

Creative Living Bible Study



A Faith That Works

Studies from the Book of Hebrews

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Studies from the Book of Hebrews

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*Studies from the Book of
Hebrews*

1	The Superiority of Christ	The Picture of God We Need	1
2	Jesus—The Perfect Man	The Understanding We Need	11
3	Jesus—Superior to Moses	The Peace and Rest We Need	20
4	Our Great High Priest	The Intimacy With God We Need	29
5	Our Eternal High Priest	The Grace We Need	39
6	Christ—The Mediator of a Better Covenant	The Transformed Life We Need	49
7	Christ—Our Redeemer	The Unconditional Love We Need	59
8	Christ—The Perfect Sacrifice	The Freedom from Guilt We Need	68
9	The Victory of Faith	Faith in God's Faithfulness	77
10	The Christian Race	Keys to Running the Race of Faith	86
11	Final Words of Wisdom	The Law of Love	96
	Major Footnotes Directory		107
	Bibliography		108
	About the Author		109

LESSON 1

INTRODUCTION

More than any other New Testament writing, the Book of Hebrews draws the Old Testament together with the New. It presents the Lord Jesus Christ as our eternal advocate before God and proves Christianity to be God's plan of the ages to redeem mankind and draw people to Himself.

This great masterpiece of Scripture was written primarily to first century Jewish Christians who were suffering persecution for their faith. Many were tempted to renounce their new-found faith in Jesus Christ and return to the safety of the Jewish religious system established under Moses (10:38-39). The anonymous author of Hebrews exhorts these believers to hold fast to their faith and press on to spiritual maturity, basing his appeal on the supremacy of Christ and the Christian faith.

This is why the basic theme of Hebrews is found in the word "better," first describing the preeminence of Christ in His Person and work (1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24), then describing the Christian faith. Christ is better than Moses; He created Moses. He is superior to Aaron and the priesthood; His sacrifice need never be repeated. Christ is better than the Mosaic Law; He mediates a better covenant of grace. The new covenant in Jesus Christ is shown to be the completion of Judaism, fulfilling the laws and prophecies of the Old Testament.

The author states that while other religions hold value, faith in Christ is superior because it is God's way to know Him personally. Through His new covenant, we are made right with God and enabled to come

into His presence, not by struggling to keep rules and rituals, but rather by simply trusting in the Person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. No other religion, including Judaism with its grand Old Testament Scriptures, gives a person forgiveness, new life within, peace and an eternal personal relationship with God as His beloved child. This relationship fulfills our deepest needs, making Christianity a faith that works.

When difficult times come or in the daily challenges of life, it is easy to become weary and give up truly practicing a life of faith. Persecution, hardship, doubt or the difficulty of living for God may cause us to feel that we need to add something to the simplicity of trusting Jesus. In such times, we may be tempted to revert to just going through the motions of being a Christian. Or we may abandon faith in God altogether. Yet, the Book of Hebrews encourages us to persevere as we "fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..." (Hebrews 12:2). We will be refreshed in our walk of faith as we look at the greatness of the Son of God—His superiority and sufficiency for all who trust in Him.

THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST

Hebrews 1

The Book of Hebrews was probably written around 64-68 A.D. before the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. While the teachings of Hebrews sound like those of Paul, most scholars doubt the apostle wrote the book. Paul always identified himself in his letters, and the style and approach of the author are different from any other New Testament book. Clearly, the writer knew Paul well and had often listened to his preaching. Luke, Barnabas, Apollos and Priscilla have all been suggested, but only God knows the true author.

The scattered Jewish believers to whom this letter was written were probably going through terrible persecution from both Romans and Jews. Perhaps they had expected Christ to return immediately to set up His kingdom. When He had not, they needed to be reassured that

Jesus was the Christ (Messiah) and that Christianity was the true worship of God. They needed to see the futility of returning to the old life that was inherently inferior to the new life found in Jesus Christ. They needed to see how Judaism's prophecies, laws and promises had all been fulfilled in the Son of God.

The writer proves to fellow Jewish Christians that Jesus Christ is superior to all those whom Jewish people had considered God's authorities—the prophets, angels, Moses and the priests.

Read Hebrews 1:1-3.

1. How has God communicated to mankind (1:1-2a)?

Note: *prophets* here refers to all Old Testament writers because their testimony prepared the way for Christ. *in these last days* signifies the Messianic (Christ) era inaugurated by the incarnation of Jesus.

2. What is true of God's Son (1:2b-3)?

Reference: Note 1, *exact representation*, p. 8.

Read Hebrews 1:4-14.

3. People revere angelic beings. What is their purpose according to Hebrews 1:14?

Reference: Note 2, *angels*, p. 8, and Note 1, *angels*, p. 85.

4. a. What name did Old Testament prophecies give the Messiah (Jesus) that proves Him superior to angels (1:4-5)?

b. The author quotes Psalm 45, a Messianic prophecy describing the reign of God's Son. What would make angels worship Jesus (Hebrews 1:6-9)?

c. What does the author add to this as he quotes the prophecy of Psalm 102 (Hebrews 1:10-12)?

5. What does the author show God (the Father) promised His Son as he quotes the Messianic prophecy of Psalm 110 (Hebrews 1:13)?

Reference: Note 3, *The Trinity*, p. 8.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

The Picture of God We Need

We only have to look into nature to see that God is a being far transcendent to human beings. We might be able to draw an ant, but we could not make one or give it life. We can learn about the human mind and create computers, but crafting a human mind is beyond us.

Creation—the expansive universe hurling about our tiny earth with its amazing animal, plant and sea worlds—so demonstrates the awesome nature of God that people of all cultures have feared Him. Around the world, religions have been established with one or more fearful gods to explain creation and human existence. Each religion has rituals and works required to appease their gods.

But in Christ God has done the unimaginable in order to reveal His true nature to mankind. The Son of God became one of us to communicate and demonstrate God's gracious and righteous nature

and His great love for us. Hebrews echoes other New Testament passages that reveal that "the Son is the radiance of the Father's glory and the exact representation of His being" (1:3).

When life becomes difficult and we wonder if God is good, we need only to look at God's character in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus to be assured of God's love. In this lesson, we will take a brief look at some important aspects of God's character taught and demonstrated by Jesus, the exact image of God.

1. What did Jesus say about Himself?

John 14:9-11 (12:49-50)

Verses in parenthesis () are always optional in Building on the Basics section.

Matthew 28:18 (after His resurrection)

Reference: Note 3, *Trinity*, p. 8, and Note 4, *Claims of Jesus*, p. 9.

2. a. The teachings of Jesus reveal what God is like. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) contains many of Jesus' teachings.

What kind of person does God bless, according to the teaching of Matthew 5:3-10 (list only descriptions; i.e. "the peacemaker").

b. What did this reveal about God?

A Faith That Works

c. What did Jesus both teach and model that shows us God's goodness?

Matthew 5:16

Matthew 5:43-45 (Matthew 7:12)

Matthew 6:19-21,24c

Mark 12:30-31

3. The miracles of Jesus demonstrated God's power and compassion as well as proved Jesus was from God. At least 24 miracles of healing and deliverance, three of raising the dead, and nine showing power over nature (ex: calming a storm; feeding 5,000) are recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These were only a few of the miracles of Jesus (cf. Luke 6:19; 9:11; Matthew 4:24; 9:36). What do these miracles tell us about the character of the Father as seen in His Son?

Mark 1:40-41

Mark 6:34, 38-44

Luke 7:11-16

4. Jesus told many parables to reveal God to us. What did He teach about the love of His heavenly Father in Luke 15:11-24?

5. Jesus fulfilled 300 Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah who would come to save Israel. Isaiah's prophecy, written around 700 B.C., precisely describes the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for man's sin.

Review Isaiah 53:4-6, 11-12.

What did Jesus demonstrate about the heavenly Father through His death and resurrection?

Romans 8:31-32, 34-35a, 38-39

Reference: Note 5, *Why God gave His Son*, p. 9.

S U M M A R Y

6. Why is Jesus a higher authority than the prophets and angels whom people esteem?

7. As the exact representation of God's being, what does Jesus show us about the true nature of God?

8. a. Have any recent negative circumstances tempted you to doubt the goodness or love of God toward you?

b. Of what does fixing your eyes on Jesus assure you?

LESSON 1 NOTES

1 *exact representation* (1:3). "Not only is Jesus the exact representation of God, but He is God himself—the very God who spoke in Old Testament times. He is eternal; He worked with the Father in creating the world (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16). He is the full revelation of God. You can have no clearer view of God than by looking at Christ. Jesus Christ is the complete expression of God in a human body." *The Life Application Bible*, p. 2219.

2 *angels* (22:43). Angels are spiritual beings, created by God early in creation. Though we know only three by name—Michael, Gabriel and Satan—the Bible refers to numerous ranks and divisions. Satan is the leader of the company of evil angels, while good angels are under the authority of God. The duties of God's angels include praising and worshiping God, taking messages from God to man, and providing for or protecting God's people. *NIV Topical Bible*, p. 1367. See also Note 1, *angels*, p. 85.

3 *The Trinity*. While "Trinity" as a word is not in the Bible, Christian doctrine historically has used this term to describe God as He has revealed Himself. The Bible explains that God is one God in three equal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Certain passages in the Old Testament hint of a plurality in God (Genesis 1:26-27, 3:22, 11:7; Isaiah 6:8). The Old Testament also speaks of someone coming from God who is God (i.e. Christ, Isaiah 7:14, 9:6). The New Testament clearly portrays Jesus Christ as God (John 1:1; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:8) and the Holy Spirit as God (Luke 1:35; Acts 5:3-4; Matthew 28:19; II Corinthians 13:14). All three persons of the Trinity share the divine characteristics of holiness, power, goodness, omniscience, omnipotence, etc. While they all may

be involved in an activity such as teaching, for instance, each is associated with certain specific works. The Father is associated with the work of creating, the Son with the work of redeeming, and the Holy Spirit with the work of sanctifying believers. In many New Testament passages, mention of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit occurs in the same sentence (Jude 20-21; Ephesians 4:4-6, I John 4:2; I Peter 1:2; Titus 3:4-6; II Thessalonians 2:13; Galatians 4:4-6; Romans 5:5-6; John 15:26). See also Note 4, *Holy Spirit*, p. 57.

4 *Claims of Jesus.* Jesus claimed to be God and the only way to reach God. Such claims, if not true, render him a liar or lunatic. The Christian believes these claims because of the supernatural essence of His life and resurrection as facts of history. His life, teachings, miracles and resurrection as recorded by contemporaries in the gospels and secular historians support Jesus' claims about Himself. Jesus also fulfilled 300 specific Old Testament prophecies regarding Messiah (Christ), connecting Him to the Jewish revelation of the One true God. Also, where the message of Christ has gone, individuals and societies have been changed for better. This would not make sense if Jesus had been a liar or a lunatic.

In *The Case for Christianity* C. S. Lewis wrote: "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said wouldn't be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on the level with a man who says he's a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell; you must take your choice. Either this was and is the Son of God, or else a mad man or something worse. You can shut Him up for a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But don't come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great moral teacher. He hasn't left that alternative open to us."

5 *Why God gave His Son.* The Bible tells us that we were made in God's image (Genesis 1:26), a spiritual creature able to relate to God personally. But Genesis records that in the beginning, man chose to go His own way and his relationship with God was broken (spiritual death, or separation, is the penalty for sin Genesis 2-3). But God has made a way to restore our relationship to Him. He came to earth in the Person of His Son to provide a way for forgiveness and reconciliation for those who would believe. 2 Corinthians 5:19 says God was in Christ reconciling the wayward world to Himself, not charging men's transgressions to their account. Through the death of His own dear Son, He proved His amazing love for us (Romans 5:8; John 3:16). The theme of the Bible is God making a way for us to be reconciled to Him through His Son Jesus Christ who took the

penalty for our sin on the cross (Romans 3:23; 6:23). When we turn from going our own way apart from God, ask His forgiveness for the sins of our lives and place our faith in Jesus Christ, our relationship with the Father is re-established.

While many have never experienced a loving father, Jesus makes it possible to know the one true God as a loving heavenly Father. According to the Scriptures, this relationship to God as a Father begins when we receive His Son. "Yet to all who received Him [Jesus], to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:12-13). When we open our lives to Christ, God plants His Spirit in our hearts—His life placed within us. Jesus calls this being born again (John 3:3), coming alive spiritually to know and experience God as a loving heavenly Father. The Spirit in our hearts frees us from slavery to guilt and sin and gives us a spirit to shout, "Abba! [Daddy] Father!" The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (1 Peter 2:9; Romans 8:14-16). See also, Note 3, *Why Did Jesus Have to Die in My Place?* p. 18.