



Hebrews

BETHEL GOSPEL CHAPEL HOME BIBLE STUDY GUIDE THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

Hebrews is different from the other New Testament epistles in that the author never identifies himself; nor do we know to whom it was originally sent. It is quoted by the early church fathers in their writings but there was never any agreement as to the author. On the basis of its content we assume that it was written to a specific group of Christians who were familiar with the Old Testament scriptures and well acquainted with ceremonial law.

The author accepts the authority of these scriptures, the validity of this law, but consistently shows that they find their fulfilment in the life and ministry of Jesus.

His exhortation is:

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. Hebrews 12:2

Jesus is the person and His is the ministry through which God's eternal purpose will be realized. All of the writers of the New Testament are aware of the unique place which Jesus holds. They build on an interpretation of the Old Testament that was first made by the Lord himself. At the very beginning of his public ministry He said:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Matthew 5:17-18 NIV

As we read the story of His life we come again and again upon such statements as: "it is written," - or - "the Scripture was fulfilled," - or - "this was to fulfill what was written in the Scriptures." Finally, at the end of his earthly ministry, in answer to the perplexity of his disciples;

He said to them: how foolish you are, how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself. Luke 24:25-27 NIV

The disciples, from that time forward, consistently argued that it is in Jesus the Scriptures are fulfilled. For instance Peter says:
He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name. Acts 10:42-43 NIV

The writer of Hebrews works out in detail, through the use of the Old Testament, that it is Jesus who is the Author and Perfecter of our faith. The crucial argument is expressed in these magnificent words:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. Hebrews 1:1-3 NIV

This study guide has been prepared to assist you in your personal study and will be the basis for the group discussions. It is recommended that you read the letter right through at least once before beginning with the study questions. You will want to note anything which is unfamiliar to you. Be sure to record any questions or special problems which you encounter. Your observations will help us all to a better understanding of this book.

You may find it helpful to do some supplementary reading. For instance the writer talks about angels, Moses, Aaron, Melchizedek; about priests the tabernacle, and offerings. If you do not know who these people are or what role these other things played in the Old Testament, you will miss the meaning of the crucial arguments which the writer is making about the work of Christ. In the course of these studies we have attempted to provide at least some of the Scriptures which will assist you in understanding the points which the writer is making. Remember, if you do not know, ASK! The NIV has been used in preparing the questions but you should be able to answer them using the translation of your choice.

For your own benefit and for the benefit of your study group it is important that you complete the assigned readings and study questions before coming to the study.

The Epistle to the Hebrews Study #1

READ: Hebrews 1:1-14

- 1) Identify some of the forefathers to whom God spoke through the prophets.

- 2) List, by name, six of these prophets.

- 3) Describe some of the various ways employed by God to speak through these men.

- 4) In what position is God's Son in relation to the aforementioned prophets?

- 5.a) According to verse 3 who is the Son?

- 5.b) What does / has He done?

- 6) On the basis of the information given in verses 2 and 3, what conclusion is made in verse 4?

7) This conclusion is supported by a number of quotations from the Old Testament. Please read each of these in their original context and answer the following questions:

a) What is the original occasion/situation/circumstance in which these statements are made?

b) What do you think the original readers of these statements understood them to mean?

Psalms 2:1-12 - Quotation: verse 7

2 Samuel 7:4-17 - Quotation: verse 14

Psalms 104:1-9 - Quotation: verse 4

Psalms 45:1-17 - Quotation: verses 6 & 7

Psalms 102:1-28 - Quotation: verses 25-27

Psalms 110:1-7 - Quotation: verse 1

9) List the important statements made about the Son in this chapter.

10) Explain how this information can influence your life this week.

The Epistle to the Hebrews Study #2

READ: Hebrews 2:1-18

1.a) According to verse 1, why do people drift away?

1.b) What factors in your own experience weaken your commitment to Christ?

2) Why should the message from the Lord be taken seriously?

NOTE; "The message (word-KJV) spoken by angels" refers to the Law of Moses - Acts 7:38 and 53; Galatians 3:19)

3) How did the writer come to his understanding of the message of salvation; verses 3 & 4?

4) How is the sovereignty of God displayed in verse 4?

5) From verse 5 to verse 13 there are four more quotations from the Old Testament. Please read them in their original context and then come back to this Scripture and answer the next five questions.

Psalms 8:1-9 - Quotation: verses 4-6

Psalms 22:1-31 - Quotation verse 22

Isaiah 8:11-22 - Quotations: verses 17 & 18

6) In whose life is the promise of Psalm 8 fulfilled?

7) By what means does Jesus fulfill these prophecies and make these blessings available to us?

8) Why is the death of Jesus effective?

9) What do we learn about Jesus from verse 17?

10) Why is the ministry of Jesus effective (verse 18)?

11) Of what present benefit to you is the high priestly ministry of Jesus?

The Epistle to the Hebrews Study #3

READ: Hebrews 3:1-18

- 1) On the basis of the information which you already have, explain why your thoughts should be fixed on (you should "*consider*" - KJV) Jesus?

- 2) What additional information about Jesus is given in verses 1-6?

- 3) Why does the writer introduce Moses at this point in his explanation of identifying Jesus and his work?

- 4) What role does courage and hope (confidence - KJV) have in your life - verse 6?

- 5) Read the quotation in verses 7-11 from the Old Testament in its original context - Psalm 95:1-11. What is the first important point that the writer of Hebrews makes about this quotation?

- 6) Read the historical record of the event to which this psalm refers: Exodus 17:1-7, Numbers 20:1-13; Numbers 14:1-4 and 20-35.
 - 6.a) On how many occasions did the people test the Lord?

 - 6.b) Why did they first complain?

 - 6.c) What decision resulted in their being excluded from the promised land?

7) What is the point of this illustration from the Old Testament (verse 12)?

8) Suggest two ways in which you can fulfill the responsibility given to you in verse 13.

9) How is the response of these people to the hearing of the Word of the Lord described (verses 8, 13, 15)?

10) Why did they respond this way (verses 12, 18, 19)?

11) Come prepared to discuss ways in which this kind of behaviour can be prevented today.

The Epistle to the Hebrews Study #4

READ: Hebrews 4:1-13

1.a) Why are you exhorted to be careful about how you behave?

1.b) Why is this exhortation necessary?

2) From your own experience and understanding, summarize, in point form, the Gospel which was preached to you.

3) This message is of no value unless what condition is met?

4) What reason is given for the failure of these people to enter into God's rest?

5) Why does the writer emphasize this fact?

6) List the characteristics of the Word of God (verse 12).

7) Think of an occasion in your own life where the Word of God has had this effect. Share your experience with the group if you feel comfortable to do so.

8) Suggest a practical application of verse 13 as far as you are concerned.

9) What fact about the life of Jesus is given to us as a particular encouragement (verse 15)?

10) Why can we come with confidence to the throne of Grace?

The Epistle to the Hebrews Study #5

READ: Hebrews 5:1-14

1) On the basis of the information given in verses 1-4, describe a high priest.

What kind of person was he?

What did he do?

The priesthood was very much a part of the lives of the original readers of this letter. They could follow the arguments of the writer because they knew the origin of the Priesthood. They were familiar with its responsibilities and privileges. The tabernacle, the visible witness to God's presence in their midst, was to them a historical reality. The temple in Jerusalem was, at this point in time, still standing. The offerings and sacrifices were still being made. The service of the High Priest, although corrupted by political considerations, was still a meaningful ministry.

Today this is not true, but the crucial arguments of this letter can be readily understood if you will familiarize yourself with the world view against which this letter was written. This information is found in the first five books of the Old Testament. For the purpose of this study you should read at least the following chapters:

- Exodus, Chapters 25-30
- Leviticus, Chapters 8-10
- Leviticus, Chapter 16
- Leviticus, Chapters 21 & 22
- Genesis, Chapter 14:17-24
- Psalms, Chapter 110:1-7

2) Who was Aaron?

3) Who was Melchizedek?

4.a) In what way were the above similar?

4.b) How were they different?

5) List the important statements made about Jesus in Hebrews 5:7-10.

6) What do you think the statement "*Once made perfect*" (being made perfect-KJV) in verse 9 means?

7) Why does the writer anticipate that his teaching will create a problem for his readers?

8.a) What teaching falls under the classification of "*milk*"?

8.b) What teaching falls under the classification of "*solid food*"?

NOTE: The answer to #8 and #9 seems to be clearer in the NIV

9) What is the evidence that a person has moved from being an infant to being mature?

10) Looking seriously at your life, what factors do you think have hindered your growth, and what have you found to be the things which promote your growth.

The Epistle to the Hebrews Study #6

READ: Hebrews 6:1-20

1) List the elementary teachings about Christ - verses 1 & 2.

2) Choose one of these and explain how you would defend it.

3.a) List those that you would have difficulty defending.

3.b) What can you do to solve this problem?

4) Put verses 4-6 in your own words.

NOTE: The interpretations of this passage have been many and you should not let a debate over these hinder you from completing this study. The main interpretations are given for your consideration at the end of this study.

Regardless of which of these you choose, it must be remembered that your interpretation of a difficult passage like this one cannot be allowed to contradict what is the clear teaching of other scriptures concerning the Work of Christ, the basis of salvation, the promise of eternal life, etc

5) What familiar experience is used to confirm the warning given in verses 4-6 (see verses 7 & 8)?

6) What did the writer believe about those to whom he wrote - verses 9 & 10.

7) What ever-present danger must be avoided and what protection is recommended to insure that we inherit what has been promised - verses 11& 12?

8) **READ: Genesis 22:1-19** to familiarize yourself with the situation in which this promise was made to Abraham. What is the benefit of an oath of this kind?

9) By what two unchangeable (immutable - KJV) things are we to be encouraged - verses 13 & 14, 16 & 17?

10) Why is the knowledge that Jesus went before us into the sanctuary an anchor for the soul?

"If they fall away" means "fall away from Christianity." The verb parapipto is found only here in the NT, and its meaning is clear. The writer is envisaging people who have been numbered among the followers of Christ but now leave that company. Such cannot be brought back to repentance. Notice that he does not say "cannot be forgiven" or "cannot be restored to salvation" or the like. It is repentance that is in mind, and the writer says that it is impossible for these people to repent. This might mean that the repentance that involves leaving a whole way of life to embrace the Christian way is unique. In the nature of the case, it cannot be repeated. There is no putting the clock back. But it seems more likely that the reference is to a repentance that means leaving the backsliding into which the person has fallen. He cannot bring himself to this repentance.

The author is saying that those who deny Christ in this way are really taking their stand among those who crucified Jesus. In heart and mind they make themselves one with those who put him to death on the cross at Calvary. Heautois ("to themselves"; NIV, "to their loss") points to this inward attitude. The final words of verse 6 stress what this attitude means.

There has been much discussion of the significance of this passage:

- Some think that the author is speaking about genuine Christians who fall away and that he denies that they may ever come back. This view sets the writer of the epistle in contradiction with other NT writers for whom it is clear that the perseverance of the saints is something that comes from God and not from their own best efforts (e.g., John 6:37; 10:27-29).
- Others think that the case is purely hypothetical. Because the writer does not say that this has ever happened, they infer that it never could really happen and that to put it this way makes the warning more impressive. But unless the writer is speaking of something that could really happen, it is not a warning about anything. Granted, he does not say that anyone has apostatized in this way, nevertheless, he surely means that someone could, and he does not want his readers to do so.
- A third possibility is that the writer is talking about what looks very much like the real thing but lacks something. The case of Simon Magus springs to mind. He is said to have believed, to have been baptized, and to have continued with Philip (Acts 8:13). Presumably he shared in the laying on of hands and the gift given by it. Yet after all this Peter could say to him, "*Your heart is not right before God...you are full of bitterness and captive to sin*" (Acts 8:21-23). The writer is saying that when people have entered into the Christian experience far enough to know what it is all about and have then turned away, then, as far as they themselves are concerned, they are crucifying Christ. In that state they cannot repent. Expositors Bible Commentary Vol.12 p.55-56

The Epistle to the Hebrews Study #7

READ: Hebrews 7:1-28

Chapter six concluded with the statement that Jesus has become a high priest in the order of Melchizedek. Because of the important application to us of his position, the author, in chapter seven, proceeds to develop in more detail the conclusions about Jesus' ministry which he first reached in Hebrews 4:14-15 and 4:1-10.

1) **Read again Genesis 14:17-24.** Based on this passage, the writer makes several statements about Melchizedek. List them - verses 1-3.

2) What does he conclude, based on the fact that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek - verses 4-10?

3.a) Under the law, who were the priests?

3.b) What was the penalty for disregarding this order?

4) How is it possible for the Lord to be a high priest since his ancestors were of the tribe of Judah - verses 11-17?

5) How does a change in the priesthood affect the law?

6) Why is it possible for us to draw near to God - verse 19?

7) **Read Psalm 110 again.** What declaration is made in verse 4?

8.a) What makes the priesthood of Jesus different from that of other priests - verses 23-25?

8.b) What new benefit is a direct result of this - verse 24?

9) How does the priesthood of Jesus meet our needs - verse 26?

10) Reread this chapter and summarize the writer's argument in your own words.

11) Share with the group what verse 25 means to you personally.

The Epistle to the Hebrews Study #8

READ: Hebrews 8:1-13

- 1) What is the position which Jesus has today?

- 2) In what sanctuary does Jesus serve?

- 3) What claim does the writer make about the tabernacle built by Moses?

- 4) On the basis of what covenant did the Aaronic priesthood serve - verse 7?

- 5) Why is the ministry of Jesus superior - verse 6?

- 6) Why was the old covenant replaced - verses 7 & 8?

- 7) **Read Jeremiah 29:1-23.** This is the historical framework in which the promise of Jeremiah 31:33 & 34 is made. Under what conditions was the promise of a new covenant first made?

- 8) Why is a new covenant necessary - verses 8 & 9?

- 9) List the ways in which the new covenant differs from the old - verses 1-12.

- 10) Why is the old covenant no longer to be the means we use to approach God - verse 13?

The Epistle to the Hebrews Study #9

READ: Hebrews 9:1-28

The world view of covenant, tabernacle, priests, gifts and sacrifices through which the author develops his argument that the eternal purpose of God is being fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus, is one with which his readers were completely familiar. It was part of their heritage. This is not true today, although some of you, through a lifetime of reading the Old Testament, will follow his argument without difficulty. Others will need to read at least some background material.

So that you can understand these crucial chapters, 9 and 10, we would recommend:

- For the tabernacle - Exodus 36-40 and/or 40.
- For the priesthood - Exodus 28 & 29 and / or Leviticus 9
- For the offerings - Leviticus 1-7 and / or Leviticus 16
- For the waters of cleansing - Numbers 19

- 1) Identify the "*First Covenant*" to which the writer refers in verse 1.

- 2) He refuses to discuss in detail the significance of the furniture of the tabernacle. Can you suggest a reason?

- 3) What was the Holy Spirit teaching through the ministry of the High Priest - verses 8 & 9?

- 4) Why were the gifts and sacrifices under the first covenant not effective?

- 5) Express the meaning of verse 11 in your own words,

- 6) In what ways is the sacrifice of Christ different from those previous offerings - verse 12?

- 7) What is the result of his offering?

8) On what basis is Christ the mediator of the "*New Covenant*" - verse 15?

9) What point is being made in verses 16-22?

10) List the differences between the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifices offered under the Law.

11) What does verse 28 mean when it states that Christ will come (appear-KJV) a second time to bring salvation (unto salvation-KJV)?

The Epistle to the Hebrews Study #10

READ: Hebrews 10:1-18

1.a) Why couldn't the Law make the worshipper perfect - verse 1?

1.b) How was its shadowy nature demonstrated - verses 1-4?

2) The writer uses Psalm 40:6-8 in support of his argument that some other means to deal with sin must be found. What does he say Christ has done - verses 8 & 9?

3) The sacrifice of the body of Jesus is seen as a fulfilment of the will of God (see also Acts 2:22-24). What is the result of his offering?

4) What are the contrasts between the sacrifices made by the Old Testament priesthood and the sacrifice which Jesus made - verses 11-14?

5) What proof is given to show that the sacrifice which Jesus made is complete verse 12?

6) What truth about the Holy Spirit can be understood from a comparison between Jeremiah 31:33-34 and the statements made in verses 15-19?

READ: Hebrews 10:19-39

7) What benefits are ours through the blood of Jesus - verses 19-22?

8) What are our responsibilities - verses 23-25?

9) Come prepared to discuss ways in which you can discharge these obligations.

NOTE: The exposition of verses 26-31 again raises many difficulties. Since the interpretations of this passage are many, the force of this warning is well put in the Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. XII, page 108, paragraph 2:

The quotation here emphasizes that vengeance is a divine prerogative. It is not for men to take it into their own hands. But the emphasis is not on that, it is rather on the certainty that the Lord will act. The wrongdoer cannot hope to go unpunished because avenging wrong is in the hands of none less than God. The second quotation leaves no doubt whatever about the Lord's intervention, for he is named and so is his activity. The word "judge" may mean "give a favourable judgment" as well as "condemn". In both Deuteronomy 32:35 and Psalm 135:14, it is deliverance that is in mind; and both times RSV, for example, translates it as "vindicate." But in the OT God does not vindicate his people if they have sinned. Vindication implies that they have been faithful in their service and that God's intervention recognizes this. But where they have not been faithful, that same principle of impartial judgment according to right demands that intervention bring punishment. It is this that the author has primarily in mind. That a man claims to be a member of the people of God does not exempt him from judgment. God judges all. Let not the apostate think that he, of all people, can escape.

Again, as in chapter six, the interpretation adopted cannot be allowed to contradict the clear teaching of Scripture relating to the work of Christ.

10) What was the motivation for the extraordinary conduct of these people following their salvation - verses 32-34?

11) What character trait is essential in the Christian life and why?

12) What blessing is promised?

The Epistle to the Hebrews Study #11

READ: Hebrews 11:1-40

1) What do you mean when you say: "*I have faith.*"

2) Why is faith necessary regarding the origin of the universe?

3) In what way did the following men express their faith:

Abel

Enoch

Noah

Abraham

4) What was the common factor in each of their actions?

5) Identify the two essential parts to any successful approach to God - verse 6.

6) All the people had the same experience:

6.a) What was it - verses 13-16?

6.b) Why is this an encouragement to us?

7) Why are the particular actions of the following men regarded as evidence of their faith:

Abraham

Isaac

Jacob

Joseph

Moses

8) Identify and discuss the two factors that are identified as being crucial to Moses' faith - verses 24-27.

9) In his summary statement in verses 32-40 the writer identifies as men and women of faith, some who were victorious and some who were defeated. How can he arrive at such a conclusion?

10) Do the words of encouragement and explanation in verses 39 & 40 make sense to you? Explain your answer.

The Epistle to the Hebrews Study #12

READ: Hebrews 12:1-29

1) What actions are to be the result of considering the information given to us in chapter 11?

2) Why should Jesus be the person on whom we fix our attention - verses 2-3?

3) Put verses 4-6 into your own words.

4) What is the difference between the discipline received from our fathers and from God?

5) Why is the Lord's discipline beneficial - verse 11?

6) Suggest ways in which discouragement can be overcome, fulfilling the commands of verses 12 & 13.

7) What does it mean to be holy - verse 14?

8) Give reasons why a root of bitterness, sexual immorality and godlessness (profane - KJV) are to be avoided.

9) Make a list that contrasts the situation with Mount Sinai and the situation of the followers of Jesus - verses 18-24.

10) Why should we respond to the word spoken to us - verses 25 & 26?

11) To what important conclusion does the writer come in connection with the Kingdom of God - verses 27 & 28a?

12) What is our appropriate response to the above conclusion?

The Epistle to the Hebrews Study #13

READ: Hebrews 13:1-25

- 1) What activities are always appropriate for Christians - verses 1-3?

- 2) Have you ever participated in any or all of these obligations? Share your experience with the group if you have (and feel you want to.)

- 3) Explain why you think that the writer makes these comments about marriage and money - verses 4-6.

- 4) On the basis of verses 7 & 8 what conclusion can we come to as to the character of the leaders of these people?

- 5) Partaking of ceremonial foods as a means of gaining God's approval was an attractive option to these believers. This, as well as other kinds of strange teachings were to be avoided. Today what popular teachings would fall under this classification?

- 6) What is the point of the illustration used in verses 11-13?

- 7) Through Jesus, what acceptable sacrifices can be offered to God verses 15 & 16?

- 8) Why is obedience to our spiritual leaders important - verse 17?

- 9) What activities are attributed to the God of peace and what are the direct benefits to us - verses 20-21?

- 10) Discuss practical ways in which you can demonstrate that you are equipped by God to do good.