these questions is [Dietrich] Bonhoeffer [1906-1945]. We will therefore take a little excursion into Bonhoeffer's inquiries with a view to proving the point that far from being irrelevant, Hebrews confronts problems that are relevant today, and relevant to non-Jews as well as Jews. We can even say, more broadly, that Hebrews was unsuccessful: it failed to stop the Judaizing of Christianity so what the writer feared has happened. Thus we are facing a version of Christianity that is distorted into a religion and so the argument of Hebrews—a plea to purify the gospel and be true to its core—is still relevant today. It is an unfinished argument.



Bonhoeffer's dilemma illustrates how a 20th century theologian grappled intensely with the issue of a public Christianity and articulated it in language that is stark and illuminating—language that many of us can identify with. We should pay attention to Bonhoeffer because as we all know this was not a theoretical debate for him, but one that cost him his life. (I will be drawing on a brilliant conference speech on Bonhoeffer by the eminent philosopher Paul Ricoeur and he emphasizes this point).

Bonhoeffer saw 'religion' not as a thing, institution, or social category that defines a justifiable arena of human activities, but rather as a 'psychology' as a way of thinking, being and doing about life. Increasingly he saw it as a smokescreen that obscured our knowledge of God and distorted the picture of what God was doing. He struggled to imagine what he began to call a 'religionless' Christianity and what it would look like. Importantly he saw 'religion' as almost a contrast with being 'fully human'. He saw that the cloak religion boxes Christianity into a small subset of human activity and therefore limits God's interests -and indeed God's claims—on all of life. He would, I think, have been happy with Edwin Judge's avoidance of the term 'Christian' to describe himself. Perhaps most tellingly, he saw religion as diverting attention from not only being fully human, but from being fully Christ-like. This is because he identified Jesus as the archetypal human being, the template for humanity not the starter of a specialist clique whose interests were 'technical' religious. He defined 'religion' or the religion mindset, as composed of two ingredients.

1. 'Metaphysics':

By this he meant something like 'supernatural'. Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy but he did not mean that. The key worldview of the religious psychology is to split reality into two parts—an upper and lower part. The lower part is the world of physicality and the upper part is the world of meaning and spirituality. God gets assigned to the upper part and thus we live in a world where a second layer of reality is added to perceived reality. So God inhabits an outer ring that is optional to belief and at the margins.

a. So clearly in Bonhoeffer's terms, God must own the material world and it must be central to his interests, not peripheral. Hence a doctrine of creation must be at the core of discarding religion in favour of a religionless Christianity. The vision of creation must be expansive in scope and push every horizon.

b. Secondly in Bonhoeffer's terms, we must 'discover' God—his patterns, imprints, character revealed—and recognize him in all aspects of this expansive creation. We must recognize his handiwork in it all.

c. Thirdly—and most pointedly—we must recognize the Logos in all of this creation. The Greek idea of Logos—as governing principle behind all creation—suits these purposes as we shall see in Hebrews i.e. the Greek idea of Logos introduced a very rich and flexible picture of creation as animated by meaning which on its

own was then disembodied by Plato. But once united to the creation doctrines of Jewish thought, it unlocked a rich picture of creation as logos—which in turn opens the door to Christ as Logos.

d. Thus, as we discover God in any aspect of creation—we are discovering the Logos or Christ.

e. This is supported by the dominant argumentative role that creation plays in Hebrews but also throughout the OT in Psalms, Isaiah and Job to name a few.

2. Interiority

The second ingredient of religious mindset is the 'interiority' instinct. This means that, having banished God from the world of activities and matter, he is allowed to return to a private devotional space that is unthreatened by the public world, and makes no claims on the public world.

3. To this we need to add a third —Morality as audit.

Today we are seeing an increasing claim by the religious mindset on the public space. But they are largely doing this without dismantling the metaphysics mindset. So a kind of 'sacred' censorship gets applied to the public space i.e. we take the profane v sacred and apply it to the public space. This is disastrous and inadequate as it ironically appears to be bold but ends being conservative. It forces religion on the public space but fails to recognise the stunning hand of God in the public space.

a. To really integrate we need to first reform the metaphysics mindset—the supernatural view of religion—and replace it with a radical creationism. Thus I see God in all things and this is revelation not just proposition.

b. Then we take a religionless view of God into the public space. We present ourselves as fully human not Christian.

This religious mindset condemns faith to the edges of life. This is what Bonhoeffer identified in the redemptive focus of much of Christianity. The tight links between sin, problems, healing and salvation—all directed at the individual soul—created a dynamic interlocking logic that turns Christianity into a specialist interest that occurs at the edges of life. It fails to answer or address big life questions around meaning, longevity, durability, joy, vocation, innovation, intimacy, physicality, social cohesion, smart thinking, human centred design, organisations, family cohesion, business and enterprise, inquiry and learning to name a few. "The religious man searches furiously to reserve a place for God and today this place is at the boundaries."

From "Hebrews part 1: Resurrection trumps religion" by Tony Golsby-Smith 24/4/2015.

As we study Hebrews we may get some insights into what "religionless" Christianity might look like.

Study 1, Heb ch 1, creation & angels

Getting started

1. Rather than skim read the whole of Hebrews I have selected a number of verses to give you a brief idea of the diversity of the letter. After reading these verses make some observations on the content of Hebrews.

Heb 2:1-3

3:12-14

4:1

4:11

4:12

4:16

6:4-6

6:19-20

9:24

10:22

10:26-27

10:36-38

11:1

12:22-24

13:8

Any observations?

Hebrews inspires conflicting reactions in Christians. On the one hand it is a goldmine of 'calendar verses' - much loved comforting verses that appeal to us Christians as they open up inspiring visions of the eternal kingdom. Chapter 4:12 is probably the most famous of such verses: "The Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword".

On the other hand, Hebrews contains several passages that are most threatening and seem to wave big "perform or else" sticks at us. Hebrews 6:4-6 is the most fearful. At face value it seems to suggest that a "backslidden" Christian (whatever that is) has cut off the road to God for ever and can never repent. Such a suggestion is too awful to contemplate for most Christians who feel a little "backslidden" pretty frequently. Certainly none of these verses find their way on to Christian calendars!

Too often we take both sets of verses out of context. The "comfort" verses are viewed on their own, used as vehicles to transport us to heavenly feelings: the "threatening" verses are tenaciously analysed - mainly with a view to explaining away their threat, rather than that they might exhort or edify. These explanations are often quite torturous, and strain the verses out of their natural meaning.

Furthermore this paradox between a message of comfort and a message of threat presents us with a problem: how can one book, with a common theme include such apparently contradictory passages?

From "Don't Underestimate Jesus" the message of Hebrews by Tony Golsby-Smlth 1989.

Bible

2. Read Heb 1:1-4.
What themes are introduced in this opening paragraph?

3. (a) What does the writer say about creation (v2)?

(b) How is creation connected with the ways in which God has spoken (see Gen 1 and John 1)?

4. From the examples below note the “various ways” (v 1) in which God has spoken:

 Num 22:26-31
 Deut 4:10-13
 Eze 1:4-28
 Dan 5:5-6, 22-28
 Dan 7:1

5. How does the last word compare with the past words? (N.B. Verse 2: the ‘last days’ refers to the final period of time in the history of the world, the time bounded by the first and second comings of Jesus.)

6. What is the writer saying about Jesus?

7. Read the rest of Hebrews chapter 1.
What particular view of Jesus is the writer trying to counter?



8. What does the writer find in the Old Testament to prove his point that Jesus is superior to angels? Check out the 7 Old Testament passages that the writer uses in Heb 1.

Heb 1:5 quotes Ps 2:7

and 2 Sam 7:14 = 1 Chr 17:13

1:6 quotes Deut 32:43

“[The writer of Hebrews] intends it to be understood this quotation he makes comes with authority, although no such precise quotation as *Let all God's angels worship him* appears in the Hebrew Bible. In two passages in the Septuagint (Ps 97:7 and Deut 32:43) there is a close approximation.” From Tyndale commentary on Hebrews by Donald Guthrie N.B. the Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.

1:7 quotes Ps 104:4

1:8-9 quotes Ps 45:6-7

1:10-12 quotes Ps 102:25-27

1:13 quotes Ps 110:1

Angels were known as God's messengers in the Old Testament. They gave messages directly (Exod 3.2), they were involved in saving people (Isa 63.9), the law was believed to have been given through angels (Acts 7.37-38; Gal 3.19, Heb 2.2).

From a Bible study booklet Hebrews: Got to admit, it's getting better . . . by Bill Salier.

To finish

9. Given the supremacy of Jesus, why do people tend to trust material things or religious ritual more than Jesus?
10. (a) If you had an important message you needed to get across to people, how would you best do it?

(b) How did Jesus do it?

Study 2, Heb 2:1-3a, religion

Getting started

1. (a) How do you think non-Christians would define the Christian religion?



- (b) Would Christians agree with that definition? Why/why not?

2. What is the gospel?

3. Where would the gospel fit in with a better definition of the Christian religion?

4. Wikipedia's definition of religion: Religion is a cultural system of behaviours and practices, mythologies, world views, sacred texts, holy places, ethics, and societal organisation that relate humanity to what an anthropologist has called "an order of existence".

What would "religionless" Christianity look like?

Bible

5. Read Heb 2:1-3a.
What is scary about these verses? What are the implications for Christians?



The letter to the Hebrews has a number of **scary verses** e.g.

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end. Heb 3:12-14

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. Heb 4:1

Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. Heb 4:11

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance Heb 6:4-6

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Heb 10:26-27

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." Heb 10:36-38

See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? Heb 12:25

Here are some more re-assuring verses:

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." John 5:24

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." John 6:37

"And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day." John 6:39

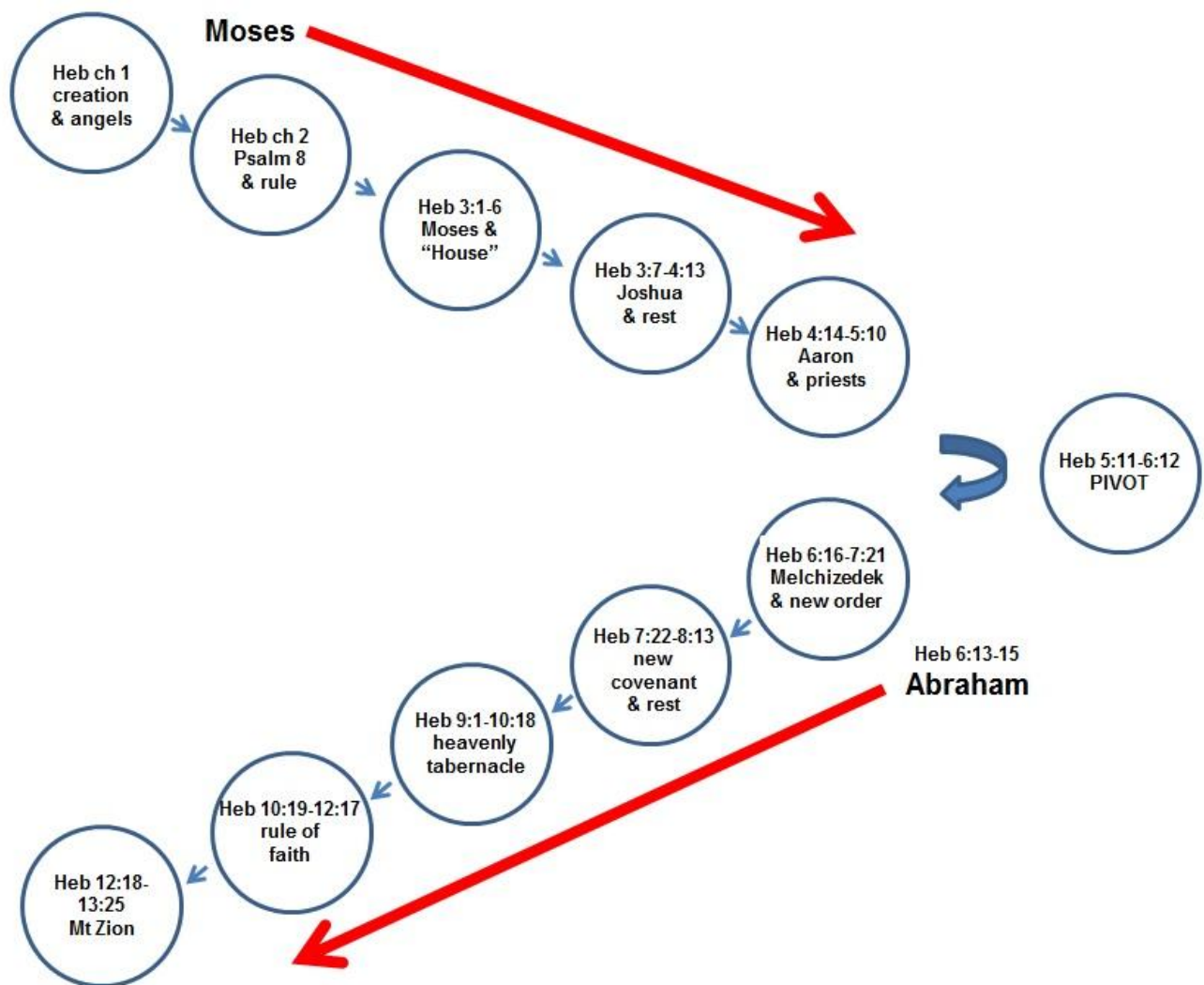
"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." John 10:28

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom 8:38-39.

6. Is Hebrews contradicting these more re-assuring verses? Why/why not?

The answer lies in the context of Hebrews.

With a quick scan through Hebrews you will notice it is very Jewish:



Christians often think in terms of people being either believers or non-believers i.e. Christian or non-Christian. In the first century they didn't think like that, as the following quote explains:

Firstly understand that Judaism was not a homogenous social unit. They formed into five segments and only one remained in its first century form.

- 1) *Pharisees* who were the letter of the law guys. They emphasized the law above all else and it was they who created the para-biblical rules, commentaries and books that have ended up defining Judaism since the first century.
- 2) The *Sadducees* who were tied to the temple and its rites. They were mortal intellectual enemies of the Pharisees and you can easily see this as Paul played them off against each other. Obviously they collapsed with the destruction of the temple.
- 3) The *Zealots* who were in favour of political rebellion against Rome.
- 4) The *Essenes* who were monastics who withdrew from life and whose writings we found in the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- 5) The *Baptisers* who stressed personal repentance and were led at first by John the Baptist.

Our first paradigm shift is to recognize that the early Christians did not call themselves Christians—we probably know this but don't recognize its significance. We assume they mentally identified themselves as the 'early church'—i.e. a non-Jewish, breakaway movement without a name yet. But in fact, it looks much more

likely that they thought of themselves as a continuation of Jewishness not a complete break from it. This is the only way to explain their behaviour and makes much more sense of a close reading of the Acts which we will get to in a moment.

But it also begins to make much more sense of Hebrews—as the letter that signals the rift where this new movement broke off from Judaism and finally realized it could never be integrated. . . .

[Acts chs 10-15.] This is the Peter section between 10 and 12 and Paul's early missionary journeys [between 13 and 15]. Both of them describe movements into Gentile territory that is criticized by the Jewish Christians, and then discussed and arbitrated on by the council of elders in Jerusalem. Clearly Jerusalem is working as some kind of headquarters for the early believers and they are the ones who demand answers and set policy. The Council in chapter 15 is a major section that Luke gives a lot of attention to. James' endorsement of the Gentiles is fair but hardly a ringing endorsement; we can identify the traces of conservatism in his judgment, and we can feel the tension in the room and Jerusalem as he gives his verdict. He does not say "Let the Gentiles believe independently, and follow Christ only with no regard to Mosaic Law". He puts four stipulations on them, both moral and ceremonial. But his reasoning is strange to us: he says that they must abide by these four laws because "Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues every Sabbath". He is justifying the ruling by Moses and the widespread influence of Jewish customs, synagogues and Sabbath keeping. His reasoning does not emanate from the dying and rising of Jesus. . . .

Acts finishes with the longest section of all—beginning at Chapter 20 we see Paul's emotional journey back to Jerusalem. We can read between the lines and recognize this is a deep thing for him. It is not a mere tactical return, and it is not like a missionary returning for R and R. This is an affair of the heart; his heart remains in Jerusalem and he wants to give them every chance to come with him to the full journey in Christ. We know that he is filled with foreboding and does not really expect to succeed and in fact this journey back is marked by poignant scenes of farewell and indeed by criticism or disagreement from other Christians who clearly do not think it is a good thing to go back to Jerusalem. Paul expects conflict there.

When he arrives back we see a violent mix of two ingredients: on the one hand, Paul's strange attempt to compromise with Judaism, and on the other the fearsome extremism of the unbelieving Jews—whom we can only describe as ungovernable, fundamentalist jihadists. All of my sympathies lie with the poor Roman governor trying to make sense of it all and calm everyone down!

But the thing to note is that Paul's presence caused uproar within days of his arrival—but the continued presence of James and the elders and the believing Jews had NOT caused any such uproar. In fact, they were living somewhat peaceably and they implored Paul to continue to keep the peace—by demonstrating that 'you yourself are living in obedience to the law'. SO we can only assume that they were participating in Jewish customs, the temple traditions and keeping Moses law while also defining themselves as believers in Christ.

I would posit therefore that they thought of themselves, and defined themselves, and presented themselves as the Jewish Baptist group, not a breakaway movement.

From "Hebrews part 1: Resurrection trumps religion" by Tony Golsby-Smith 24/4/2015.

So the scary verses are not about Christians losing their salvation but about Jewish people struggling with a progression in their faith that involved replacing their old ways of doing religion with an understanding of how Jesus has taken the place of the old system. This involves a whole hearted adoption of this new way and anything less is disastrous.

To finish

7. (a) What are the aspects of Christianity that outsiders would consider "religious"?

(b) What would it be like without these aspects?

(c) Would it be better or worse without these aspects? Give reasons for your answer.

Study 3, Heb ch 2, rule

Getting started

1. Name one thing you have control of?
2. Name one thing you don't have control of?
3. Would you like to have more control over things? Why/why not?



Bible

4. Read Hebrews 2:1-4.
 - (a) What was the message "spoken by angels" (see Acts 7:53 and Gal 3:19)?
 - (b) In what sense was it binding (see Ex 20:4-5, 32:1-4, 19-28)?
 - (c) What is the message of the Son?
 - (d) How did it come to be confirmed (vv 3-4)?
 - (e) What does "salvation" mean here (v 3)?

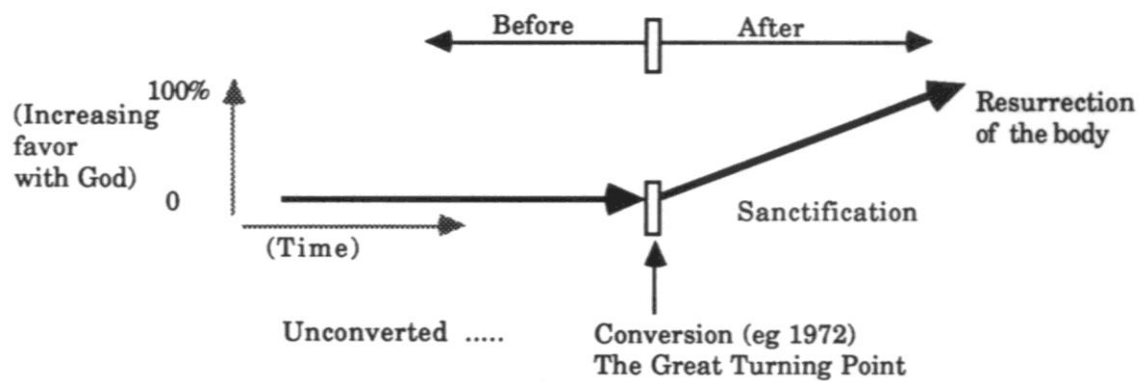
I can remember as a younger Christian wondering whether the book was written to Christians or non-Christians. This question was viewed by many as the crucial one in interpreting the book. How you read the troublesome chapter 6 depended largely on how you answered this question.

Nor is this question confined to our reading of the book of Hebrews. The parable of the sower is another example of a famous passage where this question seems crucial to our understanding. Which of the seeds represent Christians?

A lot of energy gets devoted to this question - but it is misdirected. We would do better to try to absorb the NT perspective on history because then passages like Hebrews and the parable of the sower would make a lot more sense. . . .

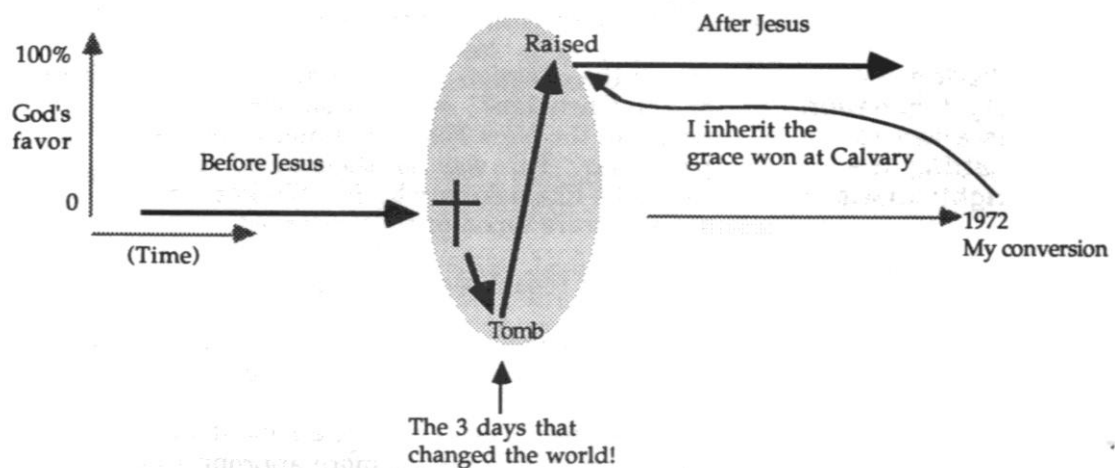
Basically individual conversion is not the perspective of the book. So the first step in the logic chain was wrong. The question was framed around an antithesis that while it is common for us 20th century evangelicals,

it is not the vantage point from which the writers of the New Testament viewed God's activities. We view the great "changing point" as our conversion and so see life as a time line like this:



This perspective is an apparent one but a limiting one. Think about its implications. For a start, isn't it intrinsically "me-centred" rather than "God-centred"? And secondly, isn't it placing rather too much emphasis on the application of grace to me, rather than the act that initiated the era of grace.

What is the perspective of the book? The NT perspective looks more like this:



The great turning point is God's act of grace in Jesus on the cross. He became man, died as man, was condemned as man, judged as man, and was justified as man.

To signify that all this had satisfied God, God raised Him as man and so Jesus initiated a new era for man, a new world. This is the great "before and after" around which all revolves. Not my experience of this grace (when I inherit it).

From "Don't Underestimate Jesus" the message of Hebrews by Tony Golsby-Smlth 1989.

5. Heb 2:6-8 quotes from Ps 8 so we need to understand what Ps 8 is about.
Read Psalm 8.

The author uses the title 'son of man' to refer to humankind. The writer to the Hebrews and his readers would have been well aware that Jesus used the title to refer to himself

(a) How is the majesty of God shown in this psalm?

(b) What does this psalm tell us about humanity . . .

(i) compared to the universe?

(ii) compared to God?

(iii) compared to animals, birds and fish?

(c) What role has God given humanity?

6. Read Heb 2:5-9.

(a) What point is made by comparing humanity with angels?

(b) What is the problem with the role of humanity?

(c) How does Jesus fit in with Ps 8?

7. Read Heb 2:10-18.

(a) What points are made about the relationship between Christians and Jesus?

(b) What point is made about angels?

(c) In what sense is Jesus a pioneer/author (v 10 and see appendix 1)?

(d) Why did God have to become human (vv 14 & 17)?

(e) What are humanity's problems according to this passage?

To finish

8. How is humanity's problem solved?

Study 4, Heb 3:1-4:13, Moses & rest

Getting started

1. How do you relax?



2. Would you say “resting” is different to “relaxing”? If so, how is it different?
3. What can you remember about how the Bible uses the word “rest”?

Bible

4. Read Heb 3:1-6.
(N.B. Verse 1 ‘apostle’: we are not used to thinking of Jesus as an apostle, but the word simply means ‘someone who is sent’. Jesus was sent by the Father and appointed as a high priest.)
(a) Heb 3:1 begins with “therefore”. Look at Hebrews chapter 2 to answer the question why we should “therefore . . . fix your thoughts on Jesus”?

(b) What is God’s house?

5. Read Numbers 12:6-8. Context. God’s people have escaped from Egypt and are wandering through the desert on the way to the promised land. It’s not long after leaving Mt Sinai that the people begin to complain about the manna that God has been providing for them to eat. So God sends them quail to eat. Miriam and Aaron complain about Moses and God’s reply is in vv 6-8.

(a) What do these verses say about Moses?



(b) From Heb 3:1-6 (i) why is Jesus worthy of greater honour than Moses?

(ii) How do you think a Jew; brought up on the Law, the Temple, the sacrificial system and the priesthood; would have reacted to this statement?

(iii) What is the confidence and hope that the writer is talking about (v 6)?

(iv) What confidence and hope would a Jewish contemporary have been waiting for?

(v) By comparing the Jewish context with the writer's emphasis, why would the writer encourage his audience to fix their thoughts on Jesus?

6. The first word of Heb 3:7 is "so" which means the verses before 3:7 lead into our current passage. Read Heb 3:2-6 and think of a phrase(s) that sums up that passage.
7. Read Heb 3:7-14.
What "time of testing in the desert" is it talking about (v 8)?
8. What "rest" (v 11) is it taking about?
9. Consider the phrase "sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God" (v 12).
What does this phrase describe?
10. What sins is it talking about – all sins or what?
11. Who are the people for whom this letter was written (see study 2)?
12. (a) In the phrase "unbelieving heart" (v 12), what is it that is not being believed (consider the context)?

(b) So what is their sin?

13. Read Heb 4:1 which starts with a “therefore”.
Now read Heb 3:15-19 which leads into the “therefore” of 4:1.
(a) What rest is it talking about in 3:18-19?

(b) What rest is it talking about in 4:1?

14. The next section, Heb 4:1-14 is about the Exodus and rest but the writer adds 2 new concepts: the gospel and faith. Read Heb 4:1-13.
(a) What is the gospel?

(b) What is the gospel in Old Testament terms?

For Israel, the good news is as much about God’s kingly rule over the world (Is 40:9-10) as it is about his forgiveness (Is 40:1-2). The gospel proclaims both a Saviour who pardons wrong and a King who puts things right.

From a sermon by John Dickson on a series on Isaiah, the Fifth Gospel, at St Andrews, Roseville 2012.

(c) What is faith?

(d) What is faith in Old Testament terms?

15. Read Heb 4:1-2 again.
(a) “They” (v 2) is the people of the Exodus. What was the message they heard?

(b) What was the faith they should have had (see Num 13:26-14:35 where God’s people are stationed on the edge of the Promised Land, just about to enter)?

16. Read Heb 4:3-6.
What 3 types of rest are mentioned?

17. Read Heb 4:6-13.
(a) What was “their example of disobedience” (v 11)?

(b) For the people-who-were-thinking-about-going-back-to-Judaism what disobedient things would they have been doing?

Let's not be too condescending to these 1st century Christians. Just try to imagine their situation. They were part of the most culturally intense tribe/race to have ever lived: for them, their history was not a casual backdrop to their lives, but gave their lives meaning and destiny. All around them, they saw physical trappings of their religion that inspired awe and reverence. A vast temple dominating their age old city, from the sheer cliff face rising out of the Kedron Valley; ornate and massive temple gates at the Beautiful gate that needed 20 people to swing them open; a cavernous Temple square that seethed with a quarter of a million devout worshippers during feast times; a society dominated by a ruling priesthood - intimidatingly learned and serious men whose opinions were authority.

And this pageantry was not the gradual accretion of social habits and shifting fashions: it traced its noble ancestry directly back one and a half thousand years to a spectacular appearance of angelic messengers to Moses on Mt. Sinai. This appearance was not only the birth of their nation: it was probably the greatest revolution in human religious thought to that date. It took a group of migrants infected with idolatry and superstition like everyone else and changed them into a nation believing in one true God - transcendent, invisible, and creator. Attached to that revelation came a moral law that has formed the basis of modern law: and a sacrificial law that mediated this God's relation with this new nation and salved its religious conscience.

From "Don't Underestimate Jesus" the message of Hebrews by Tony Golsby-Smlth 1989.

18. Read Heb 4:12-13.

(a) What "word of God" is v 12 talking about – Jesus (John 1:1), the Bible, prophecy (e.g. Micah 1:1) or something else (e.g. Gen 1:3)? Give reasons for your answer.

(b) How would God be judging these people-who-were-thinking-about-going-back-to-Judaism ?

To finish

19. Do we have faith in the Old Testament sacrificial system, the Old Testament priesthood, Temple worship and the Old Testament Law? Why/why not?

20. If the original hearers of Hebrews were to drop their faith in the Old Testament priesthood, Temple worship and the Old Testament Law what would they be left with?

21. In Christianity "religiosity" occurs when people focus on church activity, rules, tradition and pet doctrines. If we were to drop all this religiosity what would we be left with? Would it be better or worse? Would it be workable?

Study 5, Heb 4:14-5:10, priests

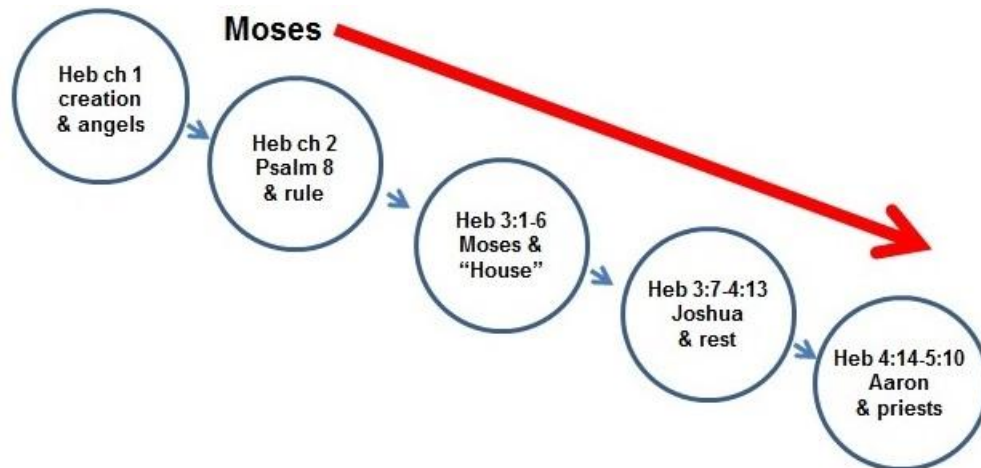
Getting started

1. In our context (a) what is a priest?

(b) what does a priest do?

(c) what kind of a relationship, if any, do you have with a priest?

The story so far . . .



The first 5 chapters look at the religious system of Judaism with an undercurrent of how Jesus changes everything. Hebrews begins with creation and Jesus' role even back then. Great are the angels but Jesus is superior. Chapter 2 quotes from Psalm 8 and introduces the idea of humanity's rule over the earth. But humanity does not rule, instead Jesus is the world's ruler and Jesus shares our humanity as brothers. Chapter 3 introduces Moses, his "house" and the Exodus but Jesus is greater than Moses. Joshua and the theme of rest is introduced in chapter 4 but Joshua was unable to give them a "Sabbath-rest" but Jesus can and does. In this study we will learn about Aaron, the priesthood and the sacrificial system – all the trappings that defined Jewishness.

Bible

2 Read Heb 4:14-5:10.

(a) What was the problem for an Old Testament Jew approaching "God's throne of grace" (4:16)?

(b) Why can Christians be confident that we can approach God's throne of grace?

Local **priests** in all the towns and villages acted as teachers and administrators of the law.

Duties: Teach the people (Leviticus 10:8-11), serve as judges to resolve controversy (Deut. 21:5), offer sacrifices (Exodus 29:38-42), assess impurity (Leviticus 13-15), burn incense (Exodus 30:7-8), bless the people (Numbers 6:22-27), bless God (Deuteronomy 10:8), take care of the altar (Leviticus 6:8-13), the lamps, and the bread (Leviticus 24:1-9) and continue the sacred fire (Leviticus 6:12-13).

From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright p 57 and www.biblecharts.org.

Aaron, the older brother of Moses, was appointed Israel's first **high priest** (Ex chs 28-29), and in theory his descendants were Israel's priests thereafter. Other members of his tribe (Levi) were 'Levites' performing other liturgical duties but not sacrificing. Priests lived among the people all around the country, having a local teaching role (Lev 10:11, Mal 2:7), and going to Jerusalem by rotation to perform the Temple liturgy (e.g. Luke 2:8).

David appointed Zadok (whose Aaronic ancestry is sometimes questioned) as high priest, and his family remained thereafter the senior priests in Jerusalem, probably the ancestors of the Sadducees. One explanation of the origins of the Qumran Essenes is that they were a dissident group who believed themselves to be the rightful chief priests.

From Hebrews for Everyone by Tom Wright p 191.

3. What do you think might be meant by an "order of priesthood" (Heb 5:6, 10)?
We will look more at this in study 7.



4. What similarities are there between Old Testament priests and Jesus . . .
(a) in handling weaknesses in people (Heb 4:14-16)?

(b) in how they got the job (Heb 5:1-6)?

(c) in their tasks (Heb 5:1-3)?

5. What differences are there between Old Testament priests and Jesus . . .
(a) in regard to their sin (Heb 4:14-5:3)?

(b) in regard to the priestly order they belong to (Heb 5:4-6)?

6. Heb 5:5 quotes Psalm 2 so we will look at Psalm 2.
Read Psalm 2.
(N.B. Acts 4:25 tells us that this is a psalm of David. In Psalm 2 David (or any king following David's line) is the "Anointed One" of verse 2, the "king" of verse 6, and the "Son" of verses 7 and 12. Revelation 2:27 and 19:15 link the ruler of verse 9 with the ascended Christ.)
(a) What does this psalm tell us about God's character?
- (b) How does Jesus being God's son fit in with the argument of Heb 5:1-9?
7. Heb 5:6 quotes Psalm 110 so we will look at Psalm 110.
Read Psalm 110.
The first line of v1 (in the NIV) reads "The LORD said to my Lord". The word printed as "LORD" represents YHWH, the psalmist's God, the name God uses for himself when speaking to Moses out of the burning bush in Ex ch 3. "My Lord" in v1 is the psalmist's master or ruler. King David wrote this psalm so in v1 we have God speaking to David's master.
(a) Who is David's master (see Mark 12:35-37)?
- (b) What is this psalm about?
- (c) What has it got to do with "a priest for ever in the order of Melchizedek"? (Hebrews develops this idea in chapter 7.)
- (d) How does Jesus being "a priest for ever in the order of Melchizedek" fit in with the rest of Heb 5:1-9?
8. In what sense did Jesus "learn obedience" (5:8)? (See appendix 2.)
9. In what sense was Jesus "made perfect" (5:9)? Wasn't he always perfect? (See appendix 1.)
10. Read 1 Peter 2:9-10. Context: Peter writes to encourage scattered believers as they endure persecution. He reminds them of their new identity in Christ and talks about a new priesthood in terms of all Christians being priests.
What do you think he means by a royal priesthood?

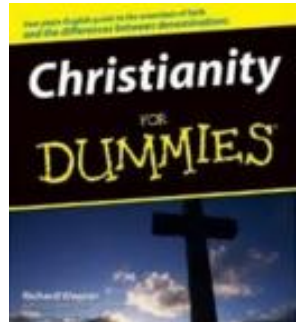
To finish

11. If all Christians are priests then we need to re-consider the select few who are allowed to be priests/ministers in our churches.
(a) What things should change?
- (b) Does this bring us closer to religionless Christianity? Why/why not?

Study 6, Heb 5:11-6:12, basics & advanced

Getting started

1. (a) What things would you consider to be the basics of the Christian faith?



- (b) What things would you consider to be more advanced – things that newcomers shouldn't worry about until they get the basics right?



Bible

2. Read Heb 5:11-6:1a.
 - (a) Why do you think there is this pause in proceedings?

- (b) What is it that the writer of Hebrews has much to say (5:10-11)?

3. Read Heb 6:1-3.

What are the elementary truths/teachings/doctrines that the author mentions?

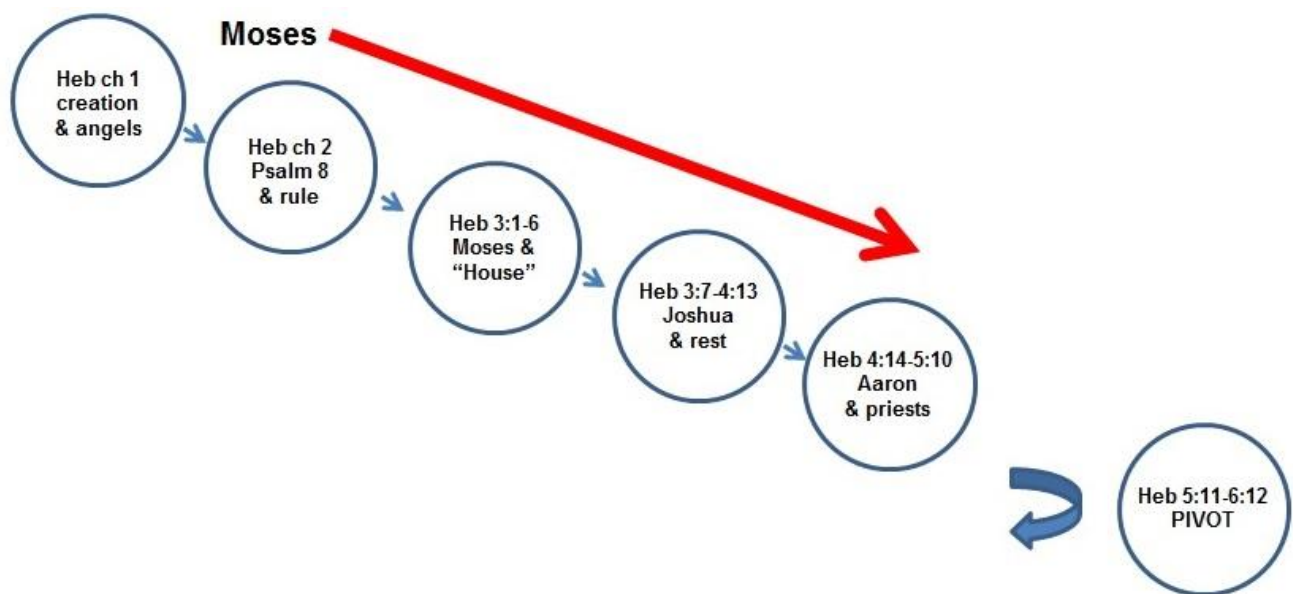
In the RSV [Revised Standard Version of the Bible] they are described as *the elementary doctrines of Christ* . . . The meaning could be either 'the word of the beginning of Christ', or as in the RSV, which applies the beginning to the doctrine rather than to Christ. There is no doubt that the former is the most natural understanding of the Greek, because of the order in which the words occur. But what does 'the beginning of Christ' here mean? A parallel may be seen in 5:12 where the 'beginning of the oracles of God' is mentioned. Evidently some basic aspects of Christ must here be in view. The 'beginning' would therefore be the initial understanding of the Christian position which differentiated it from Judaism. (J. C. Adams, Exegesis of Hebrews 6:1f. (1967) contends that the basic Jewish religion is here in mind.)

From the Tyndale commentary on Hebrews by Donald Guthrie p 140.

4. Before we get to the solid food (vv 12, 14) we read a scary section.
Read Heb 6:4-6.
In the Jewish context of Hebrews what do you think the writer means by . . .
(a) “falling away” (v6)?

(b) their actions are like “crucifying the Son of God all over again” (v 6)?

The story so far . . .



The first 5 chapters look at the religious system of Judaism with an undercurrent of how Jesus changes everything. Hebrews begins with creation and Jesus' role even back then. Great are the angels but Jesus is superior. Chapter 2 quotes from Psalm 8 and introduces the idea of humanity's rule over the earth. But humanity does not rule, instead Jesus is the world's ruler and Jesus shares our humanity as brothers. Chapter 3 introduces Moses, his "house" and the Exodus but Jesus is greater than Moses. Joshua and the theme of rest is introduced in chapter 4 but Joshua was unable to give them a "Sabbath-rest" but Jesus can and does. Next we hear about Aaron, the priesthood and the sacrificial system – all the trappings that defined Jewishness and faith in God, but Jesus is greater. The writer pauses to prepare his readers for the next section and let them know how inadequate the old system was. This pause acts like a pivot or hinge before each theme will be addressed again to show how the old system has been superseded.

From Tony Golsby-Smith:

Thus far he has established a 'negative superiority' for Jesus i.e. he has established Jesus' role by comparison to those who are weaker than Jesus. Now he wants to move beyond these terms and these foundations and to start talking in positive terms about Jesus role and the 'new order' he has established – but he cannot.

- This is the great pause wherein the argument shudders to a standstill for a while. This is salutary as he is claiming that these things are not easily understood and in fact are not 'natural' to human understanding.
- Furthermore, clinging to religion and the old ways will immunize the mind against fully appreciating what God is doing in Christ
- He briefly foreshadows this terrain of revelation as the rule of 'Melchizedek'.

This leads us to the great hinge of the book that has terrified so many.

- (a) You cannot keep circling around the first principles of our salvation. This will habituate you to a childishness of understanding. In the case of the Jews the essence of their religious system and priestly system was sacrifices. This was a regular way of making yourself right with God. Imagine a Jewish Christian participating in this ritual – and the end of Acts clearly establishes that this was what was going on. They had one foot in one camp and one in the other. They followed Jesus – but as a Jewish leader who was still working under the aegis of the whole Jewish system thus they participated in temple worship and vows and priestly orders governing their practices.
- (b) But the more pious they were, the more sinful they were in Apollos' [the possible writer of Hebrews] terms.
- (c) So he argues this way – Jesus has been sacrificed once and for all and indeed has smashed and obviated the entire façade of the religious system – including the sacrificial system and the associated priestly system.
- (d) Thus he starts to argue very logically that if a believer 'falls away' it is impossible to renew them again to repentance' – meaning that it is impossible to go through the cycle of sacrifice and forgiveness – it is theologically impossible to re-enter the cycle of forgiveness as if it were a recurrent temporal practice that we go in and out of as we sin. No! Christ has forgiven once and for all. So if a believer starts to participate in any form of this cycle, any shadow of a repentance, sacrifice, forgiveness cycle – then they are 'crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting him to an open shame' i.e. they are implying that his sacrifice is incomplete so we had better crucify him again, and again and again.
- (e) So this hinge and turning point is actually saying almost the opposite to what most people fear it says – but still in a sobering way. It is saying that God has moved once and for all, and if our practices hint or suggest that somehow his redemptive move is incomplete, we put him to shame
- (f) No – God is investing in us and he wants fruit. If we Judaize the gospel we deny him fruit. We offend him and this is a fearful thing to do.

From "Hebrews part 3: Jesus and the Resurrection order of Melchizedek" 26/6/2015 by Tony Golsby-Smith.

- 5. What have the scary verses of Heb 6:4-6 got to do with the farming example of verses 7-8 and the verses which follow (vv 9-12)?

To finish

- 6. What fruit (a) do you produce?



- (b) could you produce?



Study 7, Heb 6:13-7:21, Abraham, Melchizedek & the new order

Getting started

1. What do we mean by swearing?
2. Is swearing sinful? Why/why not?



3. What is an oath?



Bible

4. Read Heb 6:13-20.
 - (a) What does the writer of Hebrews mean by swearing?
 - (b) What oath did God make with Abraham (see also Gen 12:1-3)?
 - (c) What is the hope in vv 18-20?
 - (d) Why the “fleeing” (v18)?
5. Read Heb 7:1-21.
6. To understand this passage we need some more information about kings and high priests:
 - (a) Kings – read Gen 49:8-10 and Psalm 110:1-3.
 - (i) What tribe did the king come from?
 - (ii) What was his job?
 - (b) High priests – read Num 3:5-10 and Lev 16:6-10.
 - (i) what tribe did the high priest come from?
 - (ii) What was his job?

(c) From Heb 1:3, 5, 13 and 2:17 what positions did Jesus fulfil?

(d) Which tribe did Jesus come from (see Matt 1:1-6)?

(e) For Jewish people what was the problem with Jesus (see Heb 7:13-14)?

(f) How did Jesus become the high priest “in the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 7:20-21)?

(g) What regulations are set aside (Heb 7:18)?

(h) How is Jesus’ priesthood far greater than Aaron’s?

Then he moves on to his high point which is **the new order of priesthood** that Jesus has inaugurated – the Priesthood of Melchizedek. This priesthood is linked not with Moses but with Abraham and thus predates the law and even Israel.

- He begins with the promise to Abraham. This straight away opens up a more human wide application of the blessing. This predates all the narrowness of Israel.

- The promise is emphatic and doubled up – stressing God’s relentless commitment to bless and fulfil this promise.

- The promise is connected with rule and inheritance – inheritances are locked up and only released in death. In death all of the wealth that was owned by the previous generation passes to the next. So the death of Christ has unlocked all of the wealth bound up in the promised rule and possession.

- Abraham’s promises are universally about possessing the earth and the stars – the ‘land’ is clearly the earth.

Thus we can see that the Abraham promises link closely to the creational rule promise of Psalm 8.

However he then takes another esoteric prophecy from the Psalms and builds it into a major argument. He explores the phrase ‘priest forever after the order of Melchizedek’ and these are the features of Melchizedek that he highlights as distinctive, divine and mysterious

- He blessed Abraham and thus was superior to Abraham
- He was ‘eternal’ in that he was without beginning or end of days.
- He was King of Righteousness and King of Peace.

Thus the nature of Jesus priesthood is revealed by the epic and defining phrase that this order is characterized by ‘the power of an indestructible life’ [Heb 7:16]. This priesthood is the resurrection order.

- What is an ‘order’?
- More than the practices and closer to the principles.
 - The field of play within which all the rules operate and make sense.
 - Rather like the laws that govern the universe and make its actions and relations possible.

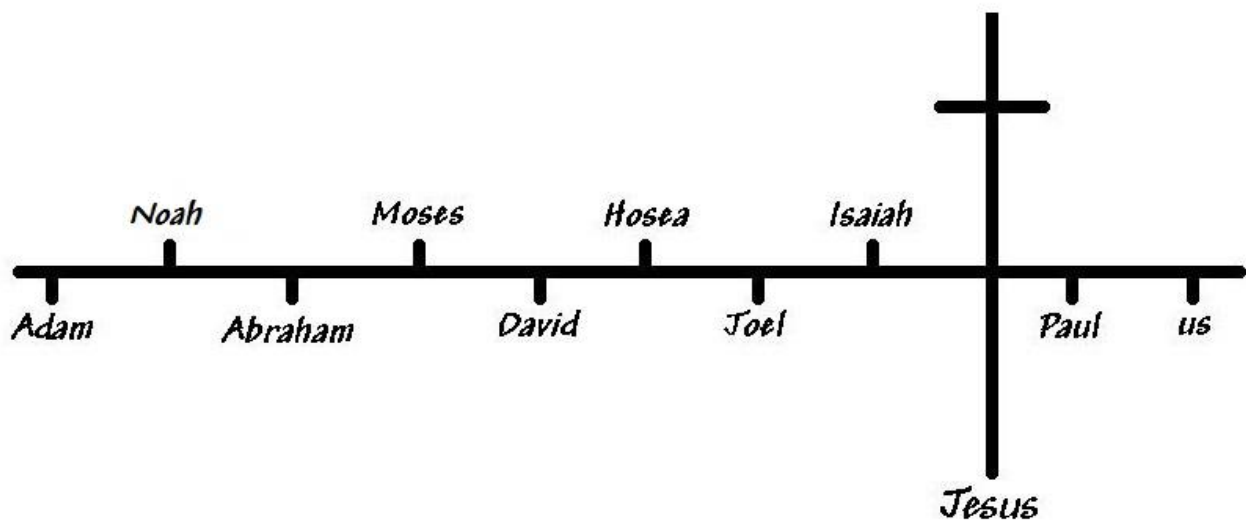
Thus his forgiveness operates within a resurrection order. Resurrection is not here an event that followed the cross but rather the governing principles of the new kingdom. All facets of it must work under the resurrection order.

From “Hebrews part 3: Jesus and the Resurrection order of Melchizedek” 26/6/2015 by Tony Golsby-Smith.

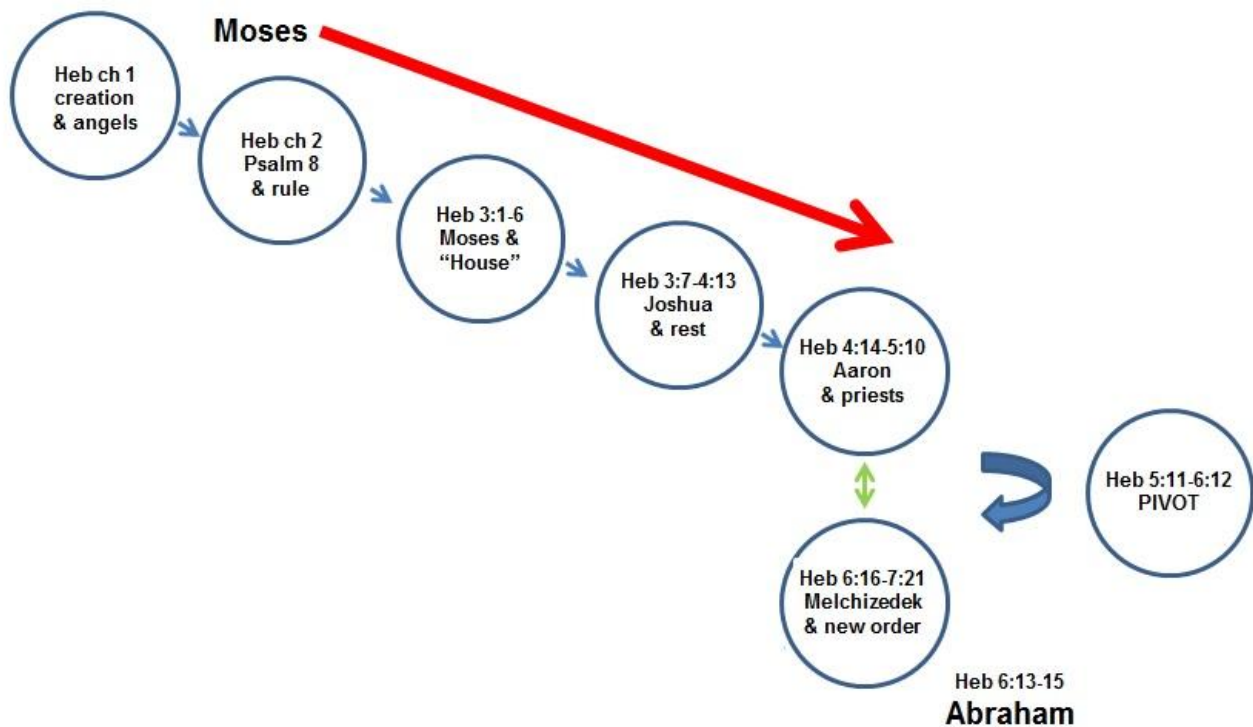
Study 8, Heb 7:22-8:13, new covenant & rest

Getting started

1. What is a covenant?
2. Can you think of any covenants in the Bible?



The story so far . . .



The writer of Hebrews introduces Abraham in chapter 6. The new order, which replaces the old order, is based on God's promises or oaths to Abraham. The Law, given through Moses, has been made obsolete by God's promises which were fulfilled through Jesus. The writer, beginning with the priestly order of Melchizedek, works through each aspect of Judaism to show how Jesus has superseded the old system. In the last study we saw how Jesus is our high priest who has fulfilled and perfected the inadequate Jewish priesthood.

Bible

3. What does Hebrews mean by the old or first covenant (see 7:22, 8:7-9, 9:1)?

At the heart of Jewish belief is the conviction that the one God, YHWH, who had made the whole world, had called Abraham and his family to belong to him in a special way. The promises God made to Abraham and his family, and the requirements that were laid on them as a result, came to be seen in terms either of the agreement that a king would make with a subject people, or sometimes of the marriage bond between husband and wife. One regular way of describing his relationship was '**covenant**' which can thus include both promise and law. The covenant was renewed at Mount Sinai with the giving of the Torah [the Old Testament laws]; in Deuteronomy before the entry to the promised land; and. In a more focused way, with David (e.g. Psalm 89). Jeremiah 31 promised that after the punishment of exile God would make a 'new covenant' with his people, forgiving them and binding them to him more intimately. Jesus believed that this was coming true through his kingdom proclamation and his death and resurrection. The early Christians developed these ideas in various ways, believing that in Jesus the promises had at last been fulfilled.

Hebrews for Everyone by Tom Wright p 182.

4. Read Heb 7:22-28.
How is the new covenant better (v22)?

5. What are the implications for us (vv 27-28)?

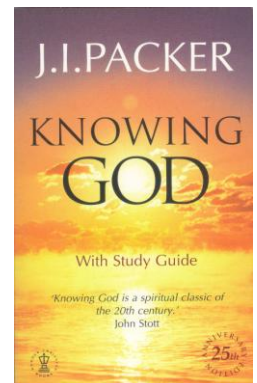
6. Read Heb ch 8.
What does it mean that Jesus sat down at the right hand of God (v1, see also Heb 1:3)?

The *right hand* was traditionally a place of honour. The idea here is drawn from the practice of oriental kings to associate the heir with them in the exercise of government. Nevertheless, the idea of Messiah being seated at the right hand of God comes from Psalm 110:1. . . . The act of sitting carries a strong sense of fulfilment, for a sitting position is more suggestive of a finished task than a standing position. Indeed, the emphasis on Christ seated, which is supported by other New Testament evidence, show conclusively that the sacrificial work is done.

From the Tyndale commentary on Hebrews by Donald Guthrie p 73.

7. What are the promises of the new covenant (v6)?

8. What was wrong with the old covenant (v7)?
9. What does it mean to have “the laws in their minds and write them on their hearts” (v10)?
10. What does it mean to “know the Lord” (v11)?

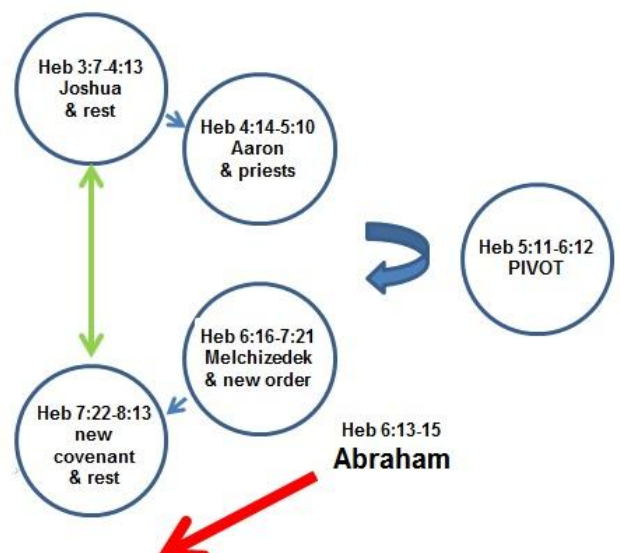


The new covenant achieves intimacy between God and humanity

1. Inward not outward i.e. not robotically followed practices and procedures, but deep inward intimacy with the spirit of God that makes us privy to his desires and hopes and plans
2. Knowledge of God is the primary outcome i.e. very much described in educational and learning terms not moral terms. “No-one will have to teach his neighbour, saying ‘Know the Lord’ but all will know me from the least to the greatest” [Heb 8:11]
3. Universal and widespread and non-hierarchical knowledge of God among the new humanity i.e. no intermediaries necessary
4. Thus God achieves what he aimed for in the sanctuary – communion and intimacy between God and mankind.
5. This overshadows the ‘forgiveness’ attribute which is the means to the end. We are forgiven and cleansed in order that we may know God. Hence the forgiveness and cleansing aspect of the new covenant is added as postscript at the end, and gets less emphasis than the intimacy benefit.

From “Hebrews part 4: Jesus and the reverse incarnation” 7/8/2015 by Tony Golsby-Smith.

11. Read Heb 3:11, 18, 4:1, 3, 5, 8-11. The writer of Hebrews talks about people *not* having rest during and after the Exodus. What are the indications of *real* rest, “Sabbath-rest”, in Heb 8:1-13?



To finish

12. (a) Name some aspects of “knowing God” that are - impersonal?

- personal?

(b) Are we better at keeping God impersonal and distant or personal and intimate?
Give reasons for your answer.

Study 9, Heb 9:1-10:18, heavenly tabernacle

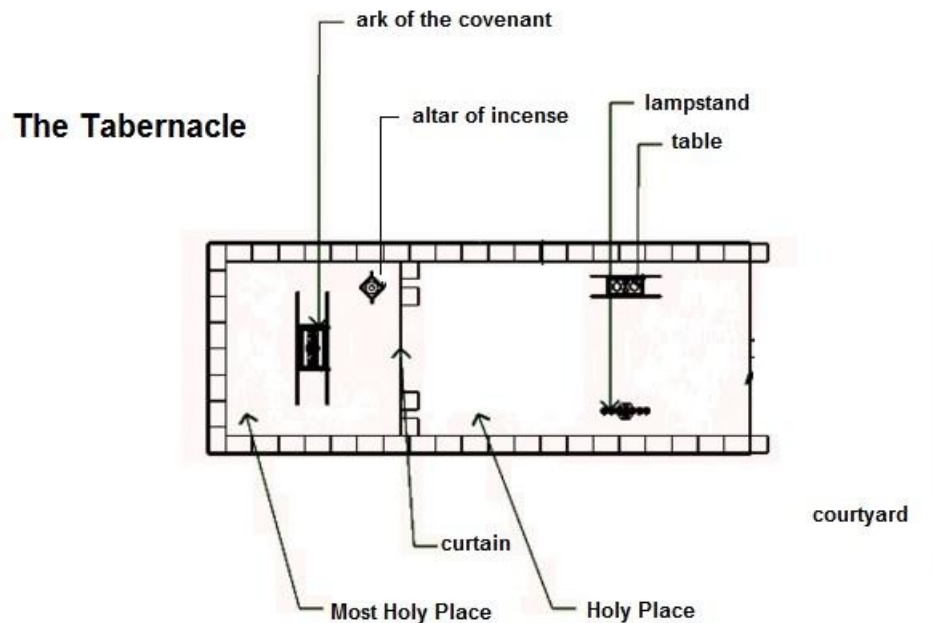
Getting started

1. Think back to the time you got converted/saved/born again/ became a Christian. What pressures were being put upon you?



Bible

2. Read Heb 9:1-10.



The Jews misread a weakness as a strength. For instance, the daily or yearly ritual of sacrifice. Now to us that may seem evidently incomplete but try to imagine a Jew observing it. Wouldn't it be comforting to see the pomp and ceremony, the sense of religious importance evoked by an impressive temple and beautifully dressed priests solemnly and self-importantly performing these centuries' old traditions? Surely they saw all this as strength.

OK. But what about Jesus? Invisible. No sign of activity. No pomp and ceremony. In fact nothing at all – apparently. Just contrast the Levitical priests and Jesus. If you were a first century Jew, who would you have found the more charismatic and impressive?

From a review session on Hebrews by Tony Golsby-Smith, 1988.

- (a) What pressures to stay with traditional Judaism would the Jews have experienced?

(b) Why were gifts and sacrifices not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper (v9)?

You cannot serve the living God without your conscience being cleansed (not your sins but your mind) from 'dead works' – not from sins but from the guilt system imposed by laws. Dead works are not sins. They are the sacrificial and religious system that was binding these Jews to the old order.

From "Hebrews part 4: Jesus and the reverse incarnation" 7/8/2015 by Tony Golsby-Smith.

3. Read Heb 9:11-14.

At this point begins the explanation of Christ's special function under the new covenant. The writer transfers the main features of the old – the tabernacle and the atonement – into spiritual terms. In this way he shows their true value. They pointed to the greater reality behind the shadow.

From the Tyndale commentary on Hebrews by Donald Guthrie p 187.

(a) How did Jesus fulfil the sacrificial system?

(b) How does Jesus cleanse the conscience?

4. Read Heb 9:15-28.

(a) What is a mediator?

(b) How is Jesus the mediator of the new covenant (v15)?

(c) What has Jesus achieved that the old covenant never could?

(d) How is the priestly ministry of Jesus superior to the Old Testament priestly ministry with regards to:

(i) where it takes place?

(ii) how often it takes place?

(iii) the nature and quality of the sacrifice?

(iv) what is achieved?

5. (a) What do you do when you have a guilty conscience?

(b) How is it that a cleansed conscience will enable us to serve God (Heb 9:14)?

(c) How is this related to having God's laws written on our hearts (Heb 8:10)?

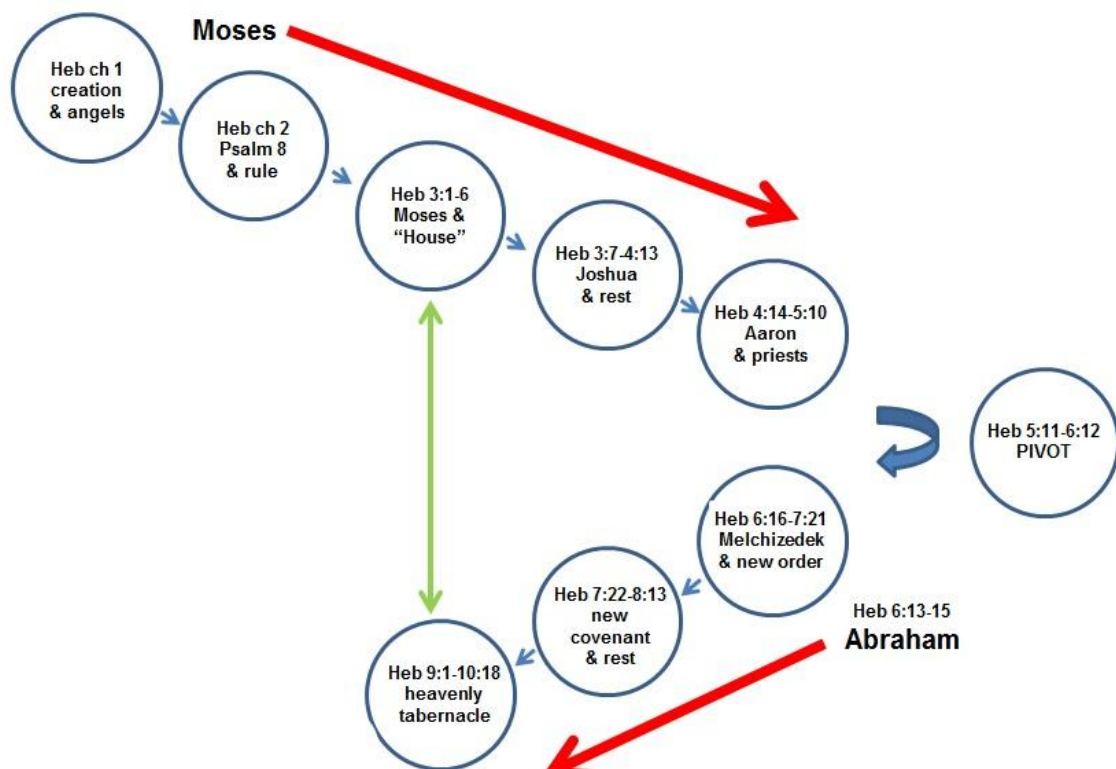
(d) What if you are a Christian but still feel guilty for your sins? Does this mean your conscience is *not* clean? Why/why not?

(e) What does it mean that Christ appears for us in God's presence (v24)?

(f) What does v26 suggest for us "at the culmination/end of the ages"?

6. Read Heb 10:1-18.

(a) In Heb chs 9 & 10 how has God's "House" in Moses' time (Heb 3:1-6) been amplified by Jesus into a heavenly tabernacle?



(b) In Heb 10:8-9 what is the first and what is the second?

It is the difference between the total failure of irrational offerings to effect a final solution and the total adequacy of a rational obedience to establish a new way once for all.
From the Tyndale commentary on Hebrews by Donald Guthrie p 207.

(c) Have we re-made the first but with different rules & regulations?

(d) How can we have religionless Christianity?

To finish

7. Are there some church practises that look like the old covenant system?

8. What would "religionless" Christianity look like?

Study 10, Heb 10:19-12:17, faith

Getting started

1. What is faith?



2.
 - (a) What does it mean to have faith in science?
 - (b) What does it mean to have faith in progress?
 - (c) What does it mean to have faith in politicians?
 - (d) What does it mean to have faith in TV presenters?
 - (e) What does it mean to have faith in the Church?
 - (f) Have you lost faith in any of those 5 above? If so, why?
 - (g) How does our faith in Jesus compare with faith we may or may not have in science or progress or politicians or TV presenters or the Church?
3. Sting recorded "If I Ever Lose my Faith in You" which refers to some of the things we have already thought about concerning faith.

Play StingIfIeverLoseMyFaithInYouSHORTER.mp3.

You could say I lost my faith in science and progress
 You could say I lost my belief in the holy church
 You could say I lost my sense of direction
 You could say all of this and worse but

If I ever lose my faith in you
 There'd be nothing left for me to do

Some would say I was a lost man in a lost world
 You could say I lost my faith in the people on TV
 You could say I'd lost my belief in our politicians
 They all seemed like game show hosts to me

If I ever lose my faith in you
 There'd be nothing left for me to do

I could be lost inside their lies without a trace
But every time I close my eyes I see your face

I never saw no miracle of science
That didn't go from a blessing to a curse
I never saw no military solution
That didn't always end up as something worse but
Let me say this first

If I ever lose my faith in you
There'd be nothing left for me to do

(a) What does Sting mean by faith?

(b) What does Sting mean by the possibility of losing faith in his wife (presumably)?

(c) Sting's faith in his wife is so all encompassing that if he lost it there would be nothing left for him to do. Is our faith in Jesus like that? Why/why not?

Bible

4. Read Heb 10:19-25.
What are the implications for us now that Jesus has done away with the sacrificial system (vv 22-25)?

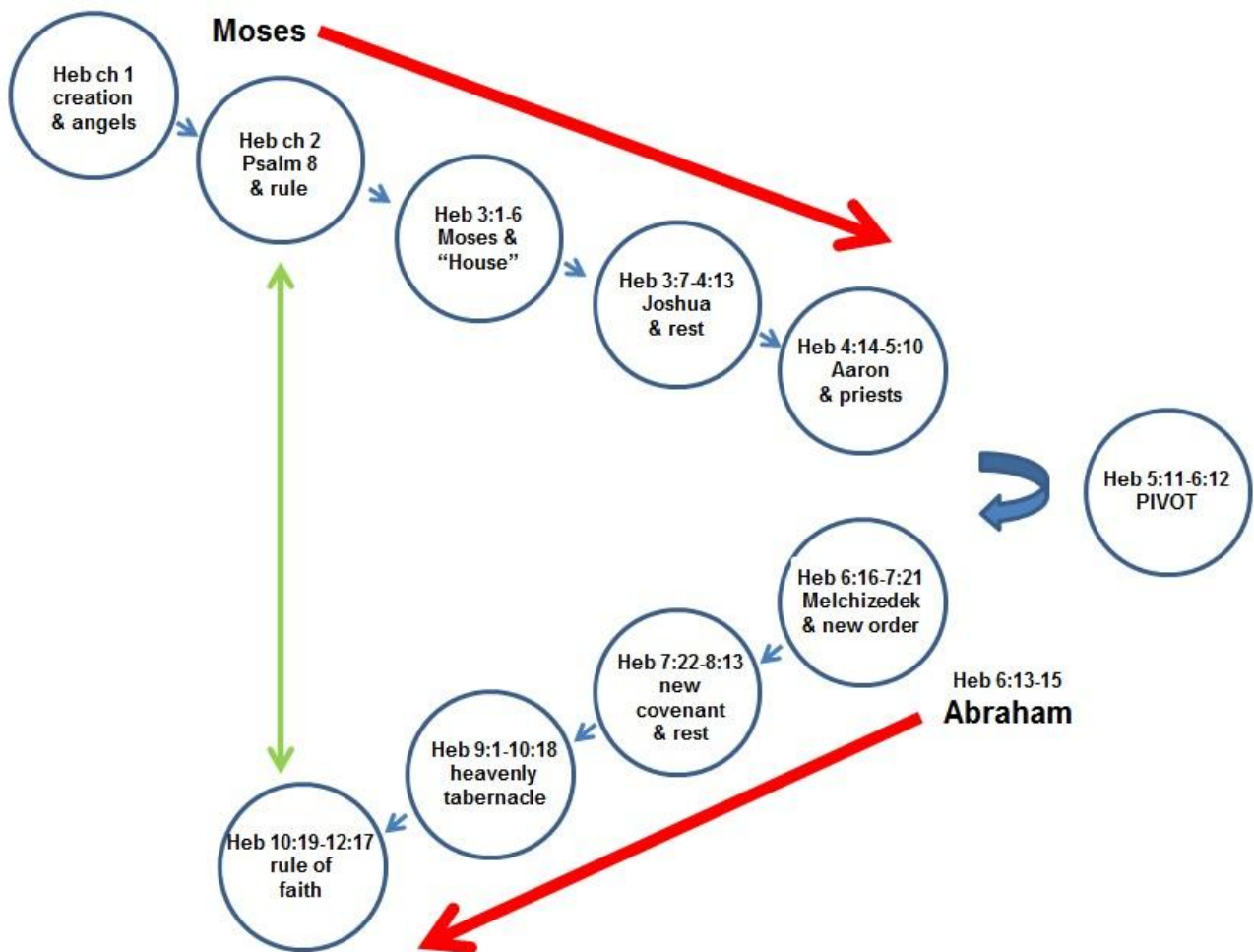
5. Read Heb 10:26-31.
By remembering the context of Hebrews, what might be the sin (v26) the writer is referring to?

6. Read Heb 10:32-35.
(a) What is the confidence (v35) that the writer refers to?

(b) In context, what might throwing away this confidence mean?

7. Read Heb 10:36-39.
What does the writer suggest *instead* of shrinking back?

8. Read Heb ch 11.
 “The operating principal of the Old Testament was never the law but faith. Chapter 11 re-interprets the entire Old Testament.”
 Do you agree with this statement? Why/why not?
9. When we studied Heb ch 2 we were thinking of ruling in terms of control and power.
 How does faith overshadow the idea of rule?



10. What was the long term goal for these heroes of faith (Heb 11:16, 39-40)?

11. Read Heb 12:1-3.
 - (a) What was the point of Heb ch 11?

 - (b) What is the sin in Heb 12:1?

 - (c) The word “our” (v2) does not exist in the original Greek. How does this change the sense of this verse?

12. Read Heb 12:4-13.

See appendix 2 (c) on suffering and discipline.

 - (a) How does the idea of suffering and discipline fit in with the context of the Jews addressed in Hebrews?

 - (b) How does the idea of “contested space” fit in with your context?

13. Read Heb 12:14-17.

In the context of the rest of Hebrews what does the example of Esau teach us?

To finish

14. Read Heb 12:25. How is faith in God like a conversation? Who initiates the conversation? How do people respond? When is the conversation superficial and when does it get deep and meaningful?

Study 11, Heb 12:18-13:25, Mt Zion

Getting started

1. (a) What is worship?



- (b) Is it more than what you do at church? Why/why not?

Bible

2. Read Heb 12:18-29.

- (a) Instead of the scary mountain of Moses' day, what have we come to?

- (b) Which of these events in vv 22-27 have already taken place and which are yet to happen?

- (c) Heb 12:26 quotes from Haggai 2:6.

After the exile God's people return to the promised land and begin re-building. Opposition and apathy brought the work to a standstill. Haggai challenges the people to get their priorities right and the temple work is re-started and completed but it is nothing like the temple Solomon built.

Read Haggai 2:4-9 and 2:20-22.

- (i) What is Haggai talking about in these verses?

- (ii) How does it fit in with Heb 12:26-29?

3. Read Heb 12:28-29 and the writer is now going to tell us about true worship.

Read Heb 13:8-16.

- (a) What are the Old Testament worship words or phrases?

- (b) How has Jesus changed all this?

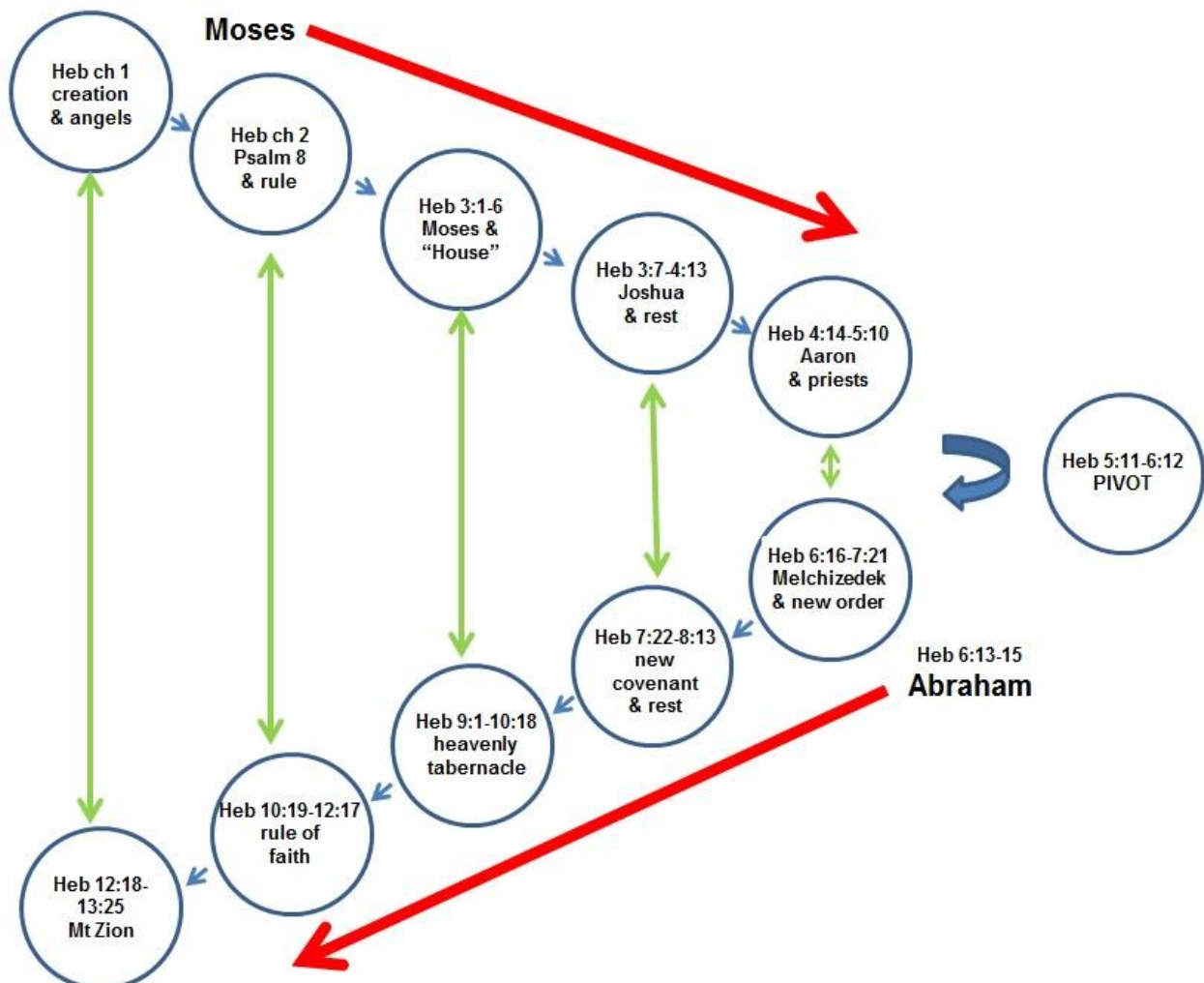
- (c) Are the Old Testament worship practises still ok? Why/why not?

4. Read Heb 13:1-6, 18-25.
What do these verses tell us about true worship?
5. Read Heb 13:7, 17.
What does this tell us about (a) leaders?

(b) how we should react to leaders?
6. I'm going to play part of a sermon by John Dickson on Hebrews ch 13. This sound clip addresses Heb 13:17 and was part of a series of 7 sermons and Bible studies from St Andrews, Roseville in 2012.

Play MinistersAuthorityHeb13JohnDickson01072012.mp3.

How does this change your view on present day church leaders, if at all?
7. Look back to the introduction to Hebrews (Heb 1:1-4). How much of the letter is summarised in these first 4 verses?



In the diagram above Hebrews begins with creation (Heb 1:1-2) and ends with new creation, Mt Zion (Heb 12:22-29, see also Rev 21:1-2). In between people are struggling with keeping the old system or chucking it in and adopting the new system or, worse of all, trying to keep both systems going. The solution is to have faith in Jesus who leads us from creation all the way through to the new creation.

To finish

8. (a) Why is Heb 12:28-13:25 an apt way to end?

(b) If this is “religionless” Christianity (a) do we need religion at all?

(b) where does this put the institutionalised church?

Appendix 1

Heb 2:10 NIV.

In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the **pioneer** of **their** salvation **perfect** through **suffering**.

(a) “our” or “their” and “pioneer”.

Verse 10 is variously translated as “pioneer/author/captain of our/their salvation/faith” but the word “our” or “their” does not exist in the original Greek. “Our” or “their” makes it sound like a Jesus clique but without that Jesus is the pioneer of faith as a broad general quality that all human beings are interested in. This is on behalf of all humanity and all hope. “Pioneer” is the better translation and it means “the one who leads the way”. Jesus is the ultimate example of how to do it.

From “Hebrews part 7: Arrangement and Architecture” by Tony Golsby-Smith 11/12/2015.

(b) “perfect”.

How can Jesus be *made* perfect? Wasn't he divine? How can you get more perfect than that?

Look at how the word “perfect” is used in Hebrews:

5:8-9 Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made *perfect*, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him . . .

6:1 Let us go on unto *perfection* not laying again the foundation . . .

7:11 & 19 If *perfection* could have been attained by the Levitical priesthood . . .
(for the law made nothing *perfect* . . .)

9:9 the gifts and sacrifices . . . were unable to *perfect* the conscience of the worshiper

9:11 greater and *more perfect* tabernacle . . .

10:14 by one offering he has made *perfect* forever those who are being made holy . . .

11: 40 without us they would not be made *perfect*.

12: 23 you have come to the spirits of just men made *perfect* . . .

We usually use the word “perfect” to mean faultless or sinless but the Greek word “teleios” means having reached its end (telos), finished, completed or accomplishing or bringing to completeness. So in Hebrews “perfect” refers to God's final purpose and goal in creating or the capability of fulfilling a role i.e. “fit for a purpose” or the end of a developmental pathway.

(c) “suffering” and “discipline” (see Heb ch 12).

Suffering and discipline are not always about the pain we experience because of our sin. We live in a world of constraints, limitations and competitiveness. We experience resistance to our ideas, actions and wants by other people, events and circumstances. We live in a world of **contested spaces** and we suffer when we lose a contest or as we struggle against resistance to what we try to do. If an idea becomes a workable project then we have faith (not necessarily religious faith) that the project will develop and become productive. This faith may be challenged by a hostile environment or contested space. Or you may be passionate about something and try to persuade people but they turn you down and it guts you. Suffering is part of growing up. It may have nothing to do with sin.

John's gospel is mostly a series of arguments which Jesus often loses because the people are not convinced. Jesus did not have the power to command faith from the Pharisees. Jesus had to work, make plans, argue with people – all the stuff we do – and the word “suffering” takes all this into account not just the cross.

Appendix 2.

Heb 5:8-9 NIV.

Although he was a son, he **learned obedience** from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him . . .

We may reason that if Jesus “learned obedience” then he must have not been obedient at some stage because he had to *learn* obedience. This implies Jesus was sinful because he was not obedient. The problem with this line of reasoning is that it correlates sin with not being obedient.

But learning obedience doesn’t always have to do with sin. We may go into a situation in ignorance and make mistakes and learn from those mistakes – it doesn’t mean we are sinning when we make mistakes. Learning experiences need to be freed from the diagnosis of sin. We learn from contested spaces (see appendix 1) and sometimes suffering is involved so we can learn from our suffering. This seems to be the way God wants to govern the world we live in – by putting us in situations and letting us learn. Part of learning is recognising the glory within everything. We can discover the hand of God in the ways of life. We need to be enquirers with a mind framed by the Holy Spirit. The Jews were taught to expect to find God in the narrative of life.

Gen 28:16 “When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, ‘Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.’”

God is in all of life but we are not aware of him.

Ex 3:2-4 “There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, ‘I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up.’ ⁴ When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, ‘Moses! Moses!’ And Moses said, ‘Here I am.’”

Moses didn’t expect to find God there.

Ps 8:1 “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”

What is majestic is the recognition of the hand of God in all the earth.

Often we associate obedience with rules or laws or commands and if we are disobedient by breaking the rules then we sin. If we look at a bigger picture and learn God’s ways as we discover God in all of creation then learning obedience is learning and living in God’s ways. It’s not about sin but it’s about wisdom, God’s wisdom.