

The
New
Testament
in a Year

November 23-27

Hebrews 7-11

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They are posted at
<http://wsquare.ca/worship/516/new-testament-in-a-year>

Thanks to Wellington Square UC for making this available.

Monday, November 23

Hebrews 7

These next several chapters continue to dig into the Hebrew scriptures for ways of understanding the new relationship that Jesus brings.

Early Christians employed a way of interpreting scripture that was deeply rooted in Jewish practice. They looked for patterns and repetitions in the text. Things like repeated words, allusions, and paradox all play important roles (as do humour and puns!). The odd story of Melchizadech opens many loose ends, offering rich ground for the writer of Hebrews to explore alternatives to the established priesthood in Israel.

How do you respond to this re-interpretation of the Hebrew scriptures? Could you use similar ways of interpreting when you read scripture yourself?

Why is the author going to great lengths to show the relationship between Jesus and Israel's sacred history?

Do you, in your faith, emphasize the continuity of Jesus with the Hebrew scriptures, or his transformation to something new?

There is a phrase that jolted me as I read it, transporting me from the

intellectual beauty of this chapter into the realm of worship. Jesus is acclaimed because of "the power of his indestructible life." (v 16)

Tuesday, November 24

Hebrews 8

While this book is full of reflections on scripture, the impact of Greek thinking is also clear. I see it in this chapter, where the "true tent" in the heavens has its "shadow or sketch" on the earth. This reminds me of Plato's parable of the Cave, where earthly experiences are but shadows of timeless other-worldly truths.

Jesus supercedes everything that has been known before. In Jesus, we are offered something intimate and freeing with God. The lines quoted from Jeremiah 31:31-34 point to broken covenants and the hope of new intimacy with God. *Are there verses here that speak particularly to your longing or your joy?*

"And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear." What do you make of these strong words about Jewish faith disappearing? If you have Jewish friends, how would they respond to these chapters? Somehow, Hebrews is painting a different picture than what I find St Paul struggling through in Romans 11.

Wednesday, November 25

Hebrews 9

The outward actions and rituals of priests are seen as ineffective: they were unable to clear the conscience of the worshiper. *What is the role of ritual in your life? Do patterns of action feed your inner life with God? Or do they numb you to this inner life?*

There is a lot of blood in this chapter. Yet the author is not squeamish: the blood is presented with an intensity that speaks of both harsh consequences and abundant vitality. *How do you respond to this blood imagery?*

This verse stops me in my tracks: "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (v 22)

Through all of the bodily, bloody images, a powerful sense of life emerges. Our faith is grounded in blood and skin and the presence of God with and within us.

As a teenager, I used to balance the little communion cup on my palm. The juice became a mark of the cross on my hand – I would watch the cup shake slightly with my heartbeat. I would meditate on the blood of Christ coursing through my own veins, his life in mine.

What is Jesus offering you, through his sacrifice on the cross?

Thursday, November 26

Hebrews 10

I find this chapter both a great invitation and also a major roadblock.

The emphasis of the chapter is that Christ's sacrifice is so powerful that it stands for all time. No other sacrifice is required: forgiveness is offered to all. This leads us to great confidence before God. We are not to be slinking back shamefully, but are welcomed into the Most Holy Place (v 19 ff). This invitation is the climax of these past bloody chapters. This nearness to God is the great, transformative blessing of belonging to Jesus. *Do you enter God's presence with awe and boldness? What is your posture today before God?*

Here's where things, for me, get really hard. I lean again and again upon God's forgiveness, but verses 26-31 present Christ's sacrifice as something you can only claim once. I can see how these words would embolden a persecuted church. But they also make me apprehensive, taking away the boldness I felt a few verses ago. It makes me wish that I experienced greater transformation in living a sacred life.

Do we "trample the Son of God underfoot"? Does our celebratory boldness deteriorate into taking God for granted?

Friday, November 27

Hebrews 11

Are you walking in faith these days? Are you basing decisions on the evidence of your eyes? Or are you allowing room for the invisible source of life to guide you? Why, at this time, are you walking this way?

This famous chapter recounts great heroes of the faith from the Hebrew Testament. These heroes form a great cloud of witnesses, encouraging us to live faith boldly. (See 12:1)

I love the picture of people leaving their birth places to seek a new home in God's heavenly kingdom. We live lightly here as citizens of another place, living in response to promise and grace that many cannot see.

When we feel alone in our faith, this picture of brothers and sisters through the centuries provides a powerful corrective. As people of faith, we are part of God's massive project in this world.

Are there faith heroes that you would add to the list? Whose example emboldens you? (These can be examples from scripture, history, or your own life.) Thank God for them now. How can you be more like them today?