



# Jesus Is Better: A Study of Hebrews

## The Story Houston Fall 2017 Discipleship Groups

### **Session 1: Better than Angels**

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Session 1: Better than Angels

#### **DAY 1:**

**Answer these questions before reading today's text.**

1. People have all sorts of opinions about who Jesus was/is. List some of the most popular ways people describe Jesus.
2. What about you? Who do you believe Jesus is, really? What has led you to hold those beliefs?
3. What are you hoping to learn through this class? (Once you answer this question, say a prayer for God to open your heart and mind to new discoveries as we learn together)

Introduction: Written by an unknown author in the late-60s AD, thirty years after the death and resurrection of Christ, *Hebrews* provides a sharp contrast between the rituals and religions of men and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The letter's original audience probably included highly religious, first-century Jews who, instead of following Jesus completely, attempted to incorporate Jesus into their existing Jewish faith and practice.

Relevance: The author is constantly comparing Jesus to the other beliefs and beings in which people place their trust: celestial beings, ancient heroes of faith, "holy men", ourselves, religion, rituals, etc. He illustrates how Jesus' gracious sacrifice and victorious resurrection represent the greatest hope for redemption the world has ever known.

#### **DAY 2**

**Read Hebrews 1:1 all the way through 2:18.**

Underline or highlight verse 3: "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." What do you think this means? If it's true that Jesus is the exact representation of God's being, what does that say about God?

List and briefly summarize all the ways Jesus is described in these verses.



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### **DAY 3**

The major, recurring theme you'll see throughout Hebrews is the supremacy of Christ. What's your gut reaction to the phrase, "Jesus is better"? Where do you think that reaction comes from?

Why did God create the angels? What is their role in creation?

### **DAY 4**

Take another look at 2:1-4. Why do you think the author gives such a heavy warning to those who reject the message of Christ (as opposed to those who reject other divine messages)? What's the difference that makes rejecting Christ worse?

For reference, read Colossians 1:13-20:

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

How does this passage echo themes in Hebrews 1 and 2? What *more* does this passage say about Jesus?

### **DAY 5**

What does it mean to you that Jesus has reconciled you to God?

### **DAY 6**

**Read Hebrews 1:1 all the way through 2:18, again**



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## Session 2: Better than Moses

### DAY 1

**Answer these questions before reading today's text.**

1. Recap what stood out to you from Session 1. What does it mean to say "Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being"?
2. List everything you know about Moses - facts about his life, circumstances of his birth, his upbringing, his calling, etc.
3. What do you know about the Hebrew people and their history in Egypt?

### DAY 2

Introduction: After making the case for the superiority of Jesus to the angels and prophets, the writer of Hebrews sets his sights on Moses, the most important figure in the Old Testament. Moses stood up to Pharaoh in Egypt, led the people out of slavery, administered communal life in the wilderness, delivered the Ten Commandments, wrote much of the first five books of the Bible, and served as the spokesman for the Hebrew people before God.

Relevance: No historical figure mattered more to the Jewish people than Moses. By suggesting Jesus is greater than Moses, the writer of Hebrews challenges his audience to reconsider some of their most sacred assumptions. You may not have the same allegiance to Moses, per se, but we all have a "Moses" in our lives - the old way of thinking that Jesus renders obsolete.

### Read Hebrews 3:1-6

What (or who) does the image of "God's house" signify?

How is Moses' role different from the role of Jesus in God's house?

"Moses was faithful as a \_\_\_\_\_ in all God's house...but Christ is faithful as \_\_\_\_\_ over God's house."

### DAY 3

**Read Hebrews 3:7-11**



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By putting Jesus on the same plane as Moses, the people conflated Creator with creation, giving Moses too much credit (as he was just a man) and giving Jesus too little (as he was God incarnate). Do you think we ever do the same? What are some of the ways people today put too much hope in men and too little hope in God?

What (or who) have you put in God's place?

## **DAY 4**

### **Read Hebrews 3:12-19**

Notice how the author connects personal responsibility ("See to it...that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart") with concern for the community ("Encourage one another daily...We have come to share in Christ"). What do you think about that connection - are we each responsible only for our own sins, or are we "our brother's keeper"?

Why were the people following Moses through the wilderness not able to enter the Promised Land? (for reference, check out Numbers 13:26-33)

## **DAY 5**

How have you struggled with doubt and cynicism (or "a hardened heart")? What are the sources of that struggle?

This passage encourages people to "fix your thoughts on Jesus." How does fixing your thoughts on Jesus help you in times of doubt? How does putting Jesus first (as opposed to religion, politics, or even yourself) help you to make sense of the world?

## **DAY 6**

**Read Hebrews 3:1-19 and jot down your reflections and remaining questions**



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### **Session 3: Better than Priests**

#### **DAY 1**

**Answer these questions before reading this week's text.**

1. Recap what stood out to you from Session 2. What does it mean to avoid a hardened heart by “fixing your thoughts on Jesus”?
2. What challenges do you face when it comes to total faith in Jesus?
3. How have preachers, priests, or other religious authorities played a role, either positive or negative, in shaping your faith?

#### **DAY 2**

Introduction: For centuries, the Jewish people had relied on priests to function as “middle management” between them and God. If the average person wanted to communicate with God, they had one channel through which to do that: men of the cloth. It's not hard to imagine, then, how priests held an incredible amount of power over the people; because they spoke for God, they had the final word on all things religious, civil, and *legal*. The system worked, as long as the priests were honest and well-intentioned, but too often, the power went to their heads.

Relevance: God was disgusted with the corruption of religion and the priesthood. Consider this passage from the Old Testament prophet Amos:

“I hate, I despise your religious festivals;  
your assemblies are a stench to me.  
Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,  
I will not accept them.  
Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,  
I will have no regard for them.  
Away with the noise of your songs!  
I will not listen to the music of your harps.  
But let justice roll on like a river,  
righteousness like a never-failing stream!” - Amos 5:21-24

How have you seen people today becoming equally frustrated by empty religion and religious leaders?



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### DAY 3

#### Read Hebrews 4:1-11

Just prior to this reading, the author draws a parallel between the O.T. narrative of the Hebrews entering the Promised Land and believers in Jesus entering His rest. But sometimes Christianity doesn't seem very restful. If Jesus came to bring rest for our weary souls, why do you think Christianity still seems heavy on the guilt, shame, and tireless efforts to earn God's favor?

Why do you suppose God is angry (v.3) when people don't have faith? What does a person's faith (or lack of faith) communicate to God?

What do you think the author means by "Let us...make every effort to enter that rest..."? Why does having faith require effort?

### DAY 4

#### Read Hebrews 4:12-13

What do you think the author means with "the word of God"?

"Nothing is hidden from God" seems obvious enough, but that doesn't keep us from living double lives, right? What are some of the ways people try to keep up appearances on the outside, even if we're a mess on the inside?

How can you be more honest with God about the state of your soul, especially as it relates to cyclical sins in your life?

### DAY 5

#### Read Hebrews 4:14-16



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The author compares the Hebrew priests with Jesus by saying Jesus is “able to empathize with our weaknesses.” Why do you think the religious priests couldn’t empathize with the weaknesses of average men and women?

In what ways can Jesus empathize with the struggles, suffering, and weakness of average people on Earth?

What’s the difference between the way the Hebrew people approached God through priests and the way believers in Jesus approach God through Christ?

## **DAY 6**

**Read Hebrews 4:1-16 once more all the way through. If possible, read it out loud. Write down your lasting insights, inspirations, questions and doubts.**



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### **Session 4: From Milk to Meat**

#### **Hebrews 5:1-6:12**

#### **DAY 1**

**Answer these questions before reading this week's text.**

1. Recap what stood out to you from Session 3. What does “believer’s rest” mean in the context of living our busy lives?
1. What challenges do you face to experiencing this rest?
1. How do you now understand the difference between resting in God and working for God? How does this affect your understanding of religion?

#### **DAY 2**

##### **Introduction:**

Religions are designed for people to go through the motions. The “motions” – ritual, prayer, disciplines, etc. – are what make religion, religion. It’s possible for a person to lead a highly religious life without ever experiencing any life change or transformation. “Spiritual but not religious” is a phrase we use to describe someone who is interested in a relationship with God but has no desire to associate with institutional religion. That’s a fast-growing segment of the American populace, but what may be even more common is the “Religious but not spiritual” phenomenon so pervasive in many churches where people go through the motions without ever pursuing a personal, meaningful relationship with God.

This week’s reading from Hebrews 5:1-6:12 speaks to the problem of nominal religion. The author wants his readers to see that, when it comes to Jesus, there are no “motions,” no religion, and no middle ground. He’s either the Lord of your whole life, or He’s nothing.

##### **Relevance:**

One of the great temptations of religion is that it allows us to remain in the driver’s seat while pretending to seek God’s wisdom and guidance. Let’s face it: most of us are control freaks. But by emphasizing the promises of God and the certainty and assurance that faith produces, the author of Hebrews reminds us that to trust Jesus is to completely trust everything to Him.





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What makes trusting in Jesus so hard? How have you learned to trust Him with your whole life?

### **DAY 3**

#### **Read Hebrews 5:1-10**

How is Jesus different than the high priests that are taken from “among men”? How are they similar?

Where does the honor of being a priest reside? How are you honoring or glorifying yourself in front of others? Does this provide lasting satisfaction and how do you think pointing the honor and glory to God would change things?

Verse 8 says that “Jesus learned obedience from the things which He suffered.” What does this mean to you? How do you respond to God when going through periods of suffering?

What did Jesus become to those who obey him? How do you understand obedience and how it relates to God’s saving grace? *Hint: what comes first?*

### **DAY 4**

#### **Read Hebrews 5:11-6:8**

What do you think made the audience “dull of hearing” in verse 11? We all have areas of our life where we don’t want to listen to other people. Where have you become dull of hearing?

The author refers to some as infants and others as mature. What differentiates the infants from the mature? What do you learn from this comparison?

What is holding you back from pressing on to solid food?



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There is a stark warning given to those who have tasted the heavenly gift of the Holy Spirit and then fall away. What does the text say about those that receive a blessing from God? What does this mean to you? *Read Matthew 13:23*

### **DAY 5**

#### **Read Hebrews 6:9-12**

Are you convinced that Jesus has something better for you? If so, how does this affect your daily life? If not, what would be necessary for you to consider the possibility?

What do you learn about God from these verses?

What benefits to we attain from exercising diligence in our faith?

### **DAY 6**

**Read Hebrews 5:1-6:12 once more all the way through. If possible, read it out loud. Write down your lasting insights, inspirations, questions and doubts.**



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### **Session 5: Better than Sacrifices**

#### **Hebrews 6:13-8:13**

#### DAY 1

Answer these questions before reading this week's text.

1. Recap what stood out to you from Session 4.
1. What is your understanding of the phrase "Jesus became the source of our eternal salvation"? What is your response?
1. How could you change your daily activities to press on from "milk to solid food" in spiritual maturity?

#### DAY 2

Introduction: Imagine you're in Houston, and you're really hungry. Not like *I could use a snack* hungry. More like *it's-four o'clock-and-I-skipped-lunch* hungry. So you walk outside to find food, and to your left, there's Taco Cabana: a fast-food chain that will suffice in a pinch. It's inexpensive and filling, but let's be honest: you have no idea what you're eating, where it came from, or where it's been.

But then you look to your right, and there's Ninfa's Original on Navigation: one of Houston's finest Mexican restaurants. Everything at Ninfa's is authentic, from the house-made salsas and table-side guacamole to the Redfish Tacos and the Chiles Rellenos filled with brisket.

Now imagine you have, in your pocket, a certificate that entitles you to a lifetime of unlimited free meals at Ninfa's. But for some reason beyond comprehension, you feel compelled to go to Taco Cabana for some overseasoned, microwaved "tacos."

In this week's readings, the author wants us to see the choice between religion and gospel as a Taco Cabana vs. Ninfa's proposition. One is authentic and true, and the other is just a cheap copy of the original. The copy might be okay, but if you can have the real thing, why would you want a copy? And why pay for the copy, when the original is free?



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Relevance: We do this all the time, don't we? With our attachments, addictions, and affections, we choose to pay for something unoriginal to fill the void in our hearts, instead of receiving the free gift of God's love and peace.

Question: What are some of the ways people choose the costly "copies" of this world in search of satisfaction, instead of receiving the original joy we find in God? Why do you suppose we consistently make choices like these?

### DAY 3

Read Hebrews 6:13-20

What did God promise to Abraham? What about God's nature would lead you to trust in His promises?

What was Abraham's response to God's promise? What was the result? What lessons can you learn from Abraham's response?

Verse 19 says "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil,". What about this sentence is special to you? Why?

What does "within the veil" mean? Read Leviticus 16:1-2

What are the implications for us that Jesus has entered "as a forerunner for us"?

### DAY 4

Read Hebrews 7

Who is Melchizedek and what do we learn about him from this chapter? (Also read Genesis 14:17-24 and Psalm 110).



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How is Melchizedek's priesthood like the priesthood of Jesus Christ?

Verse 25 says Jesus is able to "save forever" those who draw near to God through Him. What are we saved from? What challenges are you facing to "drawing near to God" this week?

### DAY 5

Read Hebrews 8

In verses 1-3; where is Jesus now? Why do you think the author means by "true tabernacle"? What is the significance that the Lord pitched it and not man?

What are some of the descriptions of Jesus' ministry? What about this new covenant seems better to you? What are some of the challenges of this new covenant?

How do you understand God's promise to Abraham (Hebrews 6:14) as it relates to the new covenant through Jesus? Read, Galatians 3:6-9.

### DAY 6

Read Hebrews 6:13-8:13 once more all the way through. If possible, read it out loud. Write down your lasting insights, inspirations, questions and doubts.

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## Session 6: Jesus is Better than the Old Way Hebrews Chapters 9 and 10

### DAY 1

Answer these questions before reading this week's text.

1. Recap what stood out to you from Session 5.
2. Jesus ushered in a "new covenant". How would you describe this new covenant to someone who has heard of Jesus but doesn't believe in Him?

### DAY 2

**Introduction:** In 2009, a movie called *Avatar* dominated the box office. It told the story of human interactions with a tribe of human-like creatures on their beautiful, mysterious home planet, Pandora. After watching *Avatar*, many fans experienced deep depression because life on Earth can't compare to Pandora, where the Na'vi people were deeply connected to the natural world, untainted by industrialism. Once the credits rolled, some people couldn't handle the thought that Pandora isn't real.

On the fan site *Naviblue*, a 23-year old man named Mike wrote: "Ever since I went to see 'Avatar' I have been depressed. Watching the wonderful world of Pandora and all the Na'vi made me want to be one of them. I can't stop thinking about all the things that happened in the film and all of the tears and shivers I got from it...I even contemplate suicide thinking that if I do it I will be rebirthed in a world similar to Pandora..."

Okay...so...let's all hope Mike got some help, because that dude had some issues. But Mike's not alone. Over a thousand other people expressed feelings of depression and/or suicidal thoughts after watching *Avatar* and reentering the "real world." But I guess that's just part of being human; we struggle to distinguish fact from fiction, and we confuse the symbolic with the sacred.

Think about the ways some people embrace patriotism, family, success, sex, religion and sports. These are all good things that can add so much to our lives, but when any of these things become the ultimate source of our worth and identity, they become toxic. That's because things like patriotism, family success, sex, and sports are all meant to be symbols pointing toward something BETTER.

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For followers of Jesus, religion is just symbolic, too. It has no inherent value or worth beyond its symbolism, which points toward something better.

**Relevance:** Have you ever taken something that wasn't The Main Thing and made it The Main Thing? We all have. We humans have a tendency to take things that are meant to be peripheral and to put them at the Center. That's what the Bible calls idolatry, and it always leaves us feeling empty and unsatisfied because only God can fill the void in our hearts.

**Question:** How have you struggled to distinguish between the symbolic and the sacred? What things, people, or goals are you tempted to put in place where only God belongs?

## DAY 3

### Read Hebrews 9:1-10

The first covenant had regulations and specific instructions for the tabernacle. What were some of the items included in the "outer tabernacle"? What was included behind the "second veil"?

How often were the priests entering the "outer tabernacle"? How often were they allowed to enter behind the second?

Why do you think this system could not make the worshiper of God perfect in conscience?

## DAY 4

### Read Hebrews 9:11-28

Christ entered through the perfect tabernacle, not a shadow or a copy of the true one, but into the presence of God. How would you answer the question the author asks in verse 14, "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

The types of covenants discussed here are similar to agreements today we call "wills". There necessarily needs to be death for a will (or the covenant) to be in force. Why does there need to

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be the shedding of blood before the new covenant can take effect?  
Read Genesis 2:17 and Romans 6:23

## DAY 5

### Read Hebrews 10

Verse 4 says it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. But wasn't the old system set up to follow the rules of sacrifice, shedding of blood, to cleanse the people of their sins? (don't answer that question) Then read Genesis 15:6 together with Hebrews 10:5-7. How does this impact your understanding of forgiveness of sins?

Consider verses 19-25, we are told we can draw near with a sincere heart in "full assurance of faith". How do these verses encourage you? What are some activities mentioned in these verses that can encourage other believers?

How could you be an encouragement to others?

Hebrews 9:28 says Jesus was offered once for those that eagerly await Him. What do you learn when you compare this to Hebrews 10:26-31?

After we receive knowledge of the truth of Jesus Christ, we can expect continued conflict and sufferings. What gives you hope and confidence to persevere in this world?

## DAY 6

**Read Hebrews 9 and 10 once more all the way through. If possible, read it out loud. Write down your lasting insights, inspirations, questions and doubts.**



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## Session 7: Understanding Faith Hebrews 11:1-12:3

### DAY 1

Answer these questions before reading this week's text.

1. Recap what stood out to you from Session 6.
2. How have you been an encouragement to others this week? How have you been encouraged?

### DAY 2

**Introduction:** Faith is the opposite of reason. Faith is *blind*. Faith requires a *leap* beyond that which is logical and rational. Faith is good for giving the faithful a spiritual sense of solace and hope, but has nothing to do with making sense of the world or our existence in it. If you want logic and knowledge, you should rely on science and math. Knowledge is a matter of the mind; faith is merely a matter of the heart.

This is the false narrative about faith, promoted by secular academia and perpetuated by Christians who feel threatened and *outsmarted* by secular academics. Faith in God once led the world's most brilliant scholars to establish elite schools and universities for the pursuit of greater knowledge. Faith in God once led to the advent of the scientific method itself. How, then, has faith in God become the opposite of science and reason?

**Relevance:** It comes down to our understanding of *knowledge*. In our secular lives, we've been taught that *knowledge* and *faith* are two entirely different spheres of understanding that should never overlap or intersect. Knowledge (via scientific experimentation) should never be tainted by faith, and faith (which is boiled down to "belief in the supernatural") can never be reconciled with knowledge.

On the other hand, if you were raised in church or have been in church most of your adult life, you may have gotten the impression that to have faith means to believe *in spite of the evidence to the contrary*.

Neither of these approaches are adequate for understand the relationship between faith and knowledge. In today's reading, the author of Hebrews offers us an alternative explanation: Knowledge isn't merely what can be proven in a lab, and faith isn't blind optimism in spite of all

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evidence to the contrary. We don't merely *believe* in God; we God. Faith is acting on what we KNOW about God.

KNOW

**Question:** How do you KNOW something is true?

## DAY 3

How would you define "faith"?

### Now, read Hebrews 11:1-6

This chapter gives us insight into a better understanding of faith and the kind of faith God wants for us. How is faith defined in these verses?

By faith, what can we come to understand about this world? Compare verse 3 to your understanding of naturalism.

Faith in this context is obviously more than simply believing God exists. Read verse 4 and Genesis 4:3-8. What about Abel's offering made it special to God and how did this offering demonstrate Abel's faith in God?

Verse 6 expands on the definition of faith. Simply believing God exists is not the definition of faith. What other condition must be met in order to please God?

Where have you seen God reward you for having faith in Him?

## DAY 4

### Read Hebrews 11:7-39

How did Noah and Abraham act on their faith in God?

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Often times we do not receive the promises of God in this lifetime. Read verses 13-16. What kept them going in this world while they endured difficulties?

Where do you turn for strength in difficult times?

What choice did Moses have to make in order to follow God? How are you faced with similar choices?

What do you learn from these many examples of faith? What can you change in your life to increase your faith in God?

## DAY 5

### Read Hebrews 12:1-3

How are you encouraged by these verses?

We are to lay aside anything that entangles us, fixing our eyes on Jesus. What does that mean to you?

We all have a personal testimony about our relationship with God and all of them are different. Why do you think our experiences within our faith journey are so different? Consider verse 2.

## DAY 6

Read Hebrews 11:1-12:3 once more all the way through. If possible, read it out loud. Write down your lasting insights, inspirations, questions and doubts.