

## The Epistle to the Hebrews – Part 1

**Key verse: Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (NASB)**

### Hebrews 1-7

Resources: Key Word Study Bible (NASB); NLT Study Bible; Life Application Study Bible (NIV); Quest Study Bible (NIV); MacArthur Study Bible (NASB); ESV Study Bible; and The Power of a Praying Woman Bible (Stormie Omartian, NIV)

The full title of the book of Hebrews is “The Letter to the Hebrews” or “The Epistle to the Hebrews.” The Hebrew people are the descendants of Abraham. Even before God changed Abraham’s name, he was known as “Abram the Hebrew” (14:13). The initial audience to whom Hebrews was addressed probably belonged to a group of house churches in Rome in early 60 AD. Some had grown cold (5:11-14); some had a skewed theological perspective (2:1); and some abandoned Christ and the church (6:4-8). The letter is written like a pastoral response to a struggling people. Many of the recipients were Jewish Christians who were being tempted to return to Judaism.

A foundational truth in Hebrews is that God has spoken (Hebrews 1:1-2). The book reminds us that the word of God is living and active, and is to be heard, heeded, obeyed, and believed. Through His Word, God initiates relationship with us, expects us to listen to Him and respond in faith.

The author of Hebrews is unknown. Possible authors include Paul, Apollos, Barnabas, Priscilla and Aquilla, Jude, Clement of Rome, Philip, by Paul in Hebrew and translated to Greek by Luke, and Silas. Most scholars agree it was not written by Paul since this author received his information from witnesses of Jesus and Paul recorded that he was eye witness of Jesus Christ. Whoever the author is, he was a well educated committed Christian leader, dynamic preacher, trained in interpretation to exposition, and had memorized large portions of the Old Testament. He wrote with urgency and passion. Although it is unknown who actually penned these words to paper, we do know that ultimately it was breathed and inspired by the Lord God.

The writer teaches by using Scripture. Hebrews continually references other Old Testament passages and quotes Scripture from Genesis 2, 5, 21, 22, and 28; Exodus 19, 20, and 25; Deuteronomy 9, 31, and 32; 2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 28; Psalms 2, 8, 40, 45, 95, 104, and 110; Proverbs 3; Jeremiah 31; Habakkuk 2; and Haggai 2. In addition to what the words of Hebrews teaches us, perhaps by his style of writing, the author also shows us that anyone teaching us Scripture should be able to back up their teachings with Scripture. Teachers intent on teaching the truth should not be offended when we ask for a Scripture reference, and we must be diligent in these days of deception to verify in Scripture that what we are being taught (in and out of church) lines up exactly with God’s Word.

Historical Setting: This book was most likely written sometime between 60 and 70 AD. The Temple was destroyed in 70 AD and the author writes as if the Temple animal sacrifices are still occurring. During that time, pagans considered early Christians “atheists” because they did not believe in the Greek or Roman gods. Many Jews rejected Christians because most of the Jews

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didn't accept Jesus as Messiah. Significant events that occurred during the decade that Hebrews was most likely recorded include the stoning of James, Jesus' brother, in Jerusalem (early 60s); Paul's imprisonment and release in Rome (60-62); the destruction of Rome by fire (July 64); persecution of Christians under Nero, Peter crucified in Rome, and Paul martyred in Rome (64-65); war between the Romans and Jews in Jerusalem (66-70); Jerusalem and the Temple destroyed (70).

The book of Hebrews is relevant today:

- It addresses Christians who were facing some persecution, and knew that persecution was about to intensify.
- The author was like us—He had been told of Jesus by someone else but did not actually know Jesus when He walked this earth (2:3).
- It provides us over 70 warnings and instructions on how to live a life pleasing to God (primarily in chapters 6 and 10-12). Note that warnings are an expression of God's grace—why warn us if there is no hope?
- It encourages us with over 80 truths about God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that supplies the hope required to endure these last days.

Hebrews teaches us Jesus is prophet, priest, apostle, and king, and that He is superior to all others who have had these positions. The author gives several examples and always speaks from lesser to greater—from angels to Jesus; from Moses to Jesus; from the sacrifice of animals to Jesus; from the Levitical high priests to Jesus; from the Law to Jesus; from Melchizedek to Jesus; and from all creation to Jesus. In all these positions and activities, Jesus is supreme! He is the best choice because He has a better covenant (writes His laws in our hearts), better sanctuary (heaven), and a better sacrifice for sins (the perfect Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world).

Clearly, from this book we should learn that Christ is the only way to God. Faith is good, but it must be in Jesus. The Law can't save us; Moses can't save us; angels can't save us; the church can't save us; nothing else in creation can save us. Only Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, can give us peace with God.

Hebrews encourages us to listen to God and endure to the end. Holy living is a part of the perseverance encouraged throughout this book and others. This ongoing encouragement can make some think the text is saying we can lose our salvation. It is critical to know we are secure in Christ. Once we are saved, we are always saved. For more on this topic, see "Once Saved Always Saved" at the end of this lesson.

### Day One: Read Chapter 1, Jesus Has Spoken

1. The word "consider" means to think about something or someone carefully, especially in order to make a choice or decision. The Letter to the Hebrews gives us much to consider.

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Read Hebrews 3:1, 10:24, 11:11, 11:19, 11:26, 12:3, and 13:7. What are some specific things we should consider as we go through this book, and through life?

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2. Notice three important truths from Hebrews 1:2:

- What days are we currently living? \_\_\_\_\_
- Who has God used to speak to us in these final days? \_\_\_\_\_
- Who is heir of all things? \_\_\_\_\_
- How did God create the universe? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Verse 1:4 tells us Jesus is far greater than angels. What are some things God said about Jesus and angels that illuminate Jesus' superiority over angels? See 1:4-14.

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4. In those same verses what titles did God use to describe His Son?

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5. Which one of those titles means the most to you right now? Why?

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**Prayer focus:** Hebrews 1:3 says, Jesus “is the radiance of His (God’s) glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Acknowledge to Him in your prayer today that you believe this to be true; praise Him for who He is; and tell Him one thing you trust Him to “uphold” for you.

### Day Two: Read Chapter 2, Jesus Provides Salvation

6. What must we do to keep from drifting from the truth? 2:1

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7. The book of Hebrews addresses ideas popular during that time that were contrary to the truth such as angels, Moses and the Law being equal to the Messiah. What is being taught or discussed among Christians today that we should recognize is contrary to the truth?

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8. How has God confirmed His message of salvation through Jesus Christ? 2:4

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9. Describe a time God confirmed His salvation in you.

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10. What had to happen in order for mankind to have salvation? 2:9-10, 14-17

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11. Who can help us when we are tempted, and how is this possible? 2:18

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**Prayer focus:** The following are truths from Hebrews 2:11-12.

- Jesus makes you holy.
- God is your Father.
- Jesus is your brother.
- Jesus proclaims God to His brothers and sisters.
- Jesus praises God publicly.

Consider writing a prayer of thanks and commitment that include these truths.

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### Day Three: Read Chapter 3, Unbelieving Heart

12. What disqualifies a person from entering God's rest? 3:19

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13. What does unbelief do within people? 3:12

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14. According to verses 7-12 and 15-18, what are the symptoms that a person is living in unbelief?

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15. Believers are told to help combat unbelief by encouraging one another (3:13). What are some practical things we can do to encourage each other?

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16. What is the reward for believing God? 3:14

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**Prayer focus:** Ask God if there is something you know about Him but really don't believe. Ask Him to help your unbelief.

### Day Four: Read Hebrews 4 and 5, Believers Enter God's Rest

17. The promise of entering God's rest still stands (4:1), a rest that was prepared from the foundation of the world (4:3). What caused people to fail to enter God's rest? 4:2, 3, 6

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18. What are some things we know about God’s rest from Hebrews 4:8-11?

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19. What do we know about God’s Word? 4:12

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20. One of the roles Jesus fulfills for us is that of High Priest (4:14). What did a high priest do? 5:1-3

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21. Describe how we can and should interact with the High Priest. 4:14-16, 5:9

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22. The author of Hebrews, by his thorough explanation of Jesus as priest has made his listeners fully aware that the old system of sacrificing animals is no longer needed—the Temple is not needed. This knowledge would have prepared them to easier accept the disaster that was about to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple. When and how has God prepared you, or someone you love, in advance for a disaster that had to be endured?

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**Prayer focus:** Hebrews 5:7 says Jesus “offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears.” What unbelieving loved one needs that kind of prayer warrior today? Will you be the one to earnestly, fervently, “with loud crying and tears,” pray for them?

### Day Five, Read Hebrews 5:11-6:20, Christians Mature

23. In Hebrews 5:11-6:3, what are some of the basics about Christ that His followers should know?

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24. Based on the length of time you have been a Christian, mark “X” on the following line where you should be and “O” where you are.

**Milk**  
(Basic knowledge about God’s Word)

**Solid Food**  
(Skilled to recognize the truth)

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If you are beyond “Milk” level, then you realize that it is because of the grace of God that you have been able to read, understand, and apply Scripture to your life. If you are at “Milk” level, then know and understand that God’s grace to open your mind to understand and apply His Word is available to you. Milk is good so let’s not dwell on the fact that we may have spent too long on the bottle and being spoon fed by others; however, it’s time to move forward on this scale. Commit today to dine with Jesus on His Word. What is a subject you have wondered what God really has to say about it? \_\_\_\_\_.

Agree with Him today that you will seek Him yourself for those answers. Use study helps to send you to the right Scripture, but get your answers from Scripture.

25. If an enlightened person rejects Jesus, how do they come back to repentance? 6:4-8

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26. What can we do to make sure we do not become spiritually dull and indifferent? 6:10-12

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27. How do we know that once we have been saved by Jesus, we will always be saved by Jesus? 6:13-20

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**Prayer focus:** If you have concerns that you may not have ever truly confessed Jesus as Lord and believed in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, call your group leader to pray with her about your salvation. If you are certain you have entrusted your life to Jesus, ask Him what your next step should be in maturing in your faith.