

*a Superior*  
**Savior**

**20-Day Study of  
HEBREWS**

**by Kathy Howard**

## Introduction to Hebrews

*Jesus isn't merely **one** way to God; He is the **only** way to God.*

Do you agree or disagree with the statement above? It isn't very politically correct. In fact, it sounds very rigid doesn't it? Some would even call it "intolerant." Yet, according to God's Word, it is truth.

Those of us who embrace this truth are in danger of being labeled "intolerant" and "narrow-minded." The world loudly proclaims that Jesus might be right for us, but not necessarily right for everyone. They "logically" argue that there are many ways to reach God. How should we respond to this as followers of Christ?

Today's culture pressures Christians to conform to its way of thinking. We can have our beliefs as long as we keep them to ourselves and don't try to push them on anyone else. If our faith influences the way we think or behave then the culture calls us "radical."

As our culture increasingly becomes more intolerant of Christianity, it is vital that God's people commit to "non-conformity" with the world and its ways. The book of *Hebrews* offers timely wisdom and practical advice for those of us who long to glorify our Savior in a misguided world.

### **Purpose and Theme**

The book of *Hebrews* is more of a sermon than a letter, written and delivered as a word of warning and encouragement for its first hearers. The discouraged recipients were in danger of rejecting their faith in Christ. Based on the text, it seems they were tired of living outside the cultural mainstream.

This group of Christians was holding back from complete obedience to Christ and even backing away from the faith. Their hesitancy to move forward had stunted their spiritual growth. They should have been growing spiritually but instead suffered from spiritual lethargy and immaturity (5:11-6:3). Fear of persecution or reluctance to separate from Judaism kept them from "eating solid food." The author's main purpose was to remind his hearers of the superiority of Christ and His work on their behalf and to urge them to continue strongly in their faith.

### **Original Recipients**

As mentioned earlier, *Hebrews* does not fit the traditional form of a letter. Without the regular opening and greeting of the biblical epistles we don't have the benefit of being told by the author to whom he is writing. The traditional title, "To the Hebrews," was added sometime late in the second century and was therefore, not a part of the original document. But this editorial comment is part of the evidence for the identity of the original recipients.

Since *Hebrews* is packed with Old Testament symbolism and Levitical ritual, most scholars hold to the belief that the original recipients were primarily Jewish Christians. Apparently, many were considering rejecting Christ and returning to their Jewish roots. This was probably due to extreme cultural pressure and widespread persecution of Christians. In the first century AD, the Jewish faith was accepted by Rome, but Christianity was not.

Biblical scholars' best guess for the location of the original recipients is Rome. Although the statement, "those from Italy send their greetings," in 13:24, could mean the letter originated in Rome, most scholars disagree. The earliest evidence of *Hebrew's* use in the ancient church locates the document in Rome. Therefore, the document was probably sent to Rome from a location where Christians from Rome then lived.

### **Date**

Like identifying the original recipients, setting a date for the writing of *Hebrews* is strictly an educated guess based on the evidence. The book of Hebrews was well known and quoted by church fathers before the end of the first century AD so we know it had to have been written before the turn of the century. However, there are clues within the book that help us narrow it down a little more.

The tabernacle and sacrificial system are central motifs in *Hebrews*. Because the author never mentions the destruction of the temple, the date of writing was probably before 70AD when the Roman army invaded Jerusalem.

While the recipients had suffered persecution because of their faith, the author writes they have not yet "shed blood" (12:4). Most scholars believe this reveals that although the recipients faced persecution they had not yet experienced martyrdom. Emperor Nero certainly opposed Christians, but by the late 60's AD his persecution was brutal, bloody, and very deadly. But the persecution under Emperor Claudius did not include death.

One last clue helps us come fairly close in establishing a date of writing. The original recipients and the author of the letter were "second generation Christians." According to 2:3, they did not hear the Gospel directly from Jesus but rather from those who heard it from Jesus. Considering the evidence, many scholars date the writing of *Hebrews* in the early 60's AD.

### **Author**

The author of *Hebrews* does not identify himself. Although several early church fathers leaned toward Pauline authorship, a majority of today's biblical scholars believe someone other than Paul was the author. First, the style of *Hebrews* is very different from the style we know as Paul's. Additionally, the presence of the High Priesthood theme, which is very prevalent in *Hebrews*, would be unusual for Paul.

However, the biggest piece of internal evidence against Pauline authorship is the information given us by the author in 2:3. Like the audience, the author heard the Gospel from someone other than Jesus. Paul would never claim this. In fact, Paul often testified that Jesus spoke to him directly. But if Paul didn't write *Hebrews*, then who did?

Even though the author does not clearly make himself known, there are several things we can determine. He was a dynamic preacher who was knowledgeable about the Old Testament and its interpretations. He was highly educated and a committed minister of the Gospel of Christ. He was probably a "he" because of the use of a masculine, personal pronoun. Some recent suggestions include Barnabas, Apollos, Philip, and Silvanus.

Like the biblical scholars, we can make some educated guesses. But since only God really knows whom He used to pen the book of *Hebrews*, it is best for us to plead ignorance.

### **Content**

The author of *Hebrews* alternates between exposition and exhortation. He expounds greatly on the person and work of Christ, beginning with Christ in heaven. Then he brings Him among humanity and finally exalts Him to our great High Priest. *Hebrews* centers on Christ and His sacrifice for sinful humanity. The author also helps us understand the Old Covenant (and therefore the Old Testament) in light of Christ and His work. Christ is supreme!

The author's exhortation passages seek to motivate his hearers to a response. The exhortations give "warning and encouragement," and "punishment and promise." They concern issues of falling away, sin, and the need for endurance and obedience. The author uses both positive and negative examples of biblical characters to teach his readers.

**Christ is superior.** If the original hearers of *Hebrews* fully grasped this truth expressed so eloquently by the author, then they never left their Christian faith to return to their Jewish roots. In fact, as Nero's persecution heated up in Rome, some of them may have even laid down their life as a testimony to their great Savior.

## DAY 1

*God speaks to His people.* The Creator of the universe reveals Himself and His ways to lowly mankind. We should be filled with awe, but how often do we stop and reflect on this incredible truth? God speaks to you. God speaks to me. God speaks...

The author of *Hebrews* began his sermon with this topic. And he didn't waste any time building up steam or going over preliminaries. He jumped right in with both feet and didn't come up for air for four full verses. It must have been because he was completely overwhelmed with the thought that God revealed Himself to us.

### **God's final revelation**

#### **Read Hebrews 1:1-4**

The first four verses of *Hebrews* is one long phrase in the original Greek, built around the main clause, "God...has spoken." The opening statement of the Hebrew preacher's sermon really packs a punch. He managed to present his main topic and catch the readers' attention. The author's point: God has a message for the church and it is focused on the work and person of Jesus Christ.

*How did God formerly speak to mankind?*

*How does God speak to us in "these last days"?*

*In what ways is God's new revelation superior to the old?*

*List all the descriptions of Jesus that you can find in these four verses.*

#### **Read John 1:1-2, Philippians 2:6, and Colossians 1:15. Compare them with Hebrews 1:3a**

The Greek word *doxa*, translated as "glory" in Hebrews 1:3, refers to the luminous manifestation of God's person - the visible revelation of the nature and acts of God. God exhibits His character and ways to mankind by revealing His "glory." Moses saw God's glory each time he climbed the mountain to speak with God face to face.

The word "representation," also in verse 3, is translated from the Greek word *charakter*. It originally denoted an instrument used for engraving and then later for the impression made by

such an instrument, like the impression made on coins. The word speaks of the features of an object or person by which we are able to recognize it for what it is.

***Based on the above scriptures and definitions what do we learn about who Jesus is?***

***What do you think is significant about the “right hand” of the majesty (Hebrews 1:3)?***

Christ’s exaltation included the inheritance of “the name.” Initially, “the name” was used as a pious reference to God, but early Christians began to use it as a designation for Jesus. In Hebrews 1:4 the author makes the point that what was formerly reserved for the Father has now been bestowed on the exalted Christ.

### **Jesus is superior to the angels**

#### **Read Hebrews 1:5-14**

In the remainder of chapter one, the author quotes a number of Old Testament passages to illustrate the result of Christ’s exaltation and to further stress His superiority. During the first century, teachers of Scriptures would build support for their theological position by stringing together various Old Testament texts. These arguments, called “chain quotations,” were designed to overwhelm their audience with evidence. The author of *Hebrews* uses seven Old Testament quotations which would have been very familiar and respected by his Jewish readers.

***List the things you learn about the superiority and position of Christ from these seven OT passages.***

In his commentary on *Hebrews*, George Guthrie shows how the author of *Hebrews* utilized the Old Testament passages to make his point:

*He presents three pairs of Old Testament passages, followed by the final quotation of Psalm 110:1, in support of the Son’s superiority to the angels. The first pair (Ps 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14) proclaims the Son’s superiority by virtue of his unique relationship to the Father (Heb 1:5). The second (Ps 97:7; 104:4) focuses attention on the angels’ positive, but inferior, position and ministry (Heb 1:6-7). The Son’s eternity constitutes the topic of the third pair of texts (Ps 45:6-7; 102:25-27). **The NIV Application Commentary, pg 67.***

#### **Read Psalm 110:1 and compare with Hebrews 1:13**

Psalms 110:1 is pivotal passage for the author of *Hebrews*. It is one of the most highly Christological Scriptures in all of the Old Testament.

*What will be the duration of Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Majesty?*

*What does it mean that Jesus will make His enemies a footstool? What significance does this have for us today?*

Why would the author compare Jesus to the angels? The original audience of *Hebrews* believed in and respected the angels. The author's method of argumentation, which was "from lesser to greater," was often used by Jewish rabbis of the day. It started with the assumption that if something is true in a lesser situation (the angels), then it is certainly true in a greater, or more important, situation. With this audience, this argument would have definitely made the author's point. The angels may be great, but Jesus is far superior. He holds the preeminent position in all of creation – the right hand of the Majesty – and possesses the unlimited power needed to subdue all His enemies.

### **Personal Application**

*Summarize what you have learned about the supreme position, authority & nature of the Son.*

*Why is it important to recognize the deity of Christ? What implications does Christ's exaltation have for you today?*

Jesus Christ is the full and final revelation of God to mankind. In fact, Jesus *is* God. His earthly purpose was to provide forgiveness of sins through His shed blood. Only Jesus is able to offer this eternal salvation because He is God. No other person, no religion, no set of beliefs, no good work is sufficient. The person of Jesus and His death on the cross is far superior to all other claims of access to God. Without Jesus Christ there is no forgiveness of sins. What are you depending on for eternal life? What are your neighbors, friends, and co-workers counting on? Will you tell them about the superiority of your Savior?

## DAY 2

Compromise. Adjust. Accommodate. Concede. Give and take. We must make good use of these tactics in our human relationships if we want them to thrive. But they have no place in our relationship with Christ. His way is always right. When we deviate even a fraction from His plan we can suffer painful consequences.

Obedience to Christ requires constant awareness of His leading and purposeful effort to follow. Even just a few days of partial obedience or small compromises with the world can take us far off course. Careful attention and uncompromising obedience are required to keep from drifting away. This is the warning the author of *Hebrews* included in his sermon: “We must pay more careful attention...”

As we’ve learned, *Hebrews*’ original audience was in danger of slipping away from Christ by falling back into the ways of their Jewish roots. Following Christ brought hardship and persecution. Conforming to the world around them may have been easier in the moment, but the author warned them it carried dire spiritual consequences.

### **The New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant**

#### **Read Hebrews 2:1-4**

“Therefore” in verse 1 indicates that what is about to be said is true because of what has been established in the precious verses. In chapter one, we learned that God now speaks to us through His Son Jesus and that Jesus is superior to the angels. Heeding these truths will help us not drift away.

***Are you in danger of drifting away? In what ways do you need to pay more careful attention to the exalted Christ?***

The image of drifting portrays a shifting, even slightly, from the intended course. Picture a ship drifting off course in strong currents or wind. Even a small fraction off course can cause a ship to miss the harbor.

***How can this image of drifting be applied to the Christian life?***

At this time in Judaism there was a strong idea that angels were mediators of God’s covenant with Moses on Mt. Sinai. So the comparison here in vs. 2-4 is between the old covenant that came from God through angels to Moses and the new covenant that came to mankind through Jesus Christ. The new covenant does not replace the old; it builds on it. God’s revelation is progressive, moving from lesser to greater. The God of the old covenant is the same God of the new covenant with the same character, purposes, and expectations of His people.



***What does vs 2 say about the nature and authority of the old covenant that came through angels?***

These Jewish Christians would never question the authority of the old covenant, so the author used the old covenant to prove the superiority of the salvation message of the new covenant. Angels may have confirmed the old covenant, but God Himself declared and confirmed the new covenant. (Note: the author uses the word “salvation” as a synonym for the “new covenant.”)

***In what ways did God confirm or “testify to” the new covenant? (See verses 3-4.)***

***According to verse 3, how were the original hearers tempted to respond to this “great salvation?” What would be the result of this kind of response?***

Jesus, “the Lord” (vs 3), announced God’s great salvation. Those who heard Him were eye witnesses to its truth. God confirmed it through miracles and the outpouring of His Spirit. The message of the new covenant is that God freely offers us the gift of His grace. However, He holds us accountable for our response. The new covenant of God’s grace, eternal salvation, held out to us by Jesus. It cannot be ignored. It demands a response.

The apostle Paul devoted his life to sharing this “great salvation.” It was his primary message and the driving force of his ministry. He believed and taught that without it there is no hope.

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8.**

***Paul gives the gospel or the message of our “great salvation” in a nutshell. Restate it as found in these verses.***

The gospel message cannot be altered, changed, or adjusted to make it more palatable to worldly ears. Anything less than the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is not sufficient for the forgiveness of sins. A compromised gospel is no gospel at all.

**Everything is subject to Christ**

**Read Hebrews 2:5-9**

As we've seen, the author has proven from the Jewish Scriptures that Jesus is superior to the angels. Even though angels are powerful messengers of God and awesome heavenly beings, it is Christ whom God has exalted. It is Jesus to whom everything is subject. However, in verses 6-7, the author quotes from Psalm 8 to refer to Jesus and emphasize a different aspect of His nature.

While Psalm 8 beautifully reflects on the unique nature of mankind and our special place in God's creation, this passage also looks forward to the Incarnation. God became man. The Divine took on human flesh. For a while Jesus was made to be "a little lower than the angels." The author introduces this truth, not so his readers will question the superiority of Christ, but to prove Jesus' ability to empathize with mankind.

After Jesus' willingly took on humanity and humbled Himself to death on a cross for our sakes, the Father exalted Him to His rightful place of power and authority. Verse 8 states that everything is "subject" to Christ. The word translated "subject" is from the Greek *hypotasso*, which means the act of yielding to the perspective or position of another.

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:24-28** and compare with **Philippians 2:9-11** and **Hebrews 2:8**

*Is everything and everyone in submission to Christ now or is this "total submission" yet to come?*

The answer to the above question is "yes!" Jesus has complete authority now, but its full impact will not be realized until His second coming. This paradox is referred to as "now and not yet." Jesus has all power over all things, seen and unseen. The reign of Christ is a present reality, yet *we* will not fully see it until the final consummation of this age.

## **The Family of God**

**Read Hebrews 2:10-18**

Beginning in the second half of verse nine there is an abrupt shift from the glory of the exalted Christ to the suffering and death of the obedient Son. The idea of a "crucified Lord" was a scandal in the first-century and a stumbling block to Jews and Gentiles alike. In fact, people still stumble over Jesus today. Our society does not normally esteem a suffering servant.

*What was God's purpose in allowing the suffering and death of Jesus? (Note: His purpose is stated at the beginning of Hebrews 2:10 and then expanded on throughout the next 8 verses.)*

*In what ways is Jesus the "author" or "founder" of your salvation? Use verses 11-18 to help you with your answer.*

The author of our salvation was made “perfect” through suffering (vs 10). Generally, the word “perfect” means “complete, whole, or adequate.” In this case, it specifically refers to the fact that Jesus not only fully obeyed God’s plan for Him, but also that His obedience was adequate for “bringing many sons to glory.” Jesus’ death on the cross was His final act of obedience to the Father in a lifetime of complete obedience. His death also bought your salvation so that you can eternally share in His glory as His *brother* or *sister*. In God’s family we are all His honored children who will receive an eternal inheritance.

In verses 12 and 13, the author quotes from Psalm 22:22 and Isaiah 8:17-18 to emphasize the family relationship that has been established between the Son and the people of God. This emphasis turns our attention once again to the incarnation. The time when the Son lived among God’s children.

*Why was it necessary for Jesus to share in the children’s humanity?*

*Based on verses 14-18, make a list of all the things that Jesus’ incarnation and death accomplished for us.*

### **Personal Application**

If you have entered into a saving relationship with Christ, you belong to the family of God. Jesus is your brother and God is your Father. Jesus is not ashamed to call you His sister. All the rights and privileges of God’s family belong to you!

*What does it mean to you personally that God is your Father?*

*What implications does this have for how you should relate to God?*

## DAY 3

Think about the greatest person you've ever known. What made them great? Perhaps it was their character, accomplishments, or service to others. History tells countless stories of amazing men and women who have fought for the freedom of others, sacrificed to meet the needs of the weak, provided brave leadership in dark times, or offered love to the unlovely. These heroes deserve our admiration and respect.

Israel held Moses in the highest esteem. He was God's prophet, the man God used to lead them out of slavery in Egypt, and the one through whom God gave the Law. Moses was a great man. A man who was "faithful in all God's house" (3:2). However, Moses was still a man. He needed a Savior just like the rest of us. But – praise God - there is One greater than Moses!

In chapters one and two, the author established the superiority of Jesus over the angels. Now, as we move into chapter three, the author continues to build on the superiority of Christ by showing these Jewish Christians that Jesus deserves even more honor than the prophet Moses. "You thought Moses was great?! Just wait 'til you get a glimpse of Jesus!"

### **Focus on the Faithful One**

#### **Read Hebrews 3:1-6.**

Hebrews 3:1 is the only place in the NT where Jesus is called an "apostle." "Apostle," which means "one that is sent," is an appropriate term for Jesus since He was sent to declare God's name to His brothers (see 2:12). As an apostle Jesus reveals and represents God to us. As our high priest, Jesus goes to the Father on our behalf. He is our "go-between," the perfect and only mediator.

Now, having demonstrated the superiority of Christ over the angels and the result of His completed mission among humanity, the author strongly urges his audience to apply it to their lives. He commands them – and us – to "consider" or "fix your thoughts on Jesus" (3:1). His command is based on a "therefore." We are to focus on Jesus because of the things the author has already established. Because Jesus...

- Is superior to the angels
- Shared in and understands our humanity
- Has been exalted to the right hand of the Majesty in heaven
- Has authority over all things

The Greek verb *katanoeo*, which is translated as "fix your thoughts" (NIV), means to "consider, think about, notice, observe." The *Amplified Bible* reads: "thoughtfully and attentively consider Jesus." Jesus deserves more than casual thoughts or our limited attention during the day.

***What does it look like to "fix your thoughts on Jesus?" In your daily life, what are some practical ways we can obey this command?***

Starting in verse 2, the author begins the comparison between Jesus and Moses. His argument continues to build on Jesus' superiority and gives the readers more reason to focus their thoughts on Christ. The original audience had a higher respect for Moses than they did the angels. After all, through Moses God established the nation of Israel and the Old Covenant.

***What important difference in position between Moses and Jesus does the author point out? What illustration does he use to make his point?***

God's "house" is a word picture for the family of God – God's children, the brothers and sisters of Jesus. We are God's children, we "share in the heavenly calling" (3:1), if our sins have been purified by the blood of Jesus (1:3). Are you part of God's house? Can Jesus call you "sister?"

### **Rebels and Hard Hearts**

**Read Hebrews 3:7-19.**

In verse 1-6 the author presents Moses and Jesus as positive examples for God's children. The author now gives a negative example for comparison. He quoted from Psalm 95 to show the hard hearts of the children of Israel during the desert wanderings. Although God had miraculously rescued them, guided them with His presence, and provided for their daily needs they still rebelled. God overwhelmingly deserved their gratitude, worship, and praise, but the children of Israel refused to give it. The disastrous results impacted an entire generation. The author of Hebrews used this poignant example from his readers' history as a dramatic warning.

***List the phrases in verses Hebrews 3:8-11 and 16-18 used to describe the sin of the Israelites in the desert.***

***How did God respond?***

***Although neither the original audience of the book of Hebrews nor Christians today are facing a literal desert wandering, we are at risk for falling into the same sin. How can we help each other stand firm? (See 3:12-13 and 3:1.)***

**Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-12.**

Paul also used the Israelites in the desert as a negative example for Christians in Corinth. This warning extends to us today. In fact, Paul said these things happened to serve as examples to

God's people, to "keep us from setting our hearts on evil things" like the Israelites did in the desert. Their sin was recorded to remind us to carefully guard our hearts and minds to keep from falling.

***Although the Israelites were in a physical desert, they were not experiencing spiritual dryness. What provisions of God and manifestations of His presence does Paul mention in verses 1-5?***

***Make a list of God's provision and presence that you experience in your own life. How can reflecting on these things protect you from a sinful, unbelieving heart?***

The third chapter of Hebrews touches on a sticky issue. Although we will look at it again when we get to chapter 6, we need to briefly consider it here. Compare Hebrews 3:14 with 3:6b. Some Biblical scholars believe these verses imply it is possible to lose our salvation. This topic is hotly debated among scholars and Christian laymen alike. The author of Hebrews is not the only NT writer to make these kinds of conditional statements. Paul's letters contain many similar ones. (See Romans 11:22 and Colossians 1:22-23 for examples.) How then are we to understand these difficult passages?

Even though the NT authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit as they wrote they were not omniscient. Although they wrote to a collective group of "Christian brothers," they could not possibly know the true spiritual condition of another person. They - just as we must - depended on the outward manifestation in an individual's life as evidence of the reality of the inner spiritual condition. "Perseverance does not gain salvation but demonstrates the reality that true salvation has taken place." (NIV Commentary, pg. 136.)

***Read Ephesians 2:8-10. Describe this perspective on God's grace verses human works.***

### **Personal Application**

Chapter three illustrates both positive and negative examples of faithfulness to God. Jesus is the positive example that should encourage one to remain faithful. We must follow His example by "fixing our thoughts on Him" and encouraging each other. This should result in acts of faith that are evidence of a saving relationship with Jesus.

***What are some ways you can develop a true, clear picture of Jesus? How can you practically stayed focused on Him as your example to follow?***

## DAY 4

Once my husband was offered a job in another city. After seeking God's guidance, he felt strongly that accepting the job and moving the family was the right thing for many reasons. I did not want to leave my friends, my church, my life and start over – again. I balked. I cried. I sulked. I did my best to make my husband feel as horrible as I felt. Then God clearly showed me that I needed to trust my husband. It was not easy, but I yielded to God's leading through my husband. God blessed the move and our family.

Have you ever had to make a decision that would determine your future? Saying “yes” would require laying aside your own agenda and relying completely on someone else. You may have even feared that choice because success depended solely on the other person. Yet the potential benefits were limitless.

In the third and fourth chapters of Hebrews, the author reminds his readers of a great time of decision faced by their ancestors. This pivotal moment defined the next forty years for the Israelites. God called them to accept His promise and cross over into the Promised Land. But after “considering their options,” the Israelites balked. They cried. They sulked. They refused to go in and receive God's promise.

### **Those who Rejected God's Rest**

**Scan Numbers 13:16-33 as a reminder of this event.**

*According to verses 23 & 28, what did the Israelite spies find when Moses sent them to check out Canaan? Check all the following that apply. Now underline the things that frightened them.*

\_\_\_ *Lush grapes, pomegranates, and figs*

\_\_\_ *Large, fortified cities*

\_\_\_ *Big, powerful people*

*Reread Hebrews 3:16-19 from last week's lesson. According to verse 19, why were they unable to enter the Promised Land – or “God's rest” as the author of Hebrews calls it?*

God had been working in the lives of the Israelites. He brought them out of Egypt and chose them to be His people. The Israelites heard God's word and experienced His presence and His miracles in the desert. Yet they fell in the desert because of “unbelief.” Their unbelief was not a lack of belief in the existence of God. In fact, in Numbers 14:3, they blame God for their “predicament.”

The Israelites lacked belief not in God's existence but rather in His nature and character. The peoples of the Promised Land were powerful and their cities were fortified. The Israelites certainly could not overcome them and they failed to trust in the God that could.

The Israelites' doubt in the power and faithfulness of God cost them greatly. Their unbelief closed the doors of the Promised Land to an entire generation. Now, more than a millennium and a half later, the author of Hebrews urges his audience to avoid the same fate. God has once again called His people to enter His rest. Would they hear His voice and obey or would they harden their hearts and rebel like their fathers before them?

### **Read Hebrews 4:1-11.**

God offered His rest to the Israelites in the desert, to the Christians in the first century, and to us today. However, this promise of rest is conditional. In Hebrews 4:1, the NIV says, "let us be careful" to not fall short of God's rest. The word translated as "let us be careful" is the Greek word *phobeo*. It means to "frighten, to be alarmed; to be in awe of; to revere." Here, the NIV translation does not appropriately communicate the seriousness of the situation. Yes, God's promise stands; but it is possible to miss it.

Our God is loving, merciful, and gracious. But our God is also holy, righteous, and just. We Christians like to emphasize the former and minimize the latter. We need to maintain a proper balance between recognizing God's love and giving Him the reverence and awe He deserves. Chapter four of Hebrews strikes this balance by showing both God's promise and warning.

***What similarities between the Israelites in the desert and the author's audience do you find in Hebrews 4:2-3? What differences do you see?***

The generation of Israelites poised at the border of Canaan to receive God's promise refused to enter. They feared the giants of the land more than they feared God Almighty, the One who had delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh and his army. Their lack of belief in God's power and character hardened their hearts leading to disobedience, rebellion, and ultimately discipline. The Jewish Christians who originally received the book of Hebrews stood at the border of a spiritual Promised Land. Would they fear persecution more than they feared God? Would they trust more in the comfort of their old life of Judaism more than they trusted in their Superior Savior? The author of Hebrews warns and encourages them to not turn back to Egypt, but to hold firm to the faith they profess so they can enter into God's rest.

### **What is God's Rest?**

***Scan Hebrews 4:1-11. The author uses the concept of rest to refer to different times and different people. Below, list all these you can find.***

What is God's "rest?" The author of Hebrews refers both to the Israelites' loss of the Promised Land and to God's own "ceasing of exertion" in Genesis 2:2. Both the Greek word translated as



“rest” in Hebrews 4 and the Hebrew word used in Psalm 95 (quoted in verses 3&7), implies an absence of movement or stopping of work. The Hebrew word translated as “rest” in Psalm 95:11 includes overtones of finality, or (when speaking abstractly) of victory and salvation. It is clear in Hebrews four that the author is referring to more than merely a physical or emotional state, though these may be included.

Is God’s rest for His people a present or future reality? The use in Scripture indicates it is both. We enter God’s rest at the time of salvation; taste its benefits in a glorious, yet partial way now; and then experience it fully in eternity.

***Based on the author’s usage and his Old Testament references, write your own understanding of the meaning of God’s “rest.”***

### **God’s Word Leads to Rest**

**Read Hebrews 4:12-13.**

If the Israelites rebelled against God’s word and therefore were not allowed to enter His rest, it follows that a proper response to God’s word would lead an individual into God’s rest. The proper response to God’s Word is obedience (4:11). We obey God by laying our life beside His Word and allowing it to expose us and affect change. This is the opposite of a “hardened heart.” This openness to God’s Word is how we know God’s ways, enter His rest, and continue along the path of true faith.

***Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and compare it with Hebrews 4:12-13. Use these two passages to describe how God desires to use His Word in your life.***

God already knows everything about you. He uses His word to let you know that He knows and to affect change in your life.

### **Personal Application**

***How can you open yourself to the transforming power of God’s word? Why would you want to do this?***

## DAY 5

Many friends and family from the southern United States visited us when we lived in Alberta. It probably had more to do with the beautiful Canadian Rockies and the great city of Calgary than spending time with the Howards, but we enjoyed every minute.

These visits often required me to do a little “interpreting” and even “interceding.” I helped Americans figure out their Canadian currency. I converted from metric measure to US measurement and back again. I explained that toboggans are sleds and toques are hats. I played interpreter for a Canadian dry cleaner and one of my very southern speaking visitors. And I even defended a Canadian’s right to use the French term “serviette” for a napkin to a very egocentric American teenager.

I had a unique perspective. As an American who had lived in Canada for a number of years, I understood and appreciated both sides of things. I had been north of the border long enough to teach the Americans what they didn’t know. And since I am an American I could also gently put one in their place when necessary.

Because Jesus Christ became man, He has a unique perspective. Although fully God, Jesus knows exactly what it’s like to be man, because He was also fully man. He alone is qualified to be our intercessor. Beginning at the end of the fourth chapter of Hebrews, the author launches into the High Priesthood of Jesus.

### **Our Great High Priest**

#### **Read Hebrews 4:14-16.**

These verses are among the most significant in the entire book of Hebrews. The heart of the author’s sermon, these three verses serve as a conclusion to all that has come before and segues into the main section of the book on the high priesthood of Jesus. The author’s main purpose is to encourage his hearers to hold firmly to their faith in the midst of persecution by focusing on the person of Christ, His saving work of their behalf, and His current position at the right hand of the Father. These verses clearly voice this purpose.

***Look again at 4:14-16. What words/phrases in these verses does the author use to accomplish the following?***

- ***Challenge his readers to not turn back?***
  
- ***Prove that Jesus is the perfect High Priest?***
  
- ***Show the benefits of Jesus as our high priest?***

When we get to chapter seven, we will delve deeper into the role of the high priest in the nation of Israel. But let's take a quick look now. God's people could not come to Him themselves. Because God is holy, His sinful people needed an intermediary, an intercessor. The high priest bridged this gap between the people of Israel and God. Not just anyone could be a high priest. All priests and Levites came from the tribe of Levi, but the high priest had to come from the line of Moses' brother Aaron. The position of high priest was hereditary and usually for life.

Other priests served under the high priest and helped with the required duties. However, there were some duties that only the high priest could perform. The high priest offered the sacrifices on behalf of the people. He spoke to God for the people. God spoke through the high priest to the people. The high priest interceded with God for the people.

According to the book of Hebrews, Jesus is the last and ultimate high priest. God's people no longer have need for any other intercessor.

***How does reflecting on Jesus' role as our high priest help us to hold firmly to our faith?***

The earthly priests were sinners just like the rest of us. They had to petition God for forgiveness of their own sin before they could intercede for the sin of the people.

***According to Hebrews 4:15, what is one significant way that Jesus, our High Priest, is different from the earthly priests?***

Jesus never sinned, but He *was* tempted. In fact, Hebrews 4:15 makes a point to tell us that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are tempted. (See Matthew 4:1-11 for an example.) Because Jesus faced temptation, He can sympathize with us in our weakness. However, Hebrews 4:15 makes it clear that Jesus never yielded to temptation. Standing firm is not easy for us. Facing and resisting temptation caused Jesus suffering (Hebrews 2:18).

***If Jesus was tempted in similar ways that we are, yet did not yield, who do you think suffered more through all their temptations, Jesus or us? Why?***

## **The Spiritual Throne Room**

The book of Hebrews is filled with references to the things of the Old Covenant, such as the sacrificial system, the tabernacle, and the high priestly office. Why? And better still, should we care? In Hebrews, we read that all of these things were physical pictures that described spiritual realities. For instance, the sacrificial system pointed to Jesus' ultimate sacrifice. The earthly tabernacle was a man-made copy of the true heavenly one (Hebrews 9:23-24). Studying the physical ones will give us better understanding of the spiritual truths. So, throughout the study we will be hopping into the Old Testament to take a closer look. Let's do that now with the Ark of the Covenant.

*Scan Exodus 25:10-22. Take a closer look at verses 21-22. What significant thing took place between the cherubim on the cover for the ark?*

*Read 2 Samuel 6:1-2. What further understanding/information do these verses give us about the ark and its cover?*

The Ark of the Covenant, which housed God's law for His people, sat in the tabernacle (and later in the temple) behind the curtain in the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement. The Holy of Holies was the physical copy of the heavenly throne room of God. As we learned from 2 Samuel, God sat "enthroned between the cherubim." Knowing this helps us better understand and appreciate Hebrews 4:14-16.

**Reread Hebrews 4:14-16.**

In the ancient days of a monarchy, only certain individuals could approach the king on his throne. If you attempted to approach without the prior order of the king himself, you could face immediate death. Jesus, as our High Priest, does not merely protect us from the fearsome power of our King, He also ushers us into His very presence. "Let us approach" in Hebrews 4:16 is in the present tense. This implies an ongoing action. In the ancient world the image of "approaching the throne" was used as symbolic language for prayer.

*Reflect on the awesome privilege we have as believers to approach God, our King, continuously. Write your thoughts.*

**Read Hebrews 5:1-6.**

One special duty that only the high priest could perform was the offering of sacrifices on the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement, observed once a year by Israel, was a special day set aside by God for the people to confess their sins and offer sacrifices for atonement (forgiveness). The sins of the people were symbolically laid on the sacrificial animal. Then the animal was killed and burned. But before the high priest could do this for the people he had to atone for his own sin.

After the animals were slaughtered, the high priest took some of its blood into the temple, into the Holy of Holies. To enter this room was to enter into the presence of God. The only time the high priest could go into the Holy of Holies was on the Day of Atonement to make intercession for his own sins and the sins of the people.

## Our Unique High Priest

*List all the characteristics of earthly high priests you find in verses 1-4. How is Jesus' priesthood similar? How is it different?*

### **Read Genesis 14:14-20.**

This is the historical account of the priest Melchizedek. Other than Genesis and Hebrews he is only mentioned in Psalm 110:4, which is quoted in Hebrews 5:6. We know very little about him, but through divine inspiration Hebrews uses Melchizedek as a picture of the priesthood of Christ.

*List all the facts about Melchizedek from Genesis 14:14-20.*

*Note: We will return to the topic of Melchizedek in chapter 7 and learn a little more about the mysterious priest and how his priesthood relates to Jesus' priesthood.*

### **Read Hebrews 5:7-10.**

These verses refer to Jesus' incarnation. This section shows the suffering of Christ as a precursor to His exaltation. Some biblical scholars see this section specifically as a reference to Jesus' time in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night He was betrayed and arrested. Jesus asked for the suffering to be removed if possible, but He submitted Himself fully to the will of the Father.

The Greek work *teleiotheis*, which is translated as "once made perfect" in the NIV (vs 9), intends to communicate the concept of "finishing" or "completing," not that Jesus was ever "imperfect." Instead, Jesus obediently carried out or finished the entire mission God laid out for Him.

*That He "learned obedience" means that the Son arrived "at a new stage of experience," having passed through the school of suffering. Perfection refers to the Son's having "graduated" from that school, accomplishing the mission and making it to the end of that path of passion.*

*(NIV Application Commentary, Hebrews pg. 191)*

*What were the results of the Son "learning obedience" and "being made perfect?"*

## Personal Application

*If you were perfectly obedient through reverent submission to God, what could God accomplish through your life? Think of some situations He has placed you in and people He has brought into your life. Pray and ask God how you can be submitted and obedient in these areas. Write down any insights that God gives you.*

## DAY 6

I've raised three children. Within the normal time frame each of them learned to roll over, sit up, crawl, pull-up, and then walk. If one of them had not mastered these things I would have consulted with the doctor. Why? Because physically healthy babies develop in this way. If they failed to sit-up or crawl then obviously something would have been wrong. Healthy babies grow and mature.

Christians should also grow and mature. This is normal and expected. There is something spiritually wrong if a Christian stays at the same level of maturity as a brand new believer. But this seemed to be the case with the audience of the book of Hebrews.

Beginning in 5:11, the author makes a sudden shift in topic from the High Priesthood of Christ to spiritual immaturity. In the middle of his discourse about Jesus' priesthood, the author is struck by the fact that his audience is too immature to understand these things. Therefore, he warns them about their immaturity and encourages them to work at growing in their faith. This abrupt shift most certainly captured their attention.

### **Grow up!**

#### **Read Hebrews 5:11-6:3**

*Describe the problem addressed here by the author.*

*What should they be doing by this time in their Christian life? What did they still need?*

The word translated as "slow" in verse 11 of the NIV is the Greek word *nothros*. It connotes negligence or sluggishness in some area of life. These Christians had been lazy in their faith. The term "elementary truths," in verse 12, refers to the most basic principles of God's Word. Imagine a math student needing to learn to count from 1 to 10 over and over, and never moving on to addition and subtraction. Spiritually, these first century Christians were still counting. Although they'd been Christians long enough to teach they were still too immature. These spiritual babies still drank from spiritual bottles. They couldn't move on and understand the deeper things of God – like the priesthood of Jesus – because they were not ready for "solid food."

*Whose fault was their spiritual immaturity? (Circle one) God Their pastor Them*

*What phrases and words does the author use to show that believers need to take responsibility for our spiritual growth?*

*Make a list of what you consider the “basic” teachings of the Christian faith.*

The author of Hebrews lists several things he considers to be some of the basic practices or elementary teachings of the faith such as repentance, baptism, and the reality of eternal life. This list also includes parallels with Judaism’s basic practices. For instance, “baptisms” can point both to Christian baptism as well as Jewish purification ceremonies. The dual nature of his list probably reflects the pressure that these Christians were feeling to revert to their former life of Judaism. If they remained here, at the entry level to Christianity, the alienation from their Jewish roots would be less than if they moved on to maturity. Here, they could remain, on a surface level, in both worlds.

### **A Stern Warning**

#### **Read Hebrews 6:4-8**

This passage is one of the most controversial in the New Testament. The best scholars differ on the exact meaning of these four verses. The heart of the controversy is whether or not the person described in this passage is a true believer. Since much of the author’s description is ambiguous, it is easy to allow preconceived understandings to influence the way we view these verses.

We could consider numerous variations of interpretations that would keep us right here for days on end. In an attempt to make the best use of your time and keep our brains from exploding, I have attempted to summarize the main views:

1. **Genuine Christian who fell away** – According to this view, the author is referring to individuals who were truly saved, born again by the Holy Spirit, but have lost their salvation because they rejected Christ.
2. **Christian in appearance only** – this view espouses that this passage refers to individuals who “confessed” to be Christians and initially appeared to be, but were not really saved.
3. **Spiritual Seekers** – based on this view, the author is speaking of individuals who have explored Christianity, peripherally experienced God, but never chose Christ.
4. **Immature Christians** – according to this view, these are true Christians stuck in immaturity and will therefore experience God’s discipline if they don’t move forward.

5. **Hypothetical** – this view says that the author merely put forth a rhetorical situation to produce a strong warning for his readers to move forward.

Before you make a decision about how to view this passage, let's talk about a few more things. First, let's remember the author's purpose and the context of the book. The author wanted to motivate his hearers to action. He wanted them to be diligent in their faith, leaving fear and laziness behind and move on to spiritual maturity that expressed itself in action. You could even say he desired to put the "fear of God" in them to keep them moving forward.

Second, difficult passages such as this must be interpreted in light of clearer passages. For instance, a number of other New Testament passages clearly teach the security of the believer. (See John 6:37-34, John 10:27-29, Ephesians 2:8-9.) For that reason, many scholars reject the possibility that Hebrews 6:4-8 speaks of true believers who lose their salvation.

Third, although the author himself is not omniscient, he obviously believes that his readers are genuinely saved. (See Hebrews 6:9.) Even so, we cannot put a decisive end to the debate. I encourage you to consider the things we know from other Scripture and prayerfully consider how God would have you apply this passage to your life. Let's start with the author's land analogy!

**Reread Hebrews 6:7-8 and read 6:9-12.**

*Write descriptions of the two different spiritual conditions the author describes.*

*Based on verses 9-10, what evidence of salvation did exist in the lives of the original audience?*

*What words of encouragement does the author give them in verses 11-12?*

Even though we cannot establish a firm set of doctrinal beliefs on Hebrews 6:4-8, there are a couple of clear teachings in this passage we can note. First, anyone who stagnates in their Christian life is spiritually weak and in danger of God's discipline. Like the author of Hebrews, we must make every effort to encourage them to stand firm and to move toward spiritual maturity. Second, certain characteristics naturally accompany salvation.

### **Personal Application**

*Do you feel you have been adequately taught and have a good grasp of the basics of faith? If not, then why not? If yes, are you actively moving on to maturity? What are you doing to foster your own spiritual growth?*



## DAY 7

The author has been “chasing a rabbit” since the eleventh verse of chapter five. Now he is ready to get back on track and resume his teaching on the high priesthood of Christ. This section serves as a transition. After his harsh warning, he now encourages them with a positive example of a faithful believer who had trusted in God and His promises.

### **A Hopeful Example**

**Read Hebrews 6:13-20**

**Read Genesis 22:1-18 and Hebrews 11:17-20.**

God had made promises to Abraham. He would have an heir from his own body (Gen 15:4). His descendants would be as numerous as the stars (Gen 15:5). Through Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:3). All these promises culminated in the boy Isaac.

*What situation, which you read about in Genesis 22, seemed to threaten the fulfillment of God's promises?*

*How did Abraham actively demonstrate his faith in God?*

*Read Hebrews 11:17-20. What additional information does this passage give us about Abraham's faith?*

For the first century Christians and for us, Abraham stands as an example of one who had realized his hope and received what God had promised. In Hebrews 6:16-18 the author uses legal language to affirm the absolute trustworthiness of God's promises. Even in the face of difficult and seemingly overwhelming circumstances we can stand firm in the promises of God.

*What are some things in which people today place their hope or sense of security?*

*How does the faithfulness of these things compare to the faithfulness of God?*

God did not merely make promises to Abraham. He guaranteed His promises with an oath. An oath is only as good as the character of the one who makes it. Our oath might not be a sure guarantee. But God's oath is based on His character, making His promises sure and certain.

### **Patiently Waiting**

*Do you have trouble waiting on God? What purposes can waiting on God serve in your life? Read Psalm 33:20-22 for more insight.*

Abraham waited decades for God's promises to him to be fulfilled. During that time, Abraham learned to trust in God and His faithfulness to keep His promises. The original audience of Hebrews was still learning about the character of God. They were in danger of turning back because of their lack of trust in God.

*Search Hebrews 6:13-18 for characteristics of God's nature. List all you can find.*

God made a promise. But He didn't simply leave it there. He confirmed His promise with an oath. These "two unchangeable things" – God's promise and oath – leave no doubt. God does not lie. We can trust what He says. We can firmly take hold of the hope He offers us. In fact, this hope is so secure it is like an anchor for our souls. When we tightly grasp this eternal hope, life's shifting circumstances will not move us. Persecution will not cause us to drift away from Christ. Instead, with our faith solidly planted in God we will receive the promise of our inheritance.

### **Personal Application**

*How firmly do you trust in God's promises? For today and for eternity? The faithfulness of God's promises cannot be separated from His nature and character.*

*Is there something you've been waiting on God for? Voice your trust in God to provide.*

## Day 8

In my early adulthood I had a cavity in a molar. That tooth got its first filling. Years later that filling wore out and had to be replaced with a larger filling. More years after that, even that filling wasn't sufficient. But there was not enough tooth left for another fix. It required a crown.

If you have a crown, you know the process. The dentist removed (just a nice word for "drilled") the old filling and prepped the tooth for the crown. He made an impression of the tooth – what was left of it anyway – and made a temporary crown from materials he had in his office. The temporary crown was strictly a stop-gap measure until the permanent crown was ready. The permanent crown was not like the temporary one. It was made in another place and of different materials. Both the filling and the temporary crown were weak. Their protection did not last.

I even had trouble keeping the temporary crown on my tooth temporarily. I swallowed two in three days. They simply wouldn't stay on my tooth. Three temporary crowns were required to get me through until the permanent crown was ready.

"Temporary" cannot fully do the job. "Temporary" has to be repeated over and over.

"Temporary" is insufficient. The Levitical priesthood was temporary. Its priests were imperfect. Its sacrifices were insufficient. But Jesus' priesthood is permanent. This week we will dig deeper into what makes Jesus such a superior High Priest.

### **Abraham meets Melchizedek**

In chapter six, the author took a brief detour from the topic of Jesus' high priesthood to warn his audience about spiritual immaturity. After exhorting his hearers to push on to maturity, he returns to the subject of the priesthood of Christ in chapter seven.

### **Read Hebrews 7:1-10**

The author introduced us to Melchizedek in chapter five. In that week's study, we read the original account about Melchizedek and Abraham (then "Abram") from Genesis 14. Here are some of the things we learned about Melchizedek from Genesis:

- He was king of Salem
- He was a priest of God Most High
- He blessed Abram
- He worshipped the one true God, Creator of heaven and earth
- Abram gave him a tenth of the plunder

*What additional facts do we learn about Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:1-10?*

***Check all the reasons below that make Jesus' priesthood "in the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 5:6).***

\_\_\_ *Jesus is both a priest and a king*

\_\_\_ *Jesus' priesthood is eternal*

\_\_\_ *Jesus is greater than Abraham*

\_\_\_ *Jesus is without beginning or end of days*

\_\_\_ *Jesus ministry brings both peace and righteousness*

\_\_\_ *Jesus was not a descendant of Levi*

Melchizedek is a bit of a mystery. We don't know anything about his genealogy or his life other than this brief encounter with Abraham. The author capitalized on this lack of information to use Melchizedek as a picture or "type" for the priesthood of Christ. Melchizedek was an actual historical figure, but since Scripture is silent on his parents and his birth and death, he "remains a priest forever."

Abraham gave a tenth of the plunder or a "tithe" to Melchizedek. Since the "lesser" always tithes to the "greater," the author uses this to show the superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham, and of Melchizedek's priestly order over the Levitical priesthood. Although Levi and his descendants had not yet been born, Levi also "tithed" to Melchizedek since he was "still in the body of his ancestor" Abraham.

Let's take a quick look back at the Levitical priesthood and the tithe to enhance our understanding of this topic.

**Read Numbers 3:1-13 and 18:1-7**

***God set apart a "tithe" from among His people to do His work on their behalf. Who were these intercessors for the nation of Israel?***

***What were the responsibilities and duties of Aaron and his sons? Of the Levites?***

***Remember, God's presence resided in the tabernacle. Who was allowed to be near God? What would happen to anyone else that came near?***

***Read Leviticus 27:30-33. What did God command every Israelite to do? Check all that apply.***

- To give a tithe of everything they harvest.*
- To tithe from their herds and flocks.*
- Not to try to keep the best and give God the inferior.*

***Read Deuteronomy 26:12 and Numbers 18:21-25, what is the purpose for the tithe?***

***Read Numbers 18:26. Were the Levites exempt from the tithe? Yes No***

The priesthood of Jesus – like Melchizedek's – is superior to the Levitical priesthood. In tomorrow's study, we will focus on the eternal nature of Jesus' priesthood.

### **Personal Application**

***Jesus is both our king of righteousness and king of peace (7:2). Do you allow Him to reign in your life so you can experience His righteousness and peace? If not, what parts of your life are you holding back from His rule and authority?***

## Day 9

What was the last significant thing you had to replace? Maybe it was a washing machine or a refrigerator. Perhaps it was a car. These items and things like them are useful. They fill necessary roles in today's life. But they don't last forever. They wear out. They break down. And sometimes we replace them because new models come along that meet our needs even better.

Mosaic Law dictated that only descendants of the tribe of Levi could be priests. But we needed a new and better Priest than the Levitical order could provide. So, this change required a change in the Law (7:12). The Levitical priesthood and the Old Covenant were "weak and useless." Something better had come along! A Lion from the tribe of Judah!

### Read Hebrews 7:11-22

*Based on the passages you read yesterday from the Old Testament, summarize the purpose of the Levitical priesthood?*

*Why did God replace the Levitical priesthood? Did it fail? Read Galatians 3:19-25 to help you with your answer.*

The word "perfection" in Hebrews 7:11 is translated from the Greek word "teleiosis." It doesn't mean that something is "without flaws," but rather carries the idea of "reaching a goal" or "arriving at a desired end." The Levitical priesthood and the Old Covenant could not completely fulfill God's ultimate goal.

This does not mean that the old priesthood and covenant were "bad," merely temporary. God instituted both to point to and anticipate His ultimate plan for eternal redemption. We see a **progression** between the old and the new priesthood. God did not start over. He merely brought His goal to completion through His Son. And Jesus is a priest of a new order, not the old.

*On what basis is Jesus appointed our priest? (Look back at verses 16-22.)*

The superior nature of Jesus' priesthood also gives us a "better hope" or a "better covenant" through which we are able to draw near to God. (Later we will look more closely at the difference between the old covenant and the new.)

*Many religions claim they have a "new revelation" or new way to God. Based on verses 20-22, how can we be sure that God has not and will not provide another intercessor?*

*What should this assurance mean to our life?*

**Read Hebrews 7:23-28**

*List all the characteristics you can find that describe the superior nature of Jesus' priesthood over the Levitical priesthood.*

### **Application**

The author of Hebrews effectively and appropriately studied and used the Old Testament to better understand the last revelation of God, which came through Christ. First century Christians saw God's plan for redemption through Christ in the Old Testament Scriptures. Christians today would benefit greatly to follow the example of the author of Hebrews. We cannot completely understand the New Testament or get the complete picture of God's revelation to mankind without the Old Testament.

*Consider your own perspective on the Old Testament. What part does it play in your thoughts about the Christian life? What role does it play in your own Bible Study?*

## DAY 10

“Genuine faux leather.” Those were the real words on the tag. The jacket was made from real, fake leather. According to my minimal research, the fabrics used to make genuine fake leather receive special treatment to achieve a close resemblance to actual animal hide. Faux leather, which has a much lower cost than genuine leather, can look and feel very much like the real thing. And that’s by design.

God gave Moses detailed plans for the tabernacle, the sacrificial system, and the Levitical priesthood. They each served an important purpose, but were merely shadows of real, heavenly things. God designed them to point His people to greater spiritual realities. And when the time was right, He replaced these temporary, earthly institutions with the permanent and eternal.

### **The True Tabernacle**

**Read Hebrews 8:1-8a.**

*In what ways is Jesus a superior High Priest? Make a list.*

*Where does Jesus, our High Priest, serve?*

The author of Hebrews has established the superior nature of Jesus’ ministry over the angels, Moses, and the Levitical priesthood. He has pointed out Jesus’ superior position of power and authority at the right hand of the Father. And now he introduces the superior place of Jesus’ ministry – the true tabernacle.

*Using verses 2-5, circle all the words and phrases below that describe the tabernacle where our eternal High Priest now serves:*

*true   set up by God   copy   shadow   heavenly   built by men   earthly*

God’s people built the earthly tabernacle from God’s detailed plans. The instructions God gave Moses concerning the earthly tabernacle are recorded in Exodus, chapters 25, 26, & 27. Read or skim through these chapters to get a picture of this tabernacle.

**Read Exodus 25:8-9.**

*Why did God want Moses to build a tabernacle precisely according to His instructions?*



The tabernacle and its furnishings provided a place for God to dwell or “tabernacle” among His people. Although no earthly dwelling could really contain God (see Acts 7:48-50), the tabernacle symbolized God’s presence among His people. The tabernacle, the sacrificial system, and the ministry of the priests pointed the people to the greater, true reality. The tabernacle reminded them that God is the eternal King who deserved their submission and worship.

When the author of Hebrews says that the earthly sanctuary is a “copy” of the heavenly one, he does not mean a carbon copy. The earthly tabernacle, sacrificial system, and priesthood are but mere shadows of the spiritual. God established them to hint at and point to that which is much greater. For instance, God dictated the Ark of the Covenant to represent His throne in heaven, but it can never compare with the real thing. (*If you have some extra time, compare the ark to the Apostle John’s description of God’s throne in Revelation 4:1-11.*)

### **The Need for a New Covenant**

The author uses the comparison of the earthly and heavenly tabernacles to begin His presentation about the new covenant (vs 6). If the heavenly tabernacle is superior to the earthly tabernacle and Jesus’ priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood, how much more is the new covenant superior to the old covenant?

The word “covenant” in 8:6 is the Greek word *diatheke*, which means “contract.” It carries the idea of a binding agreement. The use of *diatheke* and its Hebrew equivalent, *bariyth*, indicate that God is the covenant initiator. In grace, God offers a pledge to His people for the purpose of establishing relationship.

***Reread Hebrews 8:6-8a. Why was a new covenant needed?***

***What makes the new covenant superior to the old?***

God called the nation of Israel into a relationship with Himself through the Old Covenant. (See Exodus 19:1-8.) He pledged to make them His treasured possession and a kingdom of priests. But this covenant was conditional. They would continue to enjoy this intimate relationship with God as long as they obeyed the law He gave them through Moses.

But they could not obey. God found fault with the people, not the Old Covenant (vs. 8). The Old Covenant – or Law – did exactly what God designed it to do. It revealed the sinful nature of mankind. Like the Israelites, we are unable to keep God’s law. We cannot be righteous on our own. Thus, the Old Covenant fulfilled its purpose. It clearly showed our need for the New

Covenant established and mediated by Jesus. Since we cannot be righteous, we need Christ's righteousness. The New Covenant provides righteousness for God's people through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

**Read Hebrews 8:8-13.**

Hebrews 8:8b-13 quotes directly from Jeremiah 31:31-34. Centuries earlier, God announced the coming of His new covenant through the prophet Jeremiah. A superior covenant founded on better promises. Jeremiah's ministry coincided with the timing of God's discipline of Israel's disobedience through the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 626 BC. This dramatic and heart-breaking event demonstrated the need for the superior covenant about which Jeremiah prophesied.

*Based on verses 8-12, in what ways is the new covenant superior to the old?*

*Continue to compare the Old Covenant to the New by filling out the table below.*

SCRIPTURE	OLD COVENANT CHARACTERISTICS	NEW COVENANT CHARACTERISTICS
Ezekiel 11:19-20		
Ezekiel 36:24-29		
Isaiah 54:10		
2 Corinthians 3:6-9		

*Based on your findings in the table above, summarize what you learned about the superior nature of the New Covenant.*

The Old Covenant, which was imposed from the outside, revealed our sin nature but did not have the power to change it. We needed a covenant that works from the inside. One that has the power to change our hearts. Under the New Covenant, God's law is internalized. God's New Covenant radically changed the way He relates to His people. It created an intimacy that was not possible

under the Old Covenant. Under the New Covenant, everyone can know God through a personal relationship with His Son.

### **Remembering the Covenant**

Sacrifices were often offered in connection with the establishment of a covenant. In fact, the Hebrew word for covenant derives from a verb meaning “to cut or divide.” In Genesis 15, Abraham offered a sacrifice when God established His covenant with Him. The New Covenant was also established with a sacrifice. That sacrifice is remembered through the observance of the Lord’s Supper.

**Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-29.**

*What sacrifice was given to establish the New Covenant? What is the purpose of partaking in the Lord’s Supper?*

The observance of the Lord’s Supper - or Communion – is a celebration of the New Covenant. When we partake, we should take the opportunity to reflect on everything God has provided for us through the sacrifice of Christ. A better understanding of its significance should help us worship God as we observe this commemorative meal. The New Covenant is superior to the Old. Because Jesus, our perfect High Priest, died to pay the penalty for our sins, we can receive His righteousness. God’s law is written on our hearts. We can know Him intimately. We need no other mediator than Jesus Christ. The Old Covenant could not accomplish this. So does that mean the Old Covenant is null and void?

*Read Matthew 5:17-22. If the New Covenant is superior, why did Jesus say He did not come to abolish the Law?*

The law or Old Covenant still reflects God’s nature and character. It still shows us the expectations God has for His people. But it was insufficient because people could never perfectly keep it; it could never be our means to a relationship with God. The Old Covenant showed us our need for a Savior and intercessor. Jesus Christ is our perfect intercessor. He alone perfectly kept the Law and fulfilled all the prophecy. When we trust in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, He takes our sin and gives us His righteousness. Through Christ we receive the righteousness the Law requires.

### **Personal Application**

*Do you reflect the righteousness of Christ in your daily life? If not, what obstacles need to be removed?*

## Day 11

Have you noticed that house cleaning – particularly laundry – is never really *done*? By the time I collect all the dirty clothes, haul them to the laundry room, sort them into piles, do numerous rounds of washing, drying, and folding, and then put them all away, there is already more that need washing. Dusting and mopping are just as bad. The need to clean never ends.

The Levitical sacrificial system was a little like cleaning house. The work had to be done over and over again. The priests sacrificed daily, but the sins continued to pile up. The sacrifices could not change the heart of the worshipper. They were simply a bandage on a deep wound. God's people needed healing from the inside out. In chapter 8, the author showed the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant. He also began a comparison of the earthly tabernacle with the heavenly one to further prove the insufficiency of the Old Covenant. Today, we will take a closer look at details of the tabernacle.

### The Old Establishment

#### Read Hebrews 9:1-5

Everything in the Levitical priesthood, the sacrificial system, and the tabernacle had significance. Although these things were temporary, they pointed to a greater spiritual reality that exists in Christ. Since the New Covenant fulfilled the Old Covenant, learning more about the Old will help us understand and appreciate the New. So, let's look at the tabernacle and its furnishings.

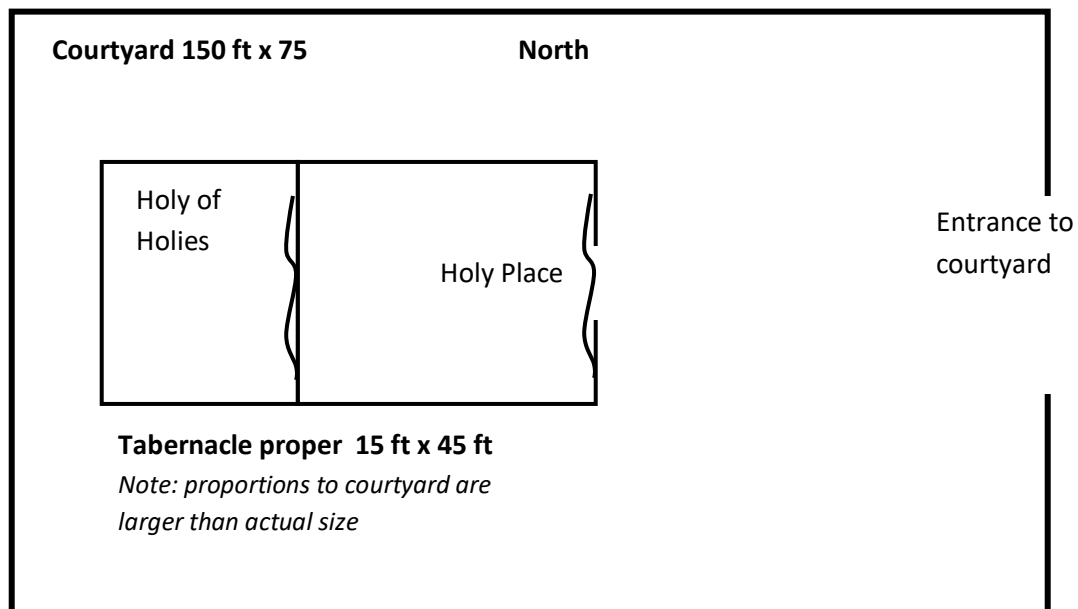
*The following list includes description & purpose of items used in the tabernacle. Look up the corresponding NT passages and in the last column, note how each pointed to Jesus.*

Item	Description	Purpose	Jesus
<b>Tabernacle</b> Ex 25:8-9, 26:1-37	Made of linen curtains. Covered w/ tents of goat hair, ram skins, & sea cows	A place for God to dwell among His people	<b>Read John 1:14</b>
<b>Ark of Covenant</b> Ex 25:10-22	Acacia wood overlaid w/ gold. 45"x 27"x27"; Solid gold cover called mercy seat/atonement cover	Symbolize God's throne to meet w/ people; blood taken here to atone for sin	<b>Read Romans 3:25</b>
<b>The Table</b> Ex 25:23-20	Acacia wood overlaid w/gold; 36"x18"x27"	Held the Bread of the Presence	<b>Read John 6:32-33</b>
<b>Lampstand</b> Ex 25:31-40	Pure gold; 6 branches & 7 lamps	To light tabernacle	<b>Read John 8:12</b>
<b>Altar of sacrifice</b> Ex 27:1-8	Acacia wood overlaid w/ bronze; 7.5'x7.5'x4.5'	To offer sacrifices	<b>Read John 1:29</b>

<b>Altar of Incense</b> Ex 30:1-10	Acacia wood overlaid w/gold. 18"x18"x36"	To burn incense	<b>Read Eph 5:2 &amp; Rev 8:3-4</b>
<b>Basin for washing</b> Ex 30:17-21	Solid bronze on a stand, made to hold water	Priests used to cleanse hands & feet to serve	<b>Read Eph 5:25-26</b>

Now let's "set-up" the tabernacle so we can picture what the daily ministry of the priests and the happenings of the once-a-year Day of Atonement looked like.

*Read Exodus 40:17-37. Using the information in these verses, draw and label the furnishings from the chart above in the courtyard, Holy Place, and Holy of Holies.*



You are doing great with all this detail work! Just a quick comment on Hebrews 9:3. You may have noticed that the author of Hebrews makes it sound like the altar of incense was "inside" the Holy of Holies. However, when you read the Exodus passage it clearly shows the altar of incense was to be set just outside the Holy of Holies in *front* of the curtain. Passages in Leviticus confirm this. Biblical commentators feel that Hebrews 9:3 reflects the close connection the altar of incense has to the Holy of Holies. As you will see below, the high priest had to take incense from it into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. Now that you've set up the tabernacle let's see what activity took place inside it.

**Read Hebrews 9:6-10.**

According to verse 6, the priests entered the “outer room,” or the “The Holy Place” every day to carry out God’s instructions for worship.

***Read Exodus 30:7-8 and Leviticus 24:1-9. List the daily duties of the priests.***

In addition to the daily ministering inside the Holy Place, the priests made daily sacrifices on the altar of sacrifice in the courtyard. We will not go into the various kinds of sacrifices and offerings. However, we will take a closer look at the Day of Atonement and the sacrifices offered on that day. This is the “once a year” sacrifice the author of Hebrews refers to in verses 7-10.

The sacrifices and rituals of the Day of Atonement - or “Yom Kippur” – symbolized the ultimate atonement God would provide for His people through Christ. Sin contaminates everything. On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest “purified” himself, the people, and even the sanctuary. The Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of God, could only be entered this one day a year. And only the high priest could do this. Ordinary men had no direct access to God.

***Read Leviticus 16:1-22, 34. Summarize the sacrifices and rituals the high priest had to perform.***

***According to Hebrews 9:9, these gifts and sacrifices were not able to “clear the conscience of the worshippers” Why not?***

Animal sacrifices and ritual cleansings are mere “external regulations.” They have no power to change the heart or the nature of a person. The Old Covenant was glorious in that it established a way to relate to God and revealed the need for a Savior. But it was only a temporary bandage.

God draws people to Himself because He wants to be in relationship with us. However, we are sinful and He is holy. Therefore, God has established regulations by which we can approach Him and He can dwell among us. Before Jesus, this was through the Old Covenant. Now, we can approach Him through the New Covenant established by Jesus.

### **Personal Application**

***Even Christians on this side of the cross can fall into the external trappings of religion. Read Psalm 51:16-17 and ask God to reveal the condition of your heart.***

## DAY 12

Imagine you're looking into the court of the tabernacle where the altar of sacrifice sat. Picture the scene with me. Every day, worshippers came with animals for sacrifice. Every day the priests stood beside the altar. Killing and burning those substitutes. Under the Old Covenant, blood flowed constantly from the altar of sacrifice. Under the Old Covenant, the smoke from the altar constantly lifted towards heaven. No end to the blood. No end to the fire.

Once for all time. No need for another. Thoroughly sufficient. All these phrases and more could be used to describe the sacrifice of Christ. The sacrifice of the New Covenant is far superior to sacrifices of the Old Covenant. The death of one Superior Savior accomplished what the death of countless bulls and goats never could – eternal forgiveness of sins and freedom from its guilt!

### **A Superior Sacrifice**

**Read Hebrews 9:11-15.**

*List all the reasons you can find that show how Jesus' covenant offering is superior to the earthy priests' offerings.*

*Look again at verse 14. What did the blood of Christ accomplish that the blood of bulls and goats could not? (See 9:9)*

Only the blood of Christ can provide internal and eternal cleansing. His unblemished sacrifice initiated the New Covenant, the covenant of the heart. His blood purchased our ransom from sin and death and provides an eternal inheritance in heaven!

**Read Hebrews 9:16-22.**

“Will” and “covenant” in these verses are both translated from the same Greek word *diatheke*. It refers to an “authoritative laying down of what should be done.” God’s covenant is not an agreement negotiated by two parties. God is the sole determiner of His covenant. Like a will, a covenant (testament) requires a death for it to be effective.

*How was the Old Covenant put into effect? (See verses 19-21. See also Ex 24:1-8 for more information.) What life was offered?*

The blood of bulls and goats made the Israelites outwardly clean. Animal sacrifice was also necessary to put the Old Covenant into effect. But a superior Covenant requires a superior sacrifice.

### **Full Atonement**

**Read Hebrews 9:23-28.**

*What was offered to put the new covenant into effect?*

*Contrast Jesus' sacrifice of atonement with the offering made by the earthly high priest on the yearly Day of Atonement. Describe the difference below.*

*Read Romans 3:21-25 and compare it with Hebrews 9:22. Why was Jesus' death necessary?*

Christ blood did not merely *cover* our sin. Hebrews 9:26 says Jesus appeared to “do away with sin.” The Greek word *athetesis* implies a cancelling or total annulment of sin. Yes, we will all die physically and face God’s judgment, but those of us who have received forgiveness of sin through the blood of Christ have no need to fear this judgment! We will enter into God’s presence and receive the full and final consummation of our salvation.

### **Personal Reflection**

*Have you been washed in the blood of Christ? As we close this lesson reflect on the words of the old hymn below. Thank God for your salvation or give your life to Him for the very first time!*

*Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power?  
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?  
Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour?  
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?*

*Are you washed in the blood,  
In the soul cleansing blood of the Lamb?  
Are your garments spotless? Are they white as snow?  
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?*



## DAY 13

Hard water leaves ugly mineral traces behind on faucets, tile, porcelain, and glass. The worst is the shower door which always looked so smeared and cloudy. I've tried many cleaning products that claim to cut through hard water deposits and leave bathroom fixtures "sparkling clean." But none performs exactly like it promises. You've probably also experienced disappointment from a product or service that didn't deliver what it promised.

Jesus Christ claims to be the only way to the Father. Jesus Christ claims that His blood covers all sin. Jesus Christ claims that He lives forever to intercede for us. Jesus Christ claims that His sacrifice is sufficient for our complete forgiveness and holiness. Believer, we can firmly stand on every one of Jesus' claims! He is our superior High Priest who offered the once-for-all, superior sacrifice on our behalf. The blood of bull and goats could not take away our sins, but the sacrificial blood of Christ accomplished it!

The Author's discourse on the superiority of the High Priesthood of Christ, which he began in chapter four, comes to a crashing crescendo in chapter ten. As a superior priest, Jesus presents to God a superior offering. This offering establishes a superior covenant and completely cleanses the guilt of God's people. No other sacrifice will ever be needed.

### **One Sacrifice for all Time**

**Read Hebrews 10:1-10.**

*List all the evidence you can find in verses 1-4 that the law, and therefore the Old Covenant, is inadequate.*

*Based on the inadequacies, what would you say is the goal of the New Covenant?*

Because the sacrificial system constantly reminded the people of their sinfulness, it also pointed to their separation from God. The sacrifices made them outwardly clean (see 9:13), but their sin remained. The New Covenant, instituted by Christ's sacrifice, doesn't simply cover sin, it removes sin and its burden. Thus, Christ's death accomplished what centuries of animal sacrifice never could – right relationship between God and His people.

Although God Himself prescribed animal sacrifice as a temporary means for relating to His people, ultimately this system did not “please” Him. The Levitical system could not make God’s people holy. Numerous passages in the Bible contrast the sacrifices that please God with those that don’t. Let’s take a closer look at the difference between sacrifices God accepts and those He does not.

*Read the Scripture passages and fill out the table below.*

<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Unacceptable Sacrifices</b>	<b>Acceptable Sacrifices</b>
<b>Hebrews 10:5-10</b>		
<b>1 Samuel 15:22</b>		
<b>Psalms 51:16-17</b>		
<b>Hosea 6:6</b>		
<b>Romans 12:1-2</b>		

The obedient death of Christ was the one perfect sacrifice, acceptable and pleasing to God. His death was effective and final. It is through the sacrifice of Christ, the new covenant, that one can find the means for forgiveness from sin. Because of this forgiveness we can be declared “holy” and can now begin a relationship with God, in His presence.

**Read Hebrews 10:11-18.**

*List all the characteristics/facts of the old sacrificial system you can find in verse 11.*

*Based on verse 12, how is Jesus’ sacrifice different?*

Eight different kinds of sacrifices and offerings are prescribed by God in the book of Leviticus. Some, like the “peace offering” and the “praise offering,” were used as a means of worship or to offer thanksgiving to God. Others, specifically the “sin offering” and the “guilt offering” were given to seek God’s forgiveness. These were required to remain in fellowship with Yahweh.

The priests were required to offer certain sacrifices for the nation *every* morning and evening. Other sacrifices were made on special days of the year. Plus, individuals brought sacrifices to offer on their own behalf. (*Note: If you would like to learn more about the specific sacrifices and their purpose, read Leviticus 1-7.*)

Just imagine the constant activity at the tabernacle! The sacrifices never ended. Day after day, year after year, a continual parade of animals came to the altar of sacrifice. Each sin dictated another death sentence for an unblemished animal. But Christ’s sacrifice put an end to all that once and for all.

***Reread Hebrews 10:14 and compare with 10:10. What effect does Jesus’ sacrifice have on the people of God?***

When we trust in Jesus and His death for our eternal salvation, our sins are forgiven. God declares us “holy” and “perfect.” Our “position” of holiness establishes a relationship with God.

### **Personal Application**

God also wants us to progressively grow in practical holiness. To look more and more like His Son. (See Romans 8:29.) Christians refer to this ongoing process as “sanctification.”

***Read Romans 6:18-22. Describe what God wants for the life of every Christian.***

***How is this kind of life possible? Read Romans 8:9-12 to help you with your answer.***

The presence of the Holy Spirit changes everything. The law of the Old Covenant was external and impossible to keep because mankind’s very nature is sinful. But the New Covenant is internalized. God’s own Spirit takes up residence inside His people giving us the desire and the power to obey. The author of Hebrews emphasizes this truth because it is essential to the superior nature of the New Covenant. God’s law is not on tablets on stone. He has written it on the hearts of His people!

## Day 14

When Jesus took His last breath, something significant happened. The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom (Mark 15:38). This heavy curtain separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. That innermost sanctum of the temple that housed the Ark of the Covenant, the very symbol of God's presence with His people. Although we don't have a description of the curtain that hung in Herod's temple, the Old Testament does describe the original curtain that hung in the tabernacle (Exodus 26:31-35). This colorful, ornate linen barrier was made from blue, purple, and scarlet yarn. Beautifully adorned with stitched images of cherubim, it hung from gold hooks and blocked the way into God's presence.

The author has concluded his formal teaching on the superior nature of the role and sacrifice of Christ. Now, like any good teacher, he moves into some purposeful application for his students. Encouragement to grow in holiness, persevere in the face of hardship, and draw close to God.

### **Encouragement to Persevere**

**Read Hebrews 10:19-25.**

*List all "exhortations" or calls to action found in verses 22-25. (Watch for the "let us" phrase.)*

He begins with encouragement to "draw near to God." Before Jesus' crucifixion God's people could not enter into His presence. Access to God was granted only to the high priest on their behalf. But as we've seen in previous lessons, the New Covenant, established by the sacrifice and blood of Christ, allows believers to enter God's presence with confidence.

***Read Mark 15:38. Compare it to Hebrews 10:20. What historical event pictured this spiritual reality?***

The author encourages his readers to confidently draw near to God. Keep in mind the reason for our "confidence" (vs. 19) to enter the Holy of Holies. We can freely and boldly approach God's throne of grace in prayer because of Christ and His sacrifice, not because we are worthy. The blood of Jesus has won our entrance into God's presence.

***Based on verse 22, in what manner or with what attitude should we "draw near to God?"***

The author also urged his readers to “hold unswervingly to the hope” they professed. In 6:19, he described this hope as an “anchor for the soul.” Many were discouraged and considering leaving their faith behind. These persecuted Christians needed a firm and stable place to stand. Still today, we need an anchor, a point of stability and security, in a chaotic world.

The giant redwood trees of the western United States are some of the largest trees known to man. Amazingly, they have relatively shallow roots systems. Their enormous weight is supported, in part, by the interlocking of a tree’s roots with those around it. A single redwood is vulnerable in extreme weather, but by relying on the trees around it, it can stay standing.

Christians need interlocking roots. God never intends Christians to attempt to follow Jesus on their own. When God saves us, He saves into His family. God’s design is for each Christian to be a vital, active part of a local church.

***What specific actions does the author encourage regarding our responsibility to the church and the church’s responsibility to us? (See 10:24-25.)***

### **Warning and Praise**

#### **Read Hebrews 10:26-39.**

The author has balanced harsh warnings with gentle reminders of past success throughout the book. However, verses 26-31 undoubtedly include the harshest warning in the entire book of Hebrews. Some of the same questions we addressed in chapter six are applicable here, so refer back to our discussion there if needed. Several important things can be drawn from this passage.

- God’s judgment is real and severe for those who rebelliously reject Christ in favor of a deliberate sinful lifestyle.
- Only the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient to completely and eternally forgive sin. If this sacrifice is rejected, no hope remains.
- Anyone outside the sanctifying blood of Christ is God’s enemy and will face judgment.

We sinners often require double motivation. God’s love woos and calls us to “draw near.” But sometimes our stubborn, hard hearts also need to be reminded of God’s holiness and justice. Keeping both God’s love and holiness in view fosters obedience. The original audience needed this kind of double motivation.

*List the things found in verses 32-34, faced by these first century Christians, that might tempt them to shrink back in their faith.*

*Now list how they responded to those challenges in the “earlier days.”*

*What encouragement/reasons for standing firm does the author give them in verses 35-39?*

### **Personal Application**

The author’s challenge to “not give up meeting together,” has to do with consistent involvement in the life of the church rather than frenetic activity in all the programs of the church. There are God-given functions of the church in which every believer should participate. Acts 2:42, which is often referenced to show these primary functions, includes the following:

- Worship
- Prayer
- Learning the Word
- Serving
- Fellowship

*Are you involved in each of these functions in some way? If not, why not? Prayerfully ask God what your role should be in all these areas.*

*How have you spiritually benefitted from a vital connection to a local church?*

*Pray and ask God for specific ways you can encourage specific people. Record what He tells you then follow through.*

## DAY 15

We all love inspiring stories. Tales about people who overcame adversity, conquered a huge challenge, or demonstrated great courage in dire circumstances. “The King’s Speech,” starring Colin Firth, demonstrates this point. This movie, which tells the story of King George VI’s victory over a debilitating speech impediment, connects with viewers and critics alike. The Academy awarded the movie with “Best Picture,” “Best Actor,” “Best Director,” and “Best Original Screenplay” Oscars. Real-life human examples like this one encourage us to strive, stand firm, be courageous, and rise to the challenge.

The author of Hebrews ended chapter 10 with another call for his hearers to persevere in the face of persecution. “You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised” (Hebrews 10:36). Following this exhortation, the author launches into a beautiful list of examples of those who were faithful and therefore received what God had promised. This list of heroes and heroines, commonly known as “the Hall of Faith,” encouraged them- and should encourage us- to hold onto their hope and faith in Christ even through the most difficult of times.

The author employs two literary devices in his list. First, he uses repetition. The phrase, “by faith,” emphasizes the necessity of building our lives on a solid faith foundation. Second, the author uses an example list. This literary device, common in the ancient world, built overwhelming evidence to support a preferred course of action. Here, the author uses dozens of Biblical examples to support his contention that his hearers will receive God’s promises when they stand firm in their faith through all circumstances. *Because the Hall of Faith is lengthy, we will be looking at it over the course of 3 days.*

### **Faith Defined**

#### **Read Hebrews 11:1-3.**

What is faith? Real, biblical faith is much more than hoping something is true. Christians don’t have to go through life with their fingers crossed. Faith is not illogical, blind acceptance either. Our God can stand up under any scrutiny. We cannot see Him with physical eyes, but God and His spiritual promises are a reality we can experience.

***Read Hebrews 11:1-3 from the Amplified Bible below. Underline words and phrases that help you understand the meaning of faith.***

*NOW FAITH is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of the things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see and the conviction of their reality [faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses].*

*For by [faith--trust and holy fervor born of faith] the men of old had divine testimony borne to them and obtained a good report.*

*By faith we understand that the worlds [during the successive ages] were framed (fashioned, put in order, and equipped for their intended purpose) by the word of God, so that what we see was not made out of things which are visible.*

***Reread Hebrews 6:13-18. How do God's promise and oath add to the evidence for faith?***

***After reflecting on these verses, write a biblical definition for faith.***

We can have a firm confidence in the existence of God, His character, and His promises. Many of His promises are yet to be fulfilled, but we can be certain God will keep them. We may still have questions about God and His ways, but we can trust completely in the One who has all the answers.

***Read verse 6. What must a person have to please God? How is it demonstrated?***

**Read Hebrews 11:4-12.**

***Based on these few examples, what foundational results does faith produce?***

### **Personal Reflection**

***How does your faith measure up to the definition you wrote? Does your faith produce good works, obedience, and endurance?***



## DAY 16

If God were to publish a new edition of the Hall of Faith, who do you think would be inducted? First, I think of all those mighty men and women of faith we read about in the pages of the New Testament. Paul and his dedication to taking the Gospel to the Gentiles no matter the cost. Peter and his renewed commitment to Christ after a fall. The deacon Stephen and his bold testimony even while the crowd hurled stones. And there have been so many faithful followers of Jesus beyond the pages of Scripture and down through the centuries. The early church fathers. Martin Luther who started a reformation. Missionaries and martyrs whose names we don't even know. Just think about how many volumes their stories would fill.

The lives of the people listed in Hebrews 11 span centuries of time. Their life circumstances are unique. Different challenges called for different responses. Like Abraham, some had to wait patiently on God. Others, like Rahab, had to act swiftly in obedience. In some instances, like Israel at the Red Sea, we see God's immediate and dramatic physical salvation. In other situations – like those stoned, sawed in two, and put to death by the sword – the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises were experienced in eternity.

### **Treasures in Heaven**

The same is true for us. Many of God's promises will not be completely fulfilled in this physical life. The full scope of blessings that accompany our salvation will be realized when Jesus returns to claim the church. We need to keep an eternal perspective, remembering that this world is not our ultimate home. This kind of focus will fill us with an eager anticipation of God's eternal promises!

***Read Matthew 6:19-21. Write the spiritual truths found in this passage in your own words.***

***How would embracing this kind of eternal focus impact your life?***

**Read Hebrews 11:13-28. Today and tomorrow we'll use all of Hebrews 11:4-38 to complete the following chart. Today, use verses 4-12, which you read yesterday and verses 13-28. We'll complete it tomorrow. Note: Each example may not exactly fit the pattern of the table.**

<b>Biblical Character</b>	<b>Faith Challenge</b>	<b>Faith Response</b>	<b>God's activity or the result of acting in faith</b>
Abel (4)			
Enoch (5-6)			
Noah (7)			
Abraham (8-12, 17-19)			
Isaac (20)			
Jacob (21)			
Joseph (22)			
Moses' parents (23)			
Moses (24-28)			
Israel (29-30)			
Rahab (31)			
Misc. & unnamed people (32-38)			

*As you end today, spend a few moments reflecting on the faith of these heroes!*

## DAY 17

Did you notice that the people in the Hall of Faith were not perfect people? In fact, some of them had some serious issues. For instance, Gideon hesitated to obey God. Both Samson and David allowed lust to lead them astray. But they all had a faith stronger than death. They looked beyond this physical life to the complete fulfillment of God's promises. Their faith was not simply religion, but rather a relationship of deep trust in God no matter the outcome. They spent their earthly life investing in their eternal future.

***Read Hebrews 11:29-38. Use these verses to fill out the rest of the chart in yesterday's study.***

***Even though the circumstances vary, these heroes of the faith share some common characteristics. Use Hebrews 11:4-38 to make a list of characteristics of faith. I'll list a few to get you started.***

- *Trusts God even when they don't understand or can't see big picture (vs 8,17)*
- *Obeys God in hard things (vs 7)*
- *Endures persecution for the sake of Christ (vs 35-38)*

**Read Hebrews 11:39-40.**

***What promise had these faith heroes not yet received when they died?***

\_\_\_ *God did not strengthen them through difficulty*

\_\_\_ *They did not get to go to heaven*

\_\_\_ *They died before they saw the fulfillment of God's salvation through Christ*

God brought these mighty people of faith through difficult times and right into His eternal presence. However, all of them died before God's anointed Savior was born. They were saved the same way we are today, but they looked *forward* to God's promised Messiah while we look *back*. (See 11:13.)

This account of great faith is inspiring but, incomplete. The author recognizes that God's family consists of all believers from all time. "God had planned something better for us so that only *together with us* would they be made perfect" (vs. 40). The word "perfect" is translated from the Greek word *teleioō*. It means to make complete; to carry through completely, to accomplish, finish; to bring to the end goal.

Salvation is relational. When we are saved we not only enter into a relationship with God, we also enter into a relationship with all other believers. The faithful ones of the Old Testament had not been "made perfect" because the New Testament believers had not yet entered God's family. And God's family was still not "perfect" until believers today were added. We are one family with the mighty men and women of faith recorded in Hebrews chapter 11.

### **Personal Reflection**

*As this lesson comes to a close, spend some time in prayer and reflection. Consider the following:*

- *If an account was written about your life of faith would it inspire future believers to stand firm?*
- *In what ways does your faith today encourage your family?*
- *Other believers?*
- *Are there areas God wants to strengthen? If so, what are they?*

## DAY 18

Years ago, when my children were still young, I began running in the early morning with a few girlfriends in my neighborhood. We got up before the sun – and before our kids - so we could finish before our husbands left for work. Kari motivated our group with a 10K run. We had three months to get ready. So, we met every morning under a specific street light, stretched, and pounded the pavement – chatting the entire time.

The four of us entered and finished the race. I think we were all among the last ten runners but we all crossed the finish line! Our families cheered us on from the sidelines holding signs that said “Go Mom!” We were so excited about our accomplishment we decided to keep training to prepare for a half marathon.

Unfortunately, a couple of months later I injured my foot. I could hardly walk for a while, much less run. I gave running a half-hearted try after my foot healed, but my race days were over. However, our friend Kelly persevered. She has completed at least two full marathons and still runs.

I allowed a little difficulty to sideline me for good. Thing got hard so I quit. The audience of the book of Hebrews was in danger of the same thing. When the persecution began to heat up they pulled back. At the beginning of chapter 12, the author uses a race metaphor to encourage them to persevere, to keep going in the face of trials. Their prize for running was much greater than a trophy or ribbon. It was Jesus Himself!

### **Run the Race with Endurance**

#### **Read Hebrews 12:1-3**

The author’s audience needed encouragement to stand firm in the face of persecution. In chapter 11, he gave them example after example of persecuted people who were faithful to God – many even giving their lives. God commended these heroes of faith for their steadfast perseverance. The author held up the example of this faithful “cloud of witnesses” to show that a life of faith will gain God’s promises.

*Describe the metaphor the author uses as a picture for faithful endurance. (See verse 1.)*

Athletic imagery was common in Greek and Roman thought. In the ancient games, an athlete would strip off anything and everything that hindered movement or restricted the limbs or

impaired breathing. Anything that would negatively affect the outcome of the race was done away with.

As Christians we have a course to complete- a goal to reach. This race is not a sprint; it is a long-distance marathon. This marathon requires preparation and training. We must throw away everything that hinders our performance. In verse 1, the author writes “throw off everything that hinders *and* the sin that so easily entangles...” Getting rid of sin is vital, but it is only part of the author’s call. Sometimes, things that aren’t necessarily sinful can still hinder our faithful obedience in following Christ.

***The author depicts the Christian life as a marathon, not a sprint. What difference does this make for us in the way we prepare and “run?”***

The sustained effort required for a marathon is much different than the short burst of energy needed for a sprint. Without training, I could put on my running shoes and give it everything I’ve got to get to the end of the block in a hurry. (Granted, I might pull something along the way!) But I could not run a marathon. I couldn’t even run that 10K.

***During a race, the runners look down the track at the course laid out ahead and toward the intended goal. As a Christian “athlete” on what are we to focus?***

Although the heroes in chapter 11 set faithful examples for us, Jesus is still our ultimate example. Not only did He blaze this trail of faith we must run, He also completed it with perfection. He “authored” or laid out the course and then “perfected” it by reaching its intended goal.

***Jesus is our ultimate example of faithfulness to God. Based on verses 2 and 3 how, can considering Christ’s example help us?***

The pain and humiliation of the cross was insignificant to Jesus in light of the joy He would gain from obeying the Father and fulfilling God’s plan to provide salvation for a lost world. He focused on the eternal rather than the temporary. The audience of Hebrews faced a similar situation. They had been enduring “opposition from sinful men.” The author encouraged them to follow Jesus’ example by scorning any pain that would come from persecution and focusing on the joy that would come from obedience. Remembering what Jesus endured can also motivate us to hold fast to our faith in times of difficulty and persecution, to “not grow weary and lose heart.”

## **Fatherly Discipline**

### **Read Hebrews 12:4-11**

Discipline is one of the primary responsibilities of a parent. We've all seen children whose parents have obviously shirked that responsibility. They are not doing their children – or the rest of humanity - any favors! Discipline is necessary for a child to grow into a fully functioning, law-abiding, productive adult.

The word translated as “discipline” in the NIV is the Greek word *paideia*. It carries the ideas of both correcting or chastening and education or training. God's discipline in the lives of His children corrects wrong behavior *and* equips us for the road ahead.

The audience of Hebrews needed to understand that God would positively use any persecution they faced. Nothing would come into their lives that He could not use to mold and shape them into the image of Christ.

They had already faced some persecution, though none had yet given their lives. However, assuming the letter was written to Christians in Rome in the early to mid- 60's that would soon change. Not long after this, the persecution increased drastically and martyrdom became widespread. The audience needed a proper perspective on persecution to faithfully persevere to the end.

***What does the presence of God's discipline in our lives prove?***

***How should we respond to the Lord's discipline?***

***In what ways is our heavenly Father's discipline superior to our earthly father's discipline? (See verses 9-10.)***

***What is the purpose of God's discipline in the lives of His children? (See verses 10b-11.)***

Our character and holiness are more important to God than our physical comfort. God allows difficulties and persecution into our lives so He can use them as tools to refine our faith and shape our character. This hard truth is all over Scripture. (See James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 1:6-7, and Romans 5:3-5 for examples.)

### **Call to Holiness**

#### **Read Hebrews 12:12-17.**

This section of Scripture begins with “therefore.” Because of the way God uses discipline in the lives of His children, the author called his audience to prepare themselves for the road ahead. Verses 12-13 show that this journey requires a group effort. God’s people must work together to help each other stand firm. We must help make “level paths” for those who are weaker among us, encouraging them along in the faith.

In verses 14-17, the author reminds us of the goal of God’s discipline (our holiness) and warns of a few things that could keep His children from that intended goal. The Greek word translated as “holiness” is *hagios*. To be holy means to be set apart *from* the world and *to* God. We still live in the world, but we must be different than the world. God’s children should adhere to His standards and not the world’s standards. Our experience of God’s presence will be limited if we do not live the holy life He calls us to. But if we embrace holiness, God promises we will “see” Him!

***The author cautions his audience of at least four things in verses 14-16 that could inhibit holiness. What warnings do you find?***

### **Personal Reflection**

***Ask God now to show you if there is anything in your life or any area of your life that hinders your faithful endurance. Write your thoughts below.***



## DAY 19

I've been on quite a few mountains in my life. I've hiked hot, dusty ones in the summer and I've skied white, frozen ones in the winter. Our family has even had a couple of scary mountain encounters. Once we got caught on a mountain top in a blinding blizzard while skiing. Another time, we had a black bear try to get in our tent in the middle of the night. Both situations were a little terrifying, but they make great stories.

In today's passage, the author of Hebrews reflects on two mountains that represent two covenants. Both are also great stories to share!

### **Two Mountains**

#### **Read Hebrews 12:18-24**

In this passage, the author emphasizes the superiority of the New Covenant by contrasting two "mountains." The scene at Mt. Sinai represents the law, the Old Covenant. There only Moses could approach God; the people had to remain at a distance. But Mount Zion, God's spiritual Kingdom, is far superior!

#### **Read Exodus 19:1-25.**

*What would happen to the people if they approached the mountain?*

*What did God tell Moses to do to protect the people?*

\_\_\_ *Confine everyone to their tents*

\_\_\_ *Ordain them all as priests*

\_\_\_ *Put barriers/limits around the mountain*

#### **Read Exodus 20:18-21.**

*How did the people respond to God's presence? Did they desire to draw closer to Him?*

*Why did God reveal Himself to the people?*

God's holy presence on Mt. Sinai made the mountain itself a holy place. Thunder, fire, smoke, and trembling ground dramatically accompanied God's fearsome holiness. The people could not touch the mountain because they were sinful. God ordained Moses as their intercessor.

***What does the scene at Mt. Sinai teach us about the nature of the Old Covenant?***

***In the list of words/phrases below, circle all those associated with the Old Covenant (Mt. Sinai). Underline all those associated with the New Covenant (Mt. Zion).***

untouchable            terrifying            better word  
joyful assembly      trembling            come to God

***What does the author's description of Mount Zion in verses 22-24, reveal about the nature of the New Covenant?***

I am so glad that under the New Covenant we are invited to come to Mount Zion instead of Mount Sinai! If we have accepted Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we can freely approach Mount Zion and worship God because we have been made righteous by the blood of our mediator, Jesus. In the heavenly realm, forgiven sinners will add our voices of praise to the "joyful assembly!"

### **One last warning**

**Read Hebrews 12:25-29.**

Once again, the author uses a "lesser to greater" argument to stress the importance of heeding God's words. The audience knew the result of their ancestors' disregard for God's Word. Our holy God judged their disobedience. That first generation could not enter the Promised Land.

If God demanded His people to obey a covenant that would be replaced, He certainly expects us to "not refuse" His permanent, superior covenant. When the people disobeyed the first covenant

they experienced the consequences of their disobedience. Rejection of the New Covenant will more certainly bring God's judgment.

Verses 26-29 refer to the end of time when Christ will return and God will establish his everlasting Kingdom. At that time, He will replace the physical and temporal with the spiritual and eternal. All physical creation will be "shaken," but the eternal will remain.

*Based on verse 28, how should we respond to this truth?*

**Read 2 Peter 3:10-14.**

*In light of Christ's return and the destruction of the physical creation, how should we live?*

### **Personal Reflection**

*As we close, prayerfully consider the truth that our "God is a consuming fire." How should the truth that God is holy affect how we respond to Him?*

## DAY 20

My friend Mark is an excellent cook. I've asked him to share recipes with me, but he doesn't have any! He just whips up wonderful dishes without them. I can't cook that way. I need step by step instructions. Tell me what ingredients I need and how to put them together. Then I can cook something that's edible. Well, at least most of the time.

The author of Hebrews has beautifully articulated why his audience should persevere in the faith and not turn back. He challenged them to stand firm in the face of persecution, to cling to their High Priest Jesus Christ, and not turn away from the superior Covenant. But what should this look like in their daily life?

Here in chapter 13, the author gives his audience some practical direction for living out their faith. He begins with a few guidelines for ethical living and relationships, touches again on holding fast to our High Priest Jesus, and then concludes his sermon-letter with a request for prayer.

### **Ethical Living**

**Read Hebrews 13:1-8.**

*How should our Christian faith be lived out in each of the following areas?*

*With our Christian brothers & sisters:*

*With strangers:*

*With prisoners & those who are mistreated:*

*In our sexual life:*

*With our material goods:*

*Leaders:*

*Look back over the list above. How does your life compare with these characteristics of a life of faith?*

*Why don't Christians have to worry about our futures? What characteristics of God – found in these verses 5 and 6 – can we depend on?*

After the author reminds His audience that they can depend on God to see them through hard times, he gives them a specific example to follow. “Remember those who first told you about Jesus? Think about how God sustained them and then follow their example. Jesus was there for them and He will be there for you, because He does not change!” Even though the author’s audience had faced – and would continue to face – persecution, Jesus would not fail them.

*How does Jesus’ unchanging nature encourage you?*

### **Praise the High Priest**

#### **Read Hebrews 13:9-16.**

Christians have had to deal with false teaching since the earliest days of our faith. Here in verse 9, the author does not get specific about the nature of the false teachings his audience was dealing with. However, he could have in mind some of the Jewish practices they would take up if they returned to Judaism.

Once again, he reminds them of Christ’s superior sacrifice. Ceremonial foods and animal sacrifices could never provide the forgiveness that believers receive through God’s grace by the death of Christ. Those still under the Old Covenant cannot partake of the sacrifice offered on the cross, which is the altar of the New Covenant.

The “camp” in verse 13 represents the religion of Judaism and the Old Covenant. For Gentile Christians it could represent the pagan culture they turned away from when they became a Christian. The author calls them to leave that “camp” and not return.

*What “camp” did you leave when you came to Christ?*

*Read Hebrews 11:13 and Philippians 3:20 and compare them with Hebrews 13:14. Why don't we have an “enduring city” here on earth? Where is our citizenship?*

In our study of Hebrews, we have learned that animal sacrifice is no longer needed because of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. He has made complete atonement for our sin. But here, the author mentions spiritual “sacrifices” that God still expects Christians to offer (verses 15-16). These “sacrifices of praise” are a believer’s thankful response to the perfect sacrifice of Christ.

The Old Covenant made provision for an offering that would be given to God solely as an expression of thanksgiving. (See Leviticus 7:12.) This thank offering was voluntary and could only be made after all the other sacrifices for sin had been made. Based on the author’s usage it seems he is using this offering as a metaphor for Christians.

The word translated “share with others,” in verse 16, is the Greek word *koinonia*. It emphasizes a fellowship among believers that is lived out practically according to their needs.

***Based on Hebrews 13:15-16, how can you offer God a “sacrifice of praise?” Also see Romans 12:1-2 to help with your answer.***

***How does God view this kind of “sacrifice?” (See verse 16).***

### **Closing Remarks**

**Read Hebrews 13:17-25.**

The author begins to wrap up his letter. Only a few last things need to be said. First, he directs them to obey their leaders. These men watch over them and care for their spiritual health. This job comes with great responsibility because God will hold them accountable. The people’s obedience will not only make the leaders’ job easier, it will also be better for them!

***How can you be a “joy” to your leaders?***

***What kind of behavior would create a “burden” for your leaders?***

Before the author takes care of a little business and closes his letter in verses 22-25, he turns to prayer. “Pray for us” in verse 18 is a present imperative. This command implies continuous action. In other words, the author wants them to pray for him and keep on praying for him. Although he wrote this letter to challenge and encourage them, he also needs their prayers and encouragement. The phrase “may be restored to you,” in verse 19, shows that the author was among them at one time.

In the ancient world, a benediction (or doxology) was an important component of an address. They expressed a wish of well-being for the readers or hearers. The author offers a beautiful one here in verses 20-21.

***List the requests the author makes of God in his benediction prayer.***

“Grace be with you all.” The author ends his letter with a prayer that God would bless each of them with His grace. What a fitting way to conclude such a marvelous treatise on Jesus Christ, our Superior High Priest. The author has given us more than enough reason to stand firm in our faith and not turn back.

***As we end our last lesson together, pray and ask God if there is any area of your daily life that does not reflect a faithful Christian walk. If so, repent and let God control and guide you in this area.***