

# ***Ten minutes a day through Lent***

A reading from *Hebrews*  
a short reflection  
ideas how to pray  
for each day

**Third week  
9-14 March**

## Background to reading *Hebrews*

“What is the point?” When the world around us seems to have no place for the gospel, when Christian commitment is treated by others with contempt, it is all too easy to drift away from active engagement with our faith. That was the situation addressed by *Hebrews*.

*Hebrews* was probably written for a house church including many Jewish Christians. Its purpose was to encourage them to stand firm in their commitment to Christ. It was written in the period 60-100CE, a time of heightened Jewish nationalism and of periodic persecution of Christians.

To be a Jewish Christian then was not easy. Small wonder if some were questioning their faith and drifting back to more traditional beliefs. Jesus? Well, a good man, maybe even an angel. It sounds so familiar.

*Hebrews* is built around 3 main themes:

1. God’s intervention in the world through Jesus Christ is unlike anything that has gone before (1:1-4:13);
2. Jesus-Christ is our high-priest, mediating between us and God. He does this in a way that is effective and lasting, unlike than the Jewish high priest (4:14-10:31);
3. Faith in Christ will enable us to enter God’s kingdom (10:37-12:29).

It closes with practical advice and greetings (chapter 13).

The author of *Hebrews* wrote “the best Greek in the New Testament” and was skilled in rhetoric. He was steeped in the Hebrew scriptures and the practices of the Temple. We do not know his name.

*Hebrews* is more like a sermon than a letter. It was probably intended to be read aloud, which would take a little more than an hour.

*Hebrews* has much to teach us today, both about the privilege of being Christians and the need for commitment if we want to enjoy God’s gifts.

## Monday 9 March

### In Jesus Christ, God spoke to us as never before

#### *Hebrews 1:1-4*

*Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.*

*He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*

**Comment** What a dramatic opening! We know that God spoke to Israel through the prophets. But now, in this final age, God has spoken to us directly, through his own Son – that is, Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to be God's Son? He was God's instrument in creation; he is the one who sustains that creation; he also removed the barrier placed by sin between the creation and its creator; and God has made him the heir of creation. His task complete, he now sits in the prime place, beside God.

How does the Son relate to God? He is the beams, the radiance, the reflection of God's glory shining forth; he is an exact image of God, like when an engraving is inked and pressed on a piece of paper.

The Son is as far above any heavenly being as the name we use for him – the Lord – is above an angel's name. Observant Jews habitually used the title "the Lord" for God himself, to avoid pronouncing the holy name.

These are some claims! They demand thinking about. Yet they do not stand alone in the New Testament (see for example, John 1, Philippians 2:5-11, Colossians 1:15-20). They draw on messianic passages of the Old Testament, as the rest of chapter 1 shows. How much is metaphor, how much is intended to be descriptive?

The message is clear: in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we have received a revelation of God vastly greater than any other.

**Tuesday 10 March**

**Do not let this opportunity slip**

**Hebrews 2:1-9**

*Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.*

*For if the message declared through angels was valid, and every transgression or disobedience received a just penalty, how can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? It was declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God added his testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will.*

*Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. But someone has testified somewhere, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, subjecting all things under their feet." Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them,*

*but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*

**Comment** *Therefore...* Since God has spoken to us so directly, we had better pay attention. What more powerful message could we hope for?

It was Jesus himself who first delivered the gospel message. Those who had heard Jesus speak repeated it. Signs and wonders and our experience of the Holy Spirit have continued to confirm its truth.

God's Son came down from the very height of heaven to our humble level. With us he tasted death, the worst of human experience. He did it for us. Once again he is in heaven, crowned and enthroned with God.

*Hebrews* may seem preoccupied with angels. But the idea that Jesus is just a good man, even an angel, destroys Christian uniqueness. Once that idea gets a hold, the gospel is just one story like many another. No. The gospel is unique because it comes from the very top, God's Son.

**Wednesday 9 March**

**Members of God's family**

***Hebrews 2:10-end***

*It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters...*

*Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.*

**Comment** The picture is of Jesus going ahead of his followers, as their pioneer. Being "made perfect" by his experience of suffering and death

means that his experience equips him with the authority to point his followers to the way he – and they – can overcome those obstacles.

Being mortal is like being a slave to death. But Christ has shown us how we can pass through death to freedom. It is his complete sharing of our situation that enables him to minister to us in our worst fears and trials, removing every barrier between us and God.

Because Christ has shared our lot, he can call us his brothers and sisters. From him we learn that we and he have one Father. We are all part of the same family - God's family.

## Thursday 12 March

### Partners in a heavenly calling

#### **Hebrews 3:1-6**

*Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also "was faithful in all God's house."*

*Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.)*

*Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later.*

*Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.*

**Comment** The writer is concerned that his Jewish Christian friends might slip back into traditional Judaism.

For Jews, Moses was the great lawgiver, the leader who moulded a group of oppressed slaves into a people and led them to freedom.

But Jesus is greater still. For if Moses was a servant to God, Jesus Christ is God's Son. Well as a servant might rule God's house, Jesus Christ rules it by right, as the Son of the house-owner.

Nor are we just followers of a great leader. Jesus speaks of us as his brothers and sisters, his partners, called to our heavenly home.

No other religion, no other way of life, offers such a calling. Then, as now for us, the question is this: If you will not heed a call like this one, what could ever move you?

Friday 13 March

## Harden not your hearts

### Hebrews 3:7-end

*Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, as on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your ancestors put me to the test, though they had seen my works for forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'They always go astray in their hearts, and they have not known my ways.'*

*As in my anger I swore, 'They will not enter my rest.'"*

*Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

*For we have become partners of Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end. As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." Now who were they who heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? But with whom was he angry forty years? Was it not those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, if not to those who were disobedient?*

*So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.*

**Comment** The Old Testament story of the Exodus, the foundational story of Israel, tells how, after their amazing escape from slavery in Egypt and their meeting with God at Mount Sinai, Israel time and again failed to put their trust in God. As a result, they wandered in the wilderness, unable to reach the Promised Land and to share God's rest.

These verses use quotations from Psalm 95, the *Venite*, familiar to many from Morning Prayer. They are here to remind Jewish Christians of what was lost through unbelief and to urge them together encourage each other in their faith in Christ.

We are in a venture with Jesus Christ, but unless we keep our trust in him, our own experience of escape from slavery will end in the wilderness. We will not reach the Promised Land.

**Saturday 14 March**

**We cannot deceive God**

**Hebrews 4:1-13**

*Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For indeed the good news came to us just as to them; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "As in my anger I swore, 'They shall not enter my rest,'" though his works were finished at the foundation of the world. For in one place it speaks about the seventh day as follows, "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." And again in this place it says, "They shall not enter my rest."*

*Since therefore it remains open for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he sets a certain day-- "today"-- saying through David much later, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."*

*For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day.*

*So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs. Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.*

**Comment** The Old Testament account tells us how, on the seventh day of creation, God rested. That rest was remembered and celebrated by Jews as the Sabbath. People who lived by hard physical labour no doubt found the Sabbath rest to be a great joy, a gift of God.

Jewish Christians knew well that the generation who were set free from slavery in Egypt failed, through their unbelief, to reach the Promised Land, the place of rest and freedom.

We, who still long for God's promised rest, must beware of unbelief. For the word of God, through which Christ sustains us, also shows people up for what they are. We will not be able to deceive God. If we are not prepared to trust him, we should consider the consequences.



### One Prayer

Pick up one thought from the reading and bring it before God as a short prayer.

It need not be complicated. God understands what we try to say to him.

### One Thought

Think about the issues raised by the reading. What could it mean for me? Is this the way the world is, or the way the world might be? Carry the thought with you through the day and try to remember it before you go to sleep.

### One Thank-you

Find something in the reading that you can thank God for. Try to be explicit, however little it may seem. Then thank God for it, just as you would thank someone who gave you a gift.

### Sum it up

*Almighty God,  
you show to those who are in  
error the light of your truth,  
that they may return to the way of  
righteousness:  
grant to all those who are  
admitted to the fellowship of  
Christ's religion,  
that they may reject those things  
that are contrary to their  
profession,  
and follow all such things as are  
agreeable to the same;  
through Jesus Christ your Son  
our Lord.*

*Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name;  
your kingdom come;  
your will be done  
on earth, as it is in heaven.*

*Give us today our daily bread.*

*Forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin  
against us.*

*Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.*

*For yours is the kingdom and the  
power and the glory forever*

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