**Hebrews**

**August 24-25, 2016**

Background

*Overview: Hebrews is a portrait of Jesus Christ seen through the lens of the Old Testament, so, many verses we read are quoted from the OT or are referencing OT themes or ideas. The author’s intent is to show the superiority and sufficiency of Jesus over the prophets, angels, Moses, priests, and the whole Old Testament. He is higher than any other OT character, superior to any OT institution, greater than any OT ritual, and better than any OT sacrifice. Jesus is the new priest with the new sacrifice that establishes a new covenant between people and God. His life, death, and resurrection make him preeminent (surpassing all others).*

*Date: The use of the present tense concerning the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system would suggest they were still in operation, placing the book before the destruction of the temple in 70AD. Also, persecution was becoming severe. These factors suggest a date for Hebrews around 67-69AD.*

*Background: The letter was primarily addressed to Hebrew Christians who suffered rejection and persecution by fellow Jews who were facing temptation to cast aside identification with Christ, secondarily to Jewish unbelievers who were convinced of the basic truths of the gospel but who had not placed their faith in Jesus as their own Savior – intellectually persuaded but spiritually uncommitted – and thirdly to Jewish unbelievers who were not convinced of the gospel’s truth, but had some exposure to it. The writer emphasized the superiority of Christ and His once-for-all sacrifice over Judaism and its repeated and imperfect sacrifices in the temple.*

*History snippet: Israel’s sin had continually interrupted Gods fellowship with his chosen and covenant people, Israel. Therefore he graciously and sovereignly established a system of sacrifice that symbolically represented the inner repentance of sinners and his divine forgiveness. But the need for sacrifices never ended because the people and priests continued to sin. All humankind needed a perfect priest and perfect sacrifice that would once and for all actually remove sin; God’s provision for this was in Christ. Those who belong to the New Covenant established in Christ dwell in a completely new and heavenly atmosphere: they worship a heavenly Savior, have a heavenly calling, receive a heavenly gift, are citizens of a heavenly country, look forward to a heavenly Jerusalem, and have their names written in Heaven. A primary teaching symbolized by the tabernacle was that believers under the covenant of the law did not have direct access to the presence of God but were shut out of the most holy place, whereas all believers now have direct access to God under the New Covenant and therefore may approach God boldly.*

Remember that this first study will be shorter than a normal Bible study to give more time to getting to know you each other on a name level and spiritual level. You might just ask people to share a favorite summer memory and/or a little bit about how God has been at work in their lives recently.

**Hebrews 1:1-3 Jesus is God’s supreme revelation**

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**Read Hebrews 1:1-3**

How has God spoken to his people in the past? Why does it matter that God has indeed spoken “at many times and in various ways”? Why not in just one way?

*(“Various times and various ways” – over 1800 years from Job (2200bc) to Nehemiah (400bc), 39 different books from different times, locations, cultures, and situations, and through people, dreams, visions, symbols, parables, and prophecy. To Moses through a burning bush, to Israel and pagan nations through God’s prophets, to Balaam through a donkey, to King Belshazzar through handwriting on a wall)*

Does this passage imply that Jesus is God’s final revelation, most authoritative revelation, most complete revelation, and/or only self-revelation? What makes you say this?

*(The writer immediately gets to his main point: Christ is the pure revelation of God, the epitome of truth, and more. God has fully and completely expressed himself in Christ. The verses either mention or allude to a number or unique attributes of Christ – his part in creation, his glory and essence, his governance of the universe, his sacrifice, his exaltation.)*

What was the function of the OT prophets and how do you think the readers viewed them that causes the author to write as he does? How is Jesus different or similar or superior (v.2-3)?

*(The letter’s purpose was to give these believers encouragement and confidence in Christ, their Messiah, and high priest.)*

What is the difference between the past (v.1) and these last days (v.2)?

*(Last days – Jews understood this to mean the time with Messiah would come (Jer 33:14-16, Mic 5:1-2, Zec 9:9, 1 Peter 1:20,4:7, 1 John 2:18). In the past, God spoke through prophets, but now God spoke through the message of redemption through the Son.)*

**Read Luke 4:16-21** (quoted from Isaiah 61)

How does this connect to these first three verses in Hebrews? What is Jesus saying about himself?

*(Christ is saying that he is the fulfillment of this ancient messianic prophecy.)*

**Reread Hebrews 1:3 again**. Which of these phrases about Jesus sticks out to you most right now?