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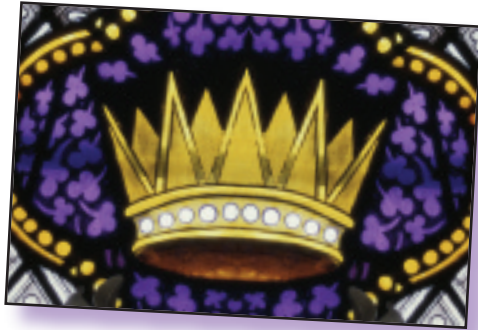
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Discover Your Bible Series

Discover HEBREWS

LEADER GUIDE



LEADER GUIDE

Discover **HEBREWS**



by
Elizabeth Vander Haagen


**FAITH
ALIVE**
Christian Resources

Grand Rapids, Michigan

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To the Leader

Prepare the Lesson

This leader guide is meant to assist you as a small group leader but not to substitute for your own work. As you prepare to lead each lesson, work first through the questions in the study guide. Then use the leader material to enrich your understanding of the passage. Prepare thoroughly before leading each group session so that you can lead without frequent references to notes. This approach will free you to concentrate on leadership responsibilities, keep eye contact with group members, and listen carefully.

Get Ready to Lead

Learn to think in terms of questions. As you prepare to lead a lesson, ask yourself questions and try to discover the answers yourself. This will prepare you to anticipate group members' questions and thus help others discover truths from God's Word.

Lead with Questions

Use questions to direct the group discussion. Draw out positive contributions by asking questions. Break down difficult or unclear questions into smaller, concise ones. Also use questions to respond to wrong or problematic answers. If you learn to lead others to truth by questions, you will be a good Bible discovery leader. The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Help to Apply

Gently help group members discover the meaning of God's message for their own lives. Be careful not to be judgmental of persons who may not yet seem to be applying the truths you encounter together. It's the Spirit's work to apply God's Word to people's hearts. Tactfully let the group know how the Spirit is applying the Word in your own heart and life. Pray faithfully for the Spirit's work in others.

While giving people the time and space to apply biblical truths as the Spirit leads them, simply try to help group members see that there is a relationship between the Bible and life. Questions for reflection at the end of each session invite everyone to take time for personal reflection and optional sharing. Try to offer at least a few minutes for reflection time toward the end of each lesson, and encourage group members to do follow-up reflection at home.

Leadership Training

If more than one group in your setting is using this Bible study, we strongly encourage leaders to meet regularly for discussion of the lessons, for prayer, and for mutual support.

If this study is being used in a Coffee Break Small Groups program, each leader should have a copy of the *Coffee Break Evangelism Manual with Director's Handbook*. This book is a basic "how-to" guide for establishing and leading a Bible discovery group. Reread the book or portions of it periodically and review it at the beginning of each season.

Leading with Love in the Coffee Break Core Values series is another important tool for leadership development.

Leaders will also find it helpful to attend one or more of the many leadership training workshops offered each year in connection with small group ministry.

For more information,

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- call toll-free 1-800-333-8300 or visit www.FaithAliveResources.org (to order materials)

Introduction

The book of Hebrews is unique; its style is distinct from that of other letters in the New Testament. It reads more like a sermon than a letter, taking the form of a carefully constructed argument based on many Old Testament passages. In this way Hebrews is similar to the teaching of a Jewish rabbi in a synagogue on the Sabbath.

Though we don't know who wrote Hebrews or exactly whom it was written to, it's clear that the book was written to believers in Jesus who had become exhausted. They were tired of being Christians, tired of suffering for their faith, and tired of waiting for Jesus to come back. In their burned-out state they were in danger of drifting in their journey with God. So the writer, or preacher, of Hebrews aims to encourage these believers to hold on, in God's strength, by refocusing on the author and founder of their faith—the Lord Jesus Christ.

This “back to basics” book outlines who Jesus is and why faith in him matters, and it focuses particularly on Jesus as our high priest and our “once for all” sacrifice (Heb. 10:10-12). Assuming an audience that's familiar with the Old Testament, Hebrews is a “word of exhortation” (Heb. 13:22), urging its first readers to continue living faithfully for their Savior, Lord, and King.

Hebrews also speaks to us today, reminding us of all that Jesus is and all he has done for us, encouraging us to live faithfully in times when we too may be weary and in spiritual danger.

Glossary of Terms

Aaron—the brother of Moses; in the law given to Moses after the Israelites' release from slavery in Egypt, God instructed Aaron (from the tribe of Levi) to be high priest and his sons and other descendants of Levi (Levites) to be priests for God's people Israel (Ex. 28-29; Lev. 8-9).

Abel—son of Adam and Eve; he was killed by his brother, Cain (Gen. 4).

Abraham—the father of the Israelite nation whom God called to follow him in faith. God promised to bless "all peoples on earth" through Abraham (Gen. 12:3). Jesus ultimately fulfilled that promise by making God's salvation possible for people of all nations. Abraham is also called the father of all believers (Rom. 4:11-12; see Gal. 3:29).

altar—an altar is a place where sacrifices are made; animals and incense were burned on altars as offerings to God in Old Testament worship (see Gen. 8:20; 12:8; Ex. 27:1-8; 30:1-10).

angels—supernatural beings created by God to be messengers, to carry out God's will in this world, and to serve and care for all who belong to God (Ps. 91:11-12).

apostle—"one who is sent." God sent Jesus into this world to bring salvation from sin for all who believe (Luke 4:18-19; John 6:38-40; Heb. 3:1).

ark of the covenant—a wooden chest overlaid with gold and placed in the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle. It symbolized the presence of God among the people of Israel (Ex. 25:10-22). See also **atonement cover**. Inside the ark were the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 34:1-28), a jar of manna, and Aaron's staff—all reminders of God's provision and covenant with the people.

atonement—reconciliation; the gracious work of Christ that brings sinners into a right relationship with God (1 John 2:1-2).

atonement cover—a cover of pure gold placed on the top of the ark of the covenant. The cover served as a kind of throne where God met with Moses and gave him all the commands for the Israelites (Ex. 25:20-22).

burnt offerings for sin—When the people of Israel sinned, intentionally or unintentionally, they were to make a burnt offering to atone for (pay for) their sins. For these offerings, animals without defect were killed and burned on the altar (Lev. 4-6). See also **Day of Atonement**.

Cain—firstborn son of Adam and Eve. Cain killed his brother, Abel, because God accepted Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's (Gen. 4).

ceremonially unclean—in a state of religious impurity, according to Old Testament law. This condition could be corrected by performing certain rituals and sacrifices (Lev. 10:10-11).

cherubim—winged creatures often described in Scripture as attending God’s throne in heaven. God instructed Moses to place two carvings of cherubim on the cover of the ark of the covenant (see Ex. 25:17-22).

Christ—see **Messiah**.

consecrated bread—twelve loaves of bread placed on a gold table in the tabernacle (Lev. 24:5-8). Representing the twelve tribes of Israel, the loaves reminded the people that God would provide for them.

covenant—a binding and solemn agreement; God made covenants with Noah (Gen. 9:8-17), Abraham (Gen. 15, 17), and the people of Israel at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19-24). In Jesus Christ God makes a new covenant with us, promising us forgiveness and the power to live in a way that pleases the Lord (Luke 22:20; Heb. 8). Jesus fulfilled the old covenant (old testament) in every way and established the new covenant (new testament) through his “once for all” sacrifice to save us from sin and death (Heb. 10:10-18).

curtain—see **tabernacle**.

Day of Atonement—annual day of rest, fasting, and sacrifices to cleanse the Old Testament people of their sins (Lev. 16). On this day the high priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle to present before God the sacrifice for the sins of all the people.

Enoch—a faithful believer who “walked with God” and did not die “because God took him away” (Gen. 5:22, 24; Heb. 11:5).

Esau—Along with his twin brother, Jacob, Esau was a son of Isaac, the son of Abraham. Esau was older than Jacob, but he sold his right of inheritance to Jacob for some stew when he was hungry (Gen. 25:29-34).

eternal life—life that lasts forever with God. It begins when one receives Jesus by faith as Savior (John 6:40), and it reaches fulfillment in the new heaven and earth when the believer’s soul is reunited with his or her resurrected body to live in God’s presence forever (1 Cor. 15:20-54).

exhortation—to exhort is to urge passionately; an exhortation is a speech or writing given to urge an important point or teaching. The book of Hebrews is an exhortation—it’s more like a sermon than a letter, it is based on many Old Testament passages, and it features a style of discussion similar to that used by a Jewish rabbi in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Hebrews was written to urge believers to hold on to their faith.

faith—“Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1). Faith is confidence in the word and promises of God, even when what is promised is unseen. Through faith in Jesus Christ we are made right with God (Rom. 3:22).

glory—splendor, majesty, power, worth, excellence of quality and character. In the Old Testament God’s glory was represented in a cloud (Ex. 33:12-34:7). God’s glory is also revealed in the world around us (Ps. 19:1). Jesus revealed God’s glory through his teaching and miracles and through his death and resurrection (John 2:11; 11:4; 12:23-28). In Christ, we also reflect God’s glory (2 Cor. 3:18).

God the Father—the first person of the Trinity. The other two persons are God the Son (Jesus Christ) and God the Holy Spirit. They are three persons in one being.

gospel—This word literally means “good news” and refers to the message of God’s salvation from sin and the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. This word can also refer to one of the first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) that tell the good news story about Jesus.

grace—God’s undeserved favor and forgiving love. Jesus is the full expression of God’s grace for the salvation and new life of all who believe in him as Lord and Savior (Eph. 2:8-10).

heifer—a young cow, often used for sacrifice in the Old Testament (Num. 19:1-8).

high priest—The high priest represents God to the people and the people to God. There were many priests in Israel who served at the tabernacle and later at the temple making offerings and leading worship. The high priest would make the offering for all of the sins of the people on the Day of Atonement (see Ex. 28-29; Lev. 16; Num. 18; Deut. 31:9-13).

holy—perfect in goodness, purity, and righteousness (Eph. 4:22-24).

Holy Place—See **tabernacle**.

Holy Spirit—the third person of the Trinity. The other two persons are God the Father and God the Son (Jesus Christ). They are three persons in one being. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, works true faith in our hearts, and empowers us to live holy lives. The Spirit’s presence in our hearts guarantees that we will receive God’s promises (John 16:7-15).

hope—in combination with faith this means looking ahead in solid trust to the fulfillment of all God’s promises (Heb. 7:19; 11:1).

house of Israel, house of Judah—during the history of the Israelites the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms, one called Israel and the other called Judah (1 Kings 12).

- hyssop**—a plant used for sprinkling blood and water for cleansing (see Lev. 14:49-53; Ps. 51:7; Heb. 9:19).
- inner sanctuary**—the place where God dwells, symbolized by the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle (Lev. 16:2).
- Isaac**—the promised son of Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 17:19; 18:1-15; 21:1-7). God tested the faith of Abraham by telling him to sacrifice Isaac to the Lord; Abraham obeyed, but Isaac was delivered at the last minute when an angel of God called Abraham to stop (22:1-19).
- Israel, Israelites**—the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (whom God renamed Israel—Gen. 32:28). The Israelites were God’s chosen people (Deut. 7:6).
- Jacob**—Along with his twin brother, Esau, Jacob was a son of Isaac, the son of Abraham. God renamed him Israel (Gen. 32:28), and he had twelve sons whose descendants became the nation of Israel (Gen. 27-35).
- Jerusalem**—the ancient city once known as Salem, when Melchizedek was its king (Gen. 14:18). It later became the capital of Israel under King David (2 Sam. 5:4-10). David’s son Solomon built the temple of the Lord there (1 Kings 6-8), and in Jesus’ day it was again the religious center for God’s people. Jesus suffered there and was crucified outside the city walls (Luke 23:26-33; Heb. 13:12).
- Joshua**—successor to Moses as leader of the Israelites. Joshua led the people into the promised land of Canaan, but because of their disobedience the people never truly found rest there (Judg. 2:6-23; Heb. 4:8).
- Judah**—the son of Jacob from whom Jesus descended (Matt. 1:3; Heb. 7:14).
- lampstand**—a pedestal of seven lamps placed in the Holy Place of the tabernacle. God commanded that the lamps be kept burning every night (Ex. 25:31-40; 27:20-21).
- law**—refers to the body of Old Testament writings prescribing the law that God gave to the Israelites for daily living, summed up in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20; see also Matt. 22:37-40).
- manna**—a food that God provided for the Israelites during their travels in the desert after their release from slavery in Egypt. The manna appeared on the ground each morning, except on the Sabbath, and could be used for baking bread (see Ex. 16; John 6:32-35).
- mediator**—a person who brings about reconciliation between two parties. Under the new covenant, Jesus Christ is the supreme mediator between God and sinful people (1 Tim. 2:5). See also **high priest**.
- Melchizedek**—a historical figure mentioned in Genesis and considered a model pointing to Jesus Christ. Because there is no record of Melchizedek’s parents or children (no known beginning or end to his

life), he symbolizes the eternal nature of Jesus. Because he was a priest of God apart from the Levites, he symbolizes the priesthood of Christ, which is not of the Levitical priesthood. Because he was both a priest and king, he symbolizes the royal priesthood of Christ, who is both priest and ruler of the kingdom of God. (See Gen. 14:17-20; Ps. 110:4.)

mercy—a term often used to describe kindness and compassion to someone in distress. To be more precise, it refers to showing leniency by holding back punishment even if justice calls for it (see Mic. 7:18-19).

Messiah—the promised deliverer of God’s people. Both the Hebrew word *Messiah* and the Greek word *Christ* mean “Anointed One.” Through the prophets God promised to send the Messiah to deliver God’s people from their oppressors and to rule them in righteousness forever. The people misunderstood these promises, however, and looked for a Messiah who would be a political ruler and gather an army to rout all their physical enemies. But as Jesus revealed through his work and teaching, the Messiah came to save God’s people from the oppression of sin and death and to give them new life forever with God. As King, Jesus Christ rules today in heaven at the right hand of the Father, and when he comes again at the end of time he will fully establish God’s everlasting kingdom of righteousness on earth. (See Matt. 26:63-64; John 16:5-16; 1 Cor. 15; Rev. 21:1-5; 22:1-5.)

Moses—the leader of the Israelites when God delivered them from slavery in Egypt and as they lived in the wilderness before entering the promised land (Canaan). Moses received the law from God and taught it to the Israelites.

Most Holy Place—see **tabernacle**.

Noah—builder of the ark in which God saved his family and land animals from the great flood (Gen. 6-9).

oath—a sworn solemn pledge in which a person calls on someone greater (such as God) as a witness. God also makes oaths (Ex. 33:1; Ps. 110:4). An oath is used “to put an end to all argument” or speculation about the fulfillment of a promise (Heb. 6:17).

Passover—This feast took place each spring to celebrate the Israelites’ exodus from slavery in Egypt. The name commemorates God’s protection of Israelite households during a final plague sent to convince the Egyptian king (pharaoh) to let the Israelites go. God promised that upon seeing the blood of a sacrificed lamb on the doorframes of a house, God would *pass over* that house and not allow the plague of death to take the life of the firstborn in that house (see Ex. 12).

perfect, perfection—complete, finished; see also **holy**.

priests—officials who served in the temple and belonged to the tribe of Levi; also often called Levites. See also **high priest**.

prophet—someone God chooses to speak God’s message (Deut. 18:17-19).

purification—removal of any uncleanness or sin; in the Old Testament purification was sometimes done with ceremonial washing or sprinkling and sometimes with burnt offerings. Jesus purified us, or made us clean and holy, through his death (Heb. 1:3; 1 John 1:7).

redemption—the condition of being freed from captivity by payment of a ransom. Jesus Christ paid the penalty of sin by his death to save sinners who otherwise would die under the law’s punishment (Rom. 3:23-24).

repentance—the word *repent* means “turn around” or “turn back”; repentance for sin involves turning around one’s life to live for God as Lord and Savior (Luke 5:32; 2 Cor. 7:10).

rest—in Hebrews the word *rest* often refers to a promised end of hardship and struggle, a state in which people can flourish in peace and righteousness in the presence of God. God promised the Israelites rest in the promised land (Canaan) as a pointer to eternal rest in the new heaven and earth, but they often did not have rest because they disobeyed God and violated the covenant (Judg. 2:6-23). In Scripture, rest is also associated with the Sabbath—the day set apart by God in the Old Testament for rest and worship (Ex. 20:8).

righteousness—the condition of being right with God; righteousness has to do with right relationships, with responding to God and others in ways that are just. As God’s people, we are called to be righteous and are given Christ’s righteousness: we are made right with God through Christ’s death and given the ability to live in right relationships with others through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 3:21-26).

Sabbath—the seventh day of the week, set apart as a day of rest and worship according to the law of Moses. Jewish religious leaders developed a stringent code of rules for keeping the Sabbath, and Jesus often criticized them for being too legalistic in this regard (see Mark 2:23-3:6; Luke 13:10-17; John 5:16-17; 7:21-24). See also **rest**.

sacrifice—an offering given to God to regain right standing with God. In the Old Testament (old covenant), right standing was regained by offering an animal sacrifice for sin. To establish the new covenant, Christ offered himself as the “once for all” perfect sacrifice for the sins of all who believe in him (Heb. 10:10).

salvation—eternal deliverance from the power and penalty of sin; salvation is possible only through the finished work of Jesus Christ, in whom we believe as Savior and Lord (John 3:16; 14:6).

sanctify—to make holy. Sanctification is the process of spiritual growth by which the believer learns to live more and more in a way that honors Christ (2 Cor. 3:18).

Sarah—wife of Abraham and mother of Isaac; she was long past childbearing age when she gave birth to Isaac (Gen. 18:1-15; 21:1-7).

sin—disobedience to God; refers to breaking God’s law (1 John 3:4).

Son of God—this title for Jesus describes his relationship with God the Father as part of the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are three persons in one being.

Son of Man—Jesus used this term to describe his humanity as well as to refer to a title associated with the Messiah as described by the prophet Daniel (see Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 24:30; 25:31; 26:64).

Spirit—see **Holy Spirit**.

tabernacle—the sacred tent that served as the Israelites’ place of worship and as a reminder of God’s presence among the people. The tabernacle was divided into two parts: the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. The Holy Place contained a table with consecrated bread, a golden lampstand, and an altar of incense. The Most Holy Place, separated from the Holy Place by a curtain, contained the ark of the covenant. Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place—and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement (Ex. 26; Lev. 16:2). King Solomon of Israel replaced the tabernacle with a permanent temple for the Lord in Jerusalem, basing it on the design of the tabernacle (1 Kings 6-8).

throne of grace—this term refers to the atonement cover on the ark of the covenant (where God came to meet with the people—Ex. 25:17-22) and to God’s throne in heaven, which we can approach with confidence because of the work of Jesus, our ultimate high priest (Heb. 4:14-16; 10:19-22).

Word (of God)—the true and living message of God (Heb. 4:12); this term is used in the Bible to refer (1) to God’s spoken word in creation (Gen. 1) and through prophets like Moses (Ex. 19-24); (2) to God’s written Word, the Scriptures (Matt. 5:17; 22:40; 2 Tim. 3:14-17); and (3) to Jesus Christ as the Word of God who “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14).

Lesson 1

Hebrews 1

Jesus Is the Last Word

Additional Related Scriptures

Genesis 1:2-3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26

Deuteronomy 18:18-22

Psalms 2:7; 19:1; 45:6-7

Isaiah 61:1-3

Malachi 3:6

Matthew 3:13-17; 4:17, 23; 6:9-10;

17:1-5

Luke 4:16-21

John 8:12, 31-36; 10:28; 14:15-17,

25-26; 16:7-15

Acts 1:9-11; 2:33-36

Romans 8:17

2 Corinthians 3:18; 5:17-21

Galatians 3:26-4:7

Ephesians 1:18-23

Colossians 1:10-17

Hebrews 10:1-18

James 1:17

Introductory Notes

The first chapter of Hebrews addresses a question that becomes a major theme in the book. “Who is Jesus?” people ask, and the opening words of Hebrews make clear that Jesus is the Son of God the Father. Jesus is the “appointed heir of all things,” and through him God “made the universe” (Heb. 1:2). Hebrews 1 also speaks of the Son as the last word, God’s final way of communicating with us. Earlier God spoke to our ancestors “through the prophets . . . but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (1:1-2). Jesus is the ultimate Word of God to a world racked with sin and beaten down by all the effects of sin. Jesus is the final answer for every sinner in need of a Savior. As the writer of Hebrews adds later, Jesus is “the author of [our] salvation” (2:10; see 12:2).

In this first chapter of Hebrews we also find a style of discussion that will continue throughout the book: the use of numerous Old Testament Scriptures to illustrate who Jesus is and how Jesus is superior to all.

Some group members may find the opening section of the book of Hebrews a bit challenging. Indeed, this book of the Bible contains more than a few complex passages. The book of Hebrews assumes that readers are already familiar with many of the Bible’s teachings about God, the people of Israel, and the coming of Jesus to bring salvation for God’s people everywhere. As you begin this study, it will be important to recognize that you don’t need to discuss every verse or its meaning in detail. But you can cover the main themes and content of the book of Hebrews. As leader, you may want to assure group members that they need not understand every

detail right away; they'll have several weeks to consider and reflect on the truths presented here.

As you begin this lesson with your group, point out the glossary and the description on how to study—these are available in each study guide. Read the introduction together and point out that the lessons in this study will serve mainly as a starting point for further growth and learning. Invite everyone also to pray with you throughout the course of this study, asking God to help each of you see this study as a personal journey in which you can grow to know Jesus in new ways through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Optional Share Question

Note: The optional share question in each lesson may serve well at the beginning of your session or at some other time during your discussion. Use or adapt each share question in a way that works best for your group.

How does God speak to you today?

1. *Hebrews 1:1-3*

a. *How has God spoken in history?*

If some of the people in your group are not Christians, it may be helpful to explain that one of the things Christians believe about God is that God speaks to humanity; God communicates with us. The Bible begins with God speaking the world into being (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, and 26 state that God speaks and the world is created). The Bible is the story of God's relationship with humanity—a relationship that involves God speaking to people and people speaking to God.

In the past God spoke to people primarily through prophets. These prophets and others, inspired by God's Spirit, wrote God's words and the story of God's care and deliverance so that later generations could hear God speaking to them through the Scriptures.

- **What is a prophet?**

A prophet is a person chosen by God to hear God's word and speak it to people. Sometimes this involves speaking about the future, but usually it applies to the present day in which the people live (see Deut. 18:18-22). Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah are examples of prophets. God also spoke to judges, such as Samuel (see 1 Sam. 3) and Deborah (Judg. 4) and other individuals (Abram in Gen. 12; Isaac in Gen. 26).

b. *How has God spoken to us?*

God has spoken to us through the Son (and through the Scriptures about him).

- **Who is God's Son?**

Jesus Christ is God's Son. Jesus is identified as God's Son at his baptism (Matt 3:17) and at his transfiguration, when he went up on a mountain with Peter, James, and John and met with Moses and Elijah (Matt. 17:1-5).

Jesus also often refers to himself as the Son of Man (see Matt. 24:30; 25:31; 26:64); he does this to describe his becoming human as well as to refer to a title associated with the Messiah (see Dan. 7:13-14). As both Son of God and Son of Man, Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the promised king that the Jewish people had been awaiting for centuries.

The title of Son of God was often used in ancient times to describe a king. In the ancient Middle East, a strong powerful king, or suzerain, would enter into a relationship with less powerful kings who became his vassals. The relationship between the suzerain and the vassals was often described in terms of a father and sons. In Israel, God was the suzerain king, and the earthly king was his vassal (see Ps. 2:7, which refers to the king in Jerusalem as Son). When the book of Hebrews speaks of the Son, it is a reference to Jesus' relationship with God as Son and as King. Hebrews 1:5, 8-9, 13 make reference to the Son's kingship.

- **How does God speak to us through Jesus Christ?**

When we read about Jesus in the Bible, God speaks to our hearts through his Holy Spirit. Often the Holy Spirit also speaks to (or teaches) us through other people who show God's love and concern and help us understand the Bible's teaching.

- **Who is the Holy Spirit?**

Before Jesus returned to heaven, he promised his followers that he would send the Spirit to teach them, comfort them, and remind them of Jesus' saving work (John 14:15-17, 25-26; 16:7-15).

c. *What do we learn about the Son?*

In verses 2-3 we learn several important things about the Son of God:

- *The Son is the "appointed heir of all things."* Everything belongs to God, and the Son has inherited it all. The Lord God is a promise-

making and promise-keeping God. In Genesis God makes promises to Abraham and his descendants—promises of blessing, descendants, and land. The nation of Israel, Abraham’s descendants, inherited the land promised to Abraham. Promised inheritance is a theme throughout Scripture. The writer of Hebrews draws on this theme by describing the Son as the One who has inherited all things—not only land and blessing but everything in all of creation. Jesus’ inheritance and our place as co-heirs with him is mentioned in Romans 8:17 and Galatians 3:26-4:7.

- *God made the universe through the Son.* The gospel of John begins with the words “In the beginning was the Word . . .” (John 1:1), echoing the Genesis story of creation and affirming Jesus’ role in creation. John uses the Greek word *logos* for “Word” in that passage. Greeks often used the word *logos* to refer to the unifying force of the universe. John explains that through “the Word,” or *logos*, “all things were made” (1:3) and that “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (1:14), affirming that the Word became human in the person of Jesus Christ. In Colossians 1:16 we also see Christ’s role in creation: “By him all things were created.” (See also Gen. 1:2, 26.)
- *“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory.”* (For a description of glory, point group members to the glossary.) In Scripture glory has to do with what makes God different from anyone or anything else. God’s glory is revealed in the world around us—“the heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1)—and we are promised that we too reflect God’s glory (2 Cor. 3:18). By saying that “the Son is the radiance of God’s glory,” the writer of Hebrews is pointing to the divinity of Christ. The Son shares God’s glory because the Son is also God.
- *The Son is “the exact representation of God’s being.”* Because Jesus is God, he can reveal God perfectly to us. We come to know who God is through knowing Jesus. In John 14:9 Jesus tells his disciples, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” In Colossians 1:15 we read that Jesus is “the image of the invisible God.”
- *The Son sustains “all things by his powerful word.”* God did not get the universe going and then leave it to run on its own; in Christ, God is actively sustaining it. The Son is holding the world together and keeping it going. Colossians 1:17 tells us that in Christ “all things hold together.”

d. *What has the Son done?*

Through his death on the cross, the Son has “provided purification for sins” (Heb. 1:3). This central theme is developed throughout the book of

Hebrews. In order to be in a right relationship with God, a person needs to be pure. But because we are all sinful, none of us is pure. Jesus alone lived a pure, sinless life (Heb. 4:15), and his willing death provided the purification for all of us to be able to have a right relationship with God.

After the Son provided purification for sins, his mission on earth was finished. He then returned to heaven, where he is seated “at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven” (Heb. 1:3), ruling everything with God. (See also Acts 1:9-11; 2:33-36; Eph. 1:18-23.)

2. *Hebrews 1:4-7*

a. *What is the relationship of the Son to the angels?*

The Son is “superior to the angels” (Heb. 1:4).

- **How did the Son become superior to the angels?**
- **Why is his name superior to theirs?**

The Son became superior to the angels by providing purification for our sins. The Son did what angels could not do; he died to pay for our sins and thus purified us. Of course, as the Son of God, he always was superior—but the Bible reveals this mystery: when he became human, Jesus humbled himself, emptying himself to take on the nature of a servant and to die on a cross for our sake (Phil. 2:7-8). “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name . . . to the glory of God the Father” (2:9-11). The Son’s name is superior to the name of angels because of the relationship it represents. The Son is God’s Son, who humbled himself and is now exalted above all things; the angels are God’s servants.

b. *What are angels for? What do they exist to do? (See also Heb. 1:14.)*

Angels are ministering spirits, “sent to serve those who will inherit salvation” (Heb. 1:14). They exist to glorify God and to do God’s will, serving as examples of obedience. Our culture seems to have a fascination with angels, usually portraying them as sent to help humans. But often the portrayals are not biblical—especially those that describe people as becoming angels after they die! In Scripture, angels minister to people as part of their service to and worship of God—all to the glory of God.

In the helpful book *In the Company of Angels: What the Bible Teaches, What You Need to Know* (Faith Alive Christian Resources), Andrew Bandstra shows that angels are created, holy, individual beings. In a discussion about the function of angels, Bandstra writes,

As holy angels who are ministers of God, the angels never do anything “on their own.” They only do what God wants and assigns them to do. Some people, in thinking about the function of angels, employ a kind of “business model.” They think of God as the chief executive officer who has granted significant authority to the angels as “department heads.” They imagine that angels have a kind of self-rule or autonomy of their own “to get the work done.” But this model doesn’t apply. Angels do not work autonomously. As God’s ambassadors or envoys, they speak and do everything that God wants them to. Although angels are not “heavenly robots,” they never function “on their own.”

If some group members would like to explore this topic further, you might suggest they pick up a reputable book on angels or simply do a study of angels on their own with the help of a concordance and other resources. (Helpful Scripture passages are Gen. 3:24; 19:1-22; Num. 22:21-35; Josh. 5:13-15; 1 Kings 19:5-7; Ps. 91:11; Matt. 18:10; Acts 12:7-11; Rev. 5:11-14; 7:1-12; 12:7-12.)

3. *Hebrews 1:8-14*

a. *What lasts forever? What is changeless?*

God’s throne, representing God’s almighty rule over the universe, lasts forever. And God is changeless (Heb. 1:12), even though everything else around us may change (see also Mal. 3:6; James 1:17).

b. *What is God’s kingdom?*

- **Is it present in our lives today? How?**

Because God is sovereign over all things, God’s kingdom encompasses everything in the universe, including the spiritual realms (see Eph. 1:18-23). But there is also a kingdom of darkness made up of “the spiritual forces of evil” that live in rebellion against God (Eph. 6:12; see Isa. 25:7-8; 60:2; Matt. 4:16-17; John 3:19-21; Rev. 12:7-12). Because we are sinful, we are like slaves in this dark world until God’s light shines into our lives to set us free from the kingdom of darkness (John 8:31-36). Jesus Christ came to bring the good news of God’s kingdom (Matt. 4:23), announcing that “the kingdom of heaven is near” (4:17). He is the light of the world who has come to save us, to give us new life forever in God’s kingdom (John 8:12; 2 Cor. 5:17-21).

The kingdom of God is a present reality, and yet it is still coming. As believers in Christ, we become citizens of God’s kingdom. We can see signs of God’s kingdom breaking into our world wherever we see God’s love and justice in our lives and in our communities, and yet we are painfully aware

that God’s kingdom is not fully here yet—in this world there is still sin and the effects of sin: war, disease, disaster, destruction, and much more.

In the prayer Jesus taught us, we ask that God’s kingdom will come and that God’s will may be done “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:9-10).

Writing here about Jesus, the author of Hebrews affirms that the Son of God will reign with God forever in his kingdom.

- c. *What is righteousness? What does it mean that “righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom” (Heb. 1:8)?*

Righteousness is a relational word, referring to right relationships between God and humanity, humans and other humans, and humans and the created world (see also glossary). The Bible often mentions righteousness in the context of a covenant relationship, describing how God calls people to live. In Scripture, righteousness is similar to justice—they both describe right relationships, which will be a defining characteristic of God’s completed kingdom. Everyone will treat everyone else with love, respect, generosity, care, and dignity.

- **What is a scepter, and how is it used?**

A scepter is a rod, often made out of precious metals, and it’s a symbol of rule and authority. To hold a scepter is to rule. In saying that righteousness is the scepter of God’s kingdom, the writer of Hebrews, along with the psalmist being quoted (see Ps. 45:6-7), notes that righteousness is the main characteristic of God’s kingdom and the power by which God rules.

- **What is “the oil of joy” (Heb. 1:9)?**
- **What is significant about anointing with oil?**

In the ancient Middle East, aromatic oils were often used to anoint people at significant celebrations, such as weddings or coronations. “Oil of joy” is a metaphor referring to God’s anointing of the Son with something even better than good-smelling oil—that is, joy. The prophet Isaiah uses this same metaphor in a description of the Messiah who would come to set God’s people free (Isa. 61:1-3), and Jesus (the Messiah) quotes from that passage when he begins his preaching ministry (Luke 4:16-21).

- d. *Why do you think the author emphasizes God’s changelessness?*

- **If God gives us a new revelation, does that mean God has changed? Explain.**

Perhaps because it begins with the announcement that God has spoken to his people in a new way—that is, through Jesus (Heb. 1:2)—the book of Hebrews affirms here that God himself does not change. Throughout history, God has given his people many new revelations to help them grow and learn more about God’s unchanging character and purposes in this world.

e. What does it mean to make one’s enemies a footstool?

The writer of Hebrews (quoting from Psalm 110) is using figurative, poetic language to describe God’s triumph over the forces of evil. God’s enemies will be so humbled that the Lord will be able to use them as a footrest. This image is similar to another that describes Jesus’ supreme authority and superiority: “God placed all things under [Jesus’] feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (Eph. 1:22-23).

Questions for Reflection

Why is it important that Jesus is the last Word about sin and death?

Since Jesus is the exact representation of God’s being and we are his followers, can we too be God’s representatives? Explain.

How do you feel about the idea that angels are sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? Have you thought of angels that way before?

If you have time, use these questions to review important points about this study lesson. Invite group members to share what they have learned, and if they aren’t sure they agree with everything stated in Hebrews 1, allow room for people to think and talk about these biblical teachings as the Spirit seeks to work in their hearts.

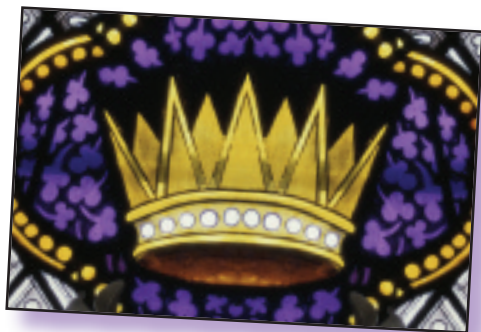
In reference to Jesus as the last Word, it may help to mention that Hebrews later clarifies that Jesus has fulfilled all of God’s salvation promises. He died “once for all,” so that no further sacrifice for sin must be made (Heb. 10:1-18). All who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior “share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light” (Col. 1:12). Jesus himself says, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28).

As you reflect on these things with your group, invite everyone to ask God for wisdom in finding ways to share this good news with others, to spread the word that Jesus has come to break the curse of sin and death and that he rules over all things today.

Discover Your Bible Series

Discover HEBREWS

STUDY GUIDE



STUDY GUIDE

Discover **HEBREWS**



by
Elizabeth Vander Haagen



Grand Rapids, Michigan

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How to Study

The questions in this study booklet will help you discover for yourself what the Bible says. This is inductive Bible study—in which you will discover the message for yourself.

Questions are the key to inductive Bible study. Through questions you search for the writers' thoughts and ideas. The questions in this booklet are designed to help you in your quest for answers. You can and should ask your own questions too. The Bible comes alive with meaning for many people as they discover the exciting truths it contains. Our hope and prayer is that this booklet will help the Bible come alive for you.

The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Step 1. Read each Bible passage several times. Allow the ideas to sink in. Think about their meaning. Ask questions about the passage.

Step 2. Answer the questions, drawing your answers from the passage. Remember that the purpose of the study is to discover what the Bible says. Write your answers in your own words. If you use Bible study aids such as commentaries or Bible handbooks, do so only after completing your own personal study.

Step 3. Apply the Bible's message to your own life. Ask,

- What is this passage saying to me?
- How does it challenge me? Comfort me? Encourage me?
- Is there a promise I should claim? A warning I should heed?
- For what can I give thanks?

If you sense God speaking to you in some way, respond to God in a personal prayer.

Step 4. Share your thoughts with someone else if possible. This will be easiest if you are part of a Bible study group that meets regularly to share discoveries and discuss questions. If you would like to learn of a study group in your area or if you would like more information on how to start a small group Bible study,

- write to Discover Your Bible at

2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49560

or

P.O. Box 5070
STN LCD 1
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8

- call toll-free 1-888-644-0814, e-mail smallgroups@crcna.org, or visit www.SmallGroupMinistries.org (for training advice and general information)
- call toll-free 1-800-333-8300 or visit www.FaithAliveResources.org (to order materials)

Introduction

The book of Hebrews is unique; its style is distinct from that of other letters in the New Testament. It reads more like a sermon than a letter, taking the form of a carefully constructed argument based on many Old Testament passages. In this way Hebrews is similar to the teaching of a Jewish rabbi in a synagogue on the Sabbath.

Though we don't know who wrote Hebrews or exactly whom it was written to, it's clear that the book was written to believers in Jesus who had become exhausted. They were tired of being Christians, tired of suffering for their faith, and tired of waiting for Jesus to come back. In their burned-out state they were in danger of drifting in their journey with God. So the writer, or preacher, of Hebrews aims to encourage these believers to hold on, in God's strength, by refocusing on the author and founder of their faith—the Lord Jesus Christ.

This “back to basics” book outlines who Jesus is and why faith in him matters, and it focuses particularly on Jesus as our high priest and our “once for all” sacrifice (Heb. 10:10-12). Assuming an audience that's familiar with the Old Testament, Hebrews is a “word of exhortation” (Heb. 13:22), urging its first readers to continue living faithfully for their Savior, Lord, and King.

Hebrews also speaks to us today, reminding us of all that Jesus is and all he has done for us, encouraging us to live faithfully in times when we too may be weary and in spiritual danger.

Glossary of Terms

- Aaron**—the brother of Moses; in the law given to Moses after the Israelites' release from slavery in Egypt, God instructed Aaron (from the tribe of Levi) to be high priest and his sons and other descendants of Levi (Levites) to be priests for God's people Israel (Ex. 28-29; Lev. 8-9).
- Abel**—son of Adam and Eve; he was killed by his brother, Cain (Gen. 4).
- Abraham**—the father of the Israelite nation whom God called to follow him in faith. God promised to bless "all peoples on earth" through Abraham (Gen. 12:3). Jesus ultimately fulfilled that promise by making God's salvation possible for people of all nations. Abraham is also called the father of all believers (Rom. 4:11-12; see Gal. 3:29).
- altar**—an altar is a place where sacrifices are made; animals and incense were burned on altars as offerings to God in Old Testament worship (see Gen. 8:20; 12:8; Ex. 27:1-8; 30:1-10).
- angels**—supernatural beings created by God to be messengers, to carry out God's will in this world, and to serve and care for all who belong to God (Ps. 91:11-12).
- apostle**—"one who is sent." God sent Jesus into this world to bring salvation from sin for all who believe (Luke 4:18-19; John 6:38-40; Heb. 3:1).
- ark of the covenant**—a wooden chest overlaid with gold and placed in the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle. It symbolized the presence of God among the people of Israel (Ex. 25:10-22). See also **atonement cover**. Inside the ark were the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 34:1-28), a jar of manna, and Aaron's staff—all reminders of God's provision and covenant with the people.
- atonement**—reconciliation; the gracious work of Christ that brings sinners into a right relationship with God (1 John 2:1-2).
- atonement cover**—a cover of pure gold placed on the top of the ark of the covenant. The cover served as a kind of throne where God met with Moses and gave him all the commands for the Israelites (Ex. 25:20-22).
- burnt offerings for sin**—When the people of Israel sinned, intentionally or unintentionally, they were to make a burnt offering to atone for (pay for) their sins. For these offerings, animals without defect were killed and burned on the altar (Lev. 4-6). See also **Day of Atonement**.
- Cain**—firstborn son of Adam and Eve. Cain killed his brother, Abel, because God accepted Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's (Gen. 4).

ceremonially unclean—in a state of religious impurity, according to Old Testament law. This condition could be corrected by performing certain rituals and sacrifices (Lev. 10:10-11).

cherubim—winged creatures often described in Scripture as attending God’s throne in heaven. God instructed Moses to place two carvings of cherubim on the cover of the ark of the covenant (see Ex. 25:17-22).

Christ—see **Messiah**.

consecrated bread—twelve loaves of bread placed on a gold table in the tabernacle (Lev. 24:5-8). Representing the twelve tribes of Israel, the loaves reminded the people that God would provide for them.

covenant—a binding and solemn agreement; God made covenants with Noah (Gen. 9:8-17), Abraham (Gen. 15, 17), and the people of Israel at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19-24). In Jesus Christ God makes a new covenant with us, promising us forgiveness and the power to live in a way that pleases the Lord (Luke 22:20; Heb. 8). Jesus fulfilled the old covenant (old testament) in every way and established the new covenant (new testament) through his “once for all” sacrifice to save us from sin and death (Heb. 10:10-18).

curtain—see **tabernacle**.

Day of Atonement—annual day of rest, fasting, and sacrifices to cleanse the Old Testament people of their sins (Lev. 16). On this day the high priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle to present before God the sacrifice for the sins of all the people.

Enoch—a faithful believer who “walked with God” and did not die “because God took him away” (Gen. 5:22, 24; Heb. 11:5).

Esau—Along with his twin brother, Jacob, Esau was a son of Isaac, the son of Abraham. Esau was older than Jacob, but he sold his right of inheritance to Jacob for some stew when he was hungry (Gen. 25:29-34).

eternal life—life that lasts forever with God. It begins when one receives Jesus by faith as Savior (John 6:40), and it reaches fulfillment in the new heaven and earth when the believer’s soul is reunited with his or her resurrected body to live in God’s presence forever (1 Cor. 15:20-54).

exhortation—to exhort is to urge passionately; an exhortation is a speech or writing given to urge an important point or teaching. The book of Hebrews is an exhortation—it’s more like a sermon than a letter, it is based on many Old Testament passages, and it features a style of discussion similar to that used by a Jewish rabbi in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Hebrews was written to urge believers to hold on to their faith.

faith—“Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1). Faith is confidence in the word and promises of God, even when what is promised is unseen. Through faith in Jesus Christ we are made right with God (Rom. 3:22).

glory—splendor, majesty, power, worth, excellence of quality and character. In the Old Testament God’s glory was represented in a cloud (Ex. 33:12-34:7). God’s glory is also revealed in the world around us (Ps. 19:1). Jesus revealed God’s glory through his teaching and miracles and through his death and resurrection (John 2:11; 11:4; 12:23-28). In Christ, we also reflect God’s glory (2 Cor. 3:18).

God the Father—the first person of the Trinity. The other two persons are God the Son (Jesus Christ) and God the Holy Spirit. They are three persons in one being.

gospel—This word literally means “good news” and refers to the message of God’s salvation from sin and the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. This word can also refer to one of the first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) that tell the good news story about Jesus.

grace—God’s undeserved favor and forgiving love. Jesus is the full expression of God’s grace for the salvation and new life of all who believe in him as Lord and Savior (Eph. 2:8-10).

heifer—a young cow, often used for sacrifice in the Old Testament (Num. 19:1-8).

high priest—The high priest represents God to the people and the people to God. There were many priests in Israel who served at the tabernacle and later at the temple making offerings and leading worship. The high priest would make the offering for all of the sins of the people on the Day of Atonement (see Ex. 28-29; Lev. 16; Num. 18; Deut. 31:9-13).

holy—perfect in goodness, purity, and righteousness (Eph. 4:22-24).

Holy Place—See **tabernacle**.

Holy Spirit—the third person of the Trinity. The other two persons are God the Father and God the Son (Jesus Christ). They are three persons in one being. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, works true faith in our hearts, and empowers us to live holy lives. The Spirit’s presence in our hearts guarantees that we will receive God’s promises (John 16:7-15).

hope—in combination with faith this means looking ahead in solid trust to the fulfillment of all God’s promises (Heb. 7:19; 11:1).

house of Israel, house of Judah—during the history of the Israelites the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms, one called Israel and the other called Judah (1 Kings 12).

hyssop—a plant used for sprinkling blood and water for cleansing (see Lev. 14:49-53; Ps. 51:7; Heb. 9:19).

inner sanctuary—the place where God dwells, symbolized by the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle (Lev. 16:2).

Isaac—the promised son of Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 17:19; 18:1-15; 21:1-7). God tested the faith of Abraham by telling him to sacrifice Isaac to the Lord; Abraham obeyed, but Isaac was delivered at the last minute when an angel of God called Abraham to stop (22:1-19).

Israel, Israelites—the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (whom God renamed Israel—Gen. 32:28). The Israelites were God’s chosen people (Deut. 7:6).

Jacob—Along with his twin brother, Esau, Jacob was a son of Isaac, the son of Abraham. God renamed him Israel (Gen. 32:28), and he had twelve sons whose descendants became the nation of Israel (Gen. 27-35).

Jerusalem—the ancient city once known as Salem, when Melchizedek was its king (Gen. 14:18). It later became the capital of Israel under King David (2 Sam. 5:4-10). David’s son Solomon built the temple of the Lord there (1 Kings 6-8), and in Jesus’ day it was again the religious center for God’s people. Jesus suffered there and was crucified outside the city walls (Luke 23:26-33; Heb. 13:12).

Joshua—successor to Moses as leader of the Israelites. Joshua led the people into the promised land of Canaan, but because of their disobedience the people never truly found rest there (Judg. 2:6-23; Heb. 4:8).

Judah—the son of Jacob from whom Jesus descended (Matt. 1:3; Heb. 7:14).

lampstand—a pedestal of seven lamps placed in the Holy Place of the tabernacle. God commanded that the lamps be kept burning every night (Ex. 25:31-40; 27:20-21).

law—refers to the body of Old Testament writings prescribing the law that God gave to the Israelites for daily living, summed up in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20; see also Matt. 22:37-40).

manna—a food that God provided for the Israelites during their travels in the desert after their release from slavery in Egypt. The manna appeared on the ground each morning, except on the Sabbath, and could be used for baking bread (see Ex. 16; John 6:32-35).

mediator—a person who brings about reconciliation between two parties. Under the new covenant, Jesus Christ is the supreme mediator between God and sinful people (1 Tim. 2:5). See also **high priest**.

Melchizedek—a historical figure mentioned in Genesis and considered a model pointing to Jesus Christ. Because there is no record of Melchizedek’s parents or children (no known beginning or end to his

life), he symbolizes the eternal nature of Jesus. Because he was a priest of God apart from the Levites, he symbolizes the priesthood of Christ, which is not of the Levitical priesthood. Because he was both a priest and king, he symbolizes the royal priesthood of Christ, who is both priest and ruler of the kingdom of God. (See Gen. 14:17-20; Ps. 110:4.)

mercy—a term often used to describe kindness and compassion to someone in distress. To be more precise, it refers to showing leniency by holding back punishment even if justice calls for it (see Mic. 7:18-19).

Messiah—the promised deliverer of God’s people. Both the Hebrew word *Messiah* and the Greek word *Christ* mean “Anointed One.” Through the prophets God promised to send the Messiah to deliver God’s people from their oppressors and to rule them in righteousness forever. The people misunderstood these promises, however, and looked for a Messiah who would be a political ruler and gather an army to rout all their physical enemies. But as Jesus revealed through his work and teaching, the Messiah came to save God’s people from the oppression of sin and death and to give them new life forever with God. As King, Jesus Christ rules today in heaven at the right hand of the Father, and when he comes again at the end of time he will fully establish God’s everlasting kingdom of righteousness on earth. (See Matt. 26:63-64; John 16:5-16; 1 Cor. 15; Rev. 21:1-5; 22:1-5.)

Moses—the leader of the Israelites when God delivered them from slavery in Egypt and as they lived in the wilderness before entering the promised land (Canaan). Moses received the law from God and taught it to the Israelites.

Most Holy Place—see **tabernacle**.

Noah—builder of the ark in which God saved his family and land animals from the great flood (Gen. 6-9).

oath—a sworn solemn pledge in which a person calls on someone greater (such as God) as a witness. God also makes oaths (Ex. 33:1; Ps. 110:4). An oath is used “to put an end to all argument” or speculation about the fulfillment of a promise (Heb. 6:17).

Passover—This feast took place each spring to celebrate the Israelites’ exodus from slavery in Egypt. The name commemorates God’s protection of Israelite households during a final plague sent to convince the Egyptian king (pharaoh) to let the Israelites go. God promised that upon seeing the blood of a sacrificed lamb on the doorframes of a house, God would *pass over* that house and not allow the plague of death to take the life of the firstborn in that house (see Ex. 12).

perfect, perfection—complete, finished; see also **holy**.

priests—officials who served in the temple and belonged to the tribe of Levi; also often called Levites. See also **high priest**.

prophet—someone God chooses to speak God’s message (Deut. 18:17-19).

purification—removal of any uncleanness or sin; in the Old Testament purification was sometimes done with ceremonial washing or sprinkling and sometimes with burnt offerings. Jesus purified us, or made us clean and holy, through his death (Heb. 1:3; 1 John 1:7).

redemption—the condition of being freed from captivity by payment of a ransom. Jesus Christ paid the penalty of sin by his death to save sinners who otherwise would die under the law’s punishment (Rom. 3:23-24).

repentance—the word *repent* means “turn around” or “turn back”; repentance for sin involves turning around one’s life to live for God as Lord and Savior (Luke 5:32; 2 Cor. 7:10).

rest—in Hebrews the word *rest* often refers to a promised end of hardship and struggle, a state in which people can flourish in peace and righteousness in the presence of God. God promised the Israelites rest in the promised land (Canaan) as a pointer to eternal rest in the new heaven and earth, but they often did not have rest because they disobeyed God and violated the covenant (Judg. 2:6-23). In Scripture, rest is also associated with the Sabbath—the day set apart by God in the Old Testament for rest and worship (Ex. 20:8).

righteousness—the condition of being right with God; righteousness has to do with right relationships, with responding to God and others in ways that are just. As God’s people, we are called to be righteous and are given Christ’s righteousness: we are made right with God through Christ’s death and given the ability to live in right relationships with others through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 3:21-26).

Sabbath—the seventh day of the week, set apart as a day of rest and worship according to the law of Moses. Jewish religious leaders developed a stringent code of rules for keeping the Sabbath, and Jesus often criticized them for being too legalistic in this regard (see Mark 2:23-3:6; Luke 13:10-17; John 5:16-17; 7:21-24). See also **rest**.

sacrifice—an offering given to God to regain right standing with God. In the Old Testament (old covenant), right standing was regained by offering an animal sacrifice for sin. To establish the new covenant, Christ offered himself as the “once for all” perfect sacrifice for the sins of all who believe in him (Heb. 10:10).

salvation—eternal deliverance from the power and penalty of sin; salvation is possible only through the finished work of Jesus Christ, in whom we believe as Savior and Lord (John 3:16; 14:6).

sanctify—to make holy. Sanctification is the process of spiritual growth by which the believer learns to live more and more in a way that honors Christ (2 Cor. 3:18).

Sarah—wife of Abraham and mother of Isaac; she was long past childbearing age when she gave birth to Isaac (Gen. 18:1-15; 21:1-7).

sin—disobedience to God; refers to breaking God’s law (1 John 3:4).

Son of God—this title for Jesus describes his relationship with God the Father as part of the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are three persons in one being.

Son of Man—Jesus used this term to describe his humanity as well as to refer to a title associated with the Messiah as described by the prophet Daniel (see Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 24:30; 25:31; 26:64).

Spirit—see **Holy Spirit**.

tabernacle—the sacred tent that served as the Israelites’ place of worship and as a reminder of God’s presence among the people. The tabernacle was divided into two parts: the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. The Holy Place contained a table with consecrated bread, a golden lampstand, and an altar of incense. The Most Holy Place, separated from the Holy Place by a curtain, contained the ark of the covenant. Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place—and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement (Ex. 26; Lev. 16:2). King Solomon of Israel replaced the tabernacle with a permanent temple for the Lord in Jerusalem, basing it on the design of the tabernacle (1 Kings 6-8).

throne of grace—this term refers to the atonement cover on the ark of the covenant (where God came to meet with the people—Ex. 25:17-22) and to God’s throne in heaven, which we can approach with confidence because of the work of Jesus, our ultimate high priest (Heb. 4:14-16; 10:19-22).

Word (of God)—the true and living message of God (Heb. 4:12); this term is used in the Bible to refer (1) to God’s spoken word in creation (Gen. 1) and through prophets like Moses (Ex. 19-24); (2) to God’s written Word, the Scriptures (Matt. 5:17; 22:40; 2 Tim. 3:14-17); and (3) to Jesus Christ as the Word of God who “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14).

Lesson 1

Hebrews 1

Jesus Is the Last Word

Additional Related Scriptures

Genesis 1:2-3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26

Deuteronomy 18:18-22

Psalms 2:7; 19:1; 45:6-7

Isaiah 61:1-3

Malachi 3:6

Matthew 3:13-17; 4:17, 23; 6:9-10;
17:1-5

Luke 4:16-21

John 8:12, 31-36; 10:28; 14:15-17,
25-26; 16:7-15

Acts 1:9-11; 2:33-36

Romans 8:17

2 Corinthians 3:18; 5:17-21

Galatians 3:26-4:7

Ephesians 1:18-23

Colossians 1:10-17

Hebrews 10:1-18

James 1:17

Introductory Notes

The first chapter of Hebrews addresses a question that becomes a major theme in the book. “Who is Jesus?” people ask, and the opening words of Hebrews make clear that Jesus is the Son of God the Father. Jesus is the “appointed heir of all things,” and through him God “made the universe” (Heb. 1:2). Hebrews 1 also speaks of the Son as the last word, God’s final way of communicating with us. Earlier God spoke to our ancestors “through the prophets . . . but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (1:1-2). Jesus is the ultimate Word of God to a world racked with sin and beaten down by all the effects of sin. Jesus is the final answer for every sinner in need of a Savior. As the writer of Hebrews adds later, Jesus is “the author of [our] salvation” (2:10; see 12:2).

In this first chapter of Hebrews we also find a style of discussion that will continue throughout the book: the use of numerous Old Testament Scriptures to illustrate who Jesus is and how Jesus is superior to all.

1. Hebrews 1:1-3

- a. How has God spoken in history?

b. How has God spoken to us?

c. What do we learn about the Son?

d. What has the Son done?

2. *Hebrews 1:4-7*

a. What is the relationship of the Son to the angels?

b. What are angels for? What do they exist to do? (See also Heb. 1:14.)

Questions for Reflection

Why is it important that Jesus is the last Word about sin and death?

Since Jesus is the exact representation of God's being and we are his followers, can we too be God's representatives? Explain.

How do you feel about the idea that angels are sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? Have you thought of angels that way before?