

1 Hebrews – Introduction

Written by whom?

- There is no real agreement among scholars about who authored Hebrews. The main contenders are:
 - A. The apostle Paul (written in Hebrew, translated into Greek by Luke)
 - B. Barnabas (he was a Levite, and knew Timothy) The writer was very knowledgeable about Jewish rituals, including sacrifices.
 - C. More recently, there has been discussion that it was Priscilla, wife to Aquilla.
 - D. Apollos (he was an eloquent man, who had “a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures”, Acts 18:24)

Written when and where?

- While there are no clues about where it was written, chapter 13, verse 24 says “Those from Italy send you their greetings”, so possibly there were some Italian believers present with the writer. It must have been written before AD70, because there is no mention of the fall of Jerusalem. Also, the author consistently uses the present tense when speaking of the temple activities.

Written to whom?

- No specific group of people is mentioned. However, given that it is addressed to “The Hebrews”, it was probably Jewish Christians living in Rome. Certainly the readers were intimately familiar with the Old Testament and its rituals.

What form?

- It is not a letter in the usual way letters were written. Some commentaries suggest that this book might have been a sermon, either preached earlier and written down or one being written just for his readers.

What’s it about?

- The theme of Hebrews is Jesus, and is to show that he is absolutely supreme, and that he is all that is needed for salvation. Believers must stick with what they know is true and persist in their faithfulness. The writer makes it clear: Jesus is better, in all ways, in all things.

Written for what purpose?

- It is possible that the Christians were considering merging with a Jewish cult, or were being tempted to revert back to Judaism, or to Judaize the gospel. The writer told them that there was no turning back, no continuation of the old Jewish system.

2 Hebrews – Chapter 1 – Scripture Questions

1. What is the difference between the way God spoke in the past and the way he now speaks to us? (vs. 1, 2)
2. List some of the different ways Jesus (God's Son) is described: (vs. 2-4)
3. How is Jesus different from the angels? (vs. 5, 6)
4. What is one of the purposes of angels? (vs. 6, 7)
5. What is the symbol of righteousness in God's kingdom? (vs. 8, 9)
6. What did the Son love? _____ What did he hate? _____ (vs. 9a)
7. How does the writer emphasize that Jesus existed from the beginning with God? (vs. 10)
8. What will remain after everything else in the universe is gone? (vs. 11, 12)
9. What would be done with Jesus' enemies? (vs. 13)
10. How are angels described? (vs. 14)

Scepters were symbols of rulership. They were often decorated in ways that symbolized the focus of the ruler who held them.

God has spoken to his people in many ways. He spoke to Moses in the burning bush, to Elijah in a still, small voice, to Isaiah in a vision in the temple, to Hosea in his family circumstances, and to Amos in a basket of summer fruit. God at times conveyed his message through visions and dreams, through angels, through Urim and Thummim, through symbols, through natural events, etc. He appeared in various locations, such as Ur of the Chaldees, Haran, Canaan, Egypt, and Babylon. Revelation was never monotonous activity: God used variety.

3 Hebrews – Chapter 1 – What Did It Mean To Them?

While it is not possible to be completely sure about the audience for this letter, the most likely possibility is a group of knowledgeable Jewish Christians who were hesitant about cutting themselves off completely from the Jewish religion (which was tolerated by the Romans) in favor of the Christian way (which was not tolerated by the Romans). The Temple and Jerusalem had not yet been destroyed, but things were becoming uncomfortable for the believers.

The intent of the writer is to remind the readers of the divinity of Christ and his power, to show how the Old Testament leads inescapably to him, and to show the superiority of God's revelation of the new covenant. The writer encourages his readers to recommit themselves to this new reality in the face of the threat of persecution.

In the first chapter, the writer draws attention to the excellence of the Christ. He emphasizes that Christ has greater dignity than any other being—so great that he must be classed with God rather than with human beings. The audience for the letter must have been well-versed in the Old Testament, since the writer uses many quotations from Psalms, Samuel and Chronicles to show how Christ is the goal of all history.

The original sources that the writer uses, especially those from Psalms, were praise directed at God. Here, though, they are applied to Christ. One in particular, Psalm 110:1, was understood as messianic, even by those who did not believe that it applied to Jesus of Nazareth. We can tell from the many mentions of angels that the readers had well-developed ideas of angels and their place in God's universe. The positions of the angels (they stand before God, while the Son sits) show how great Christ is in God's kingdom.

The word 'purification' refers to the removal of sin's defiling aspect. Christ accomplished a complete cleansing of sin at Calvary. In this letter, sin is seen as the power that deceives us and leads us to destruction. Only this sacrifice of Jesus could remove sin.

4 Hebrews – Chapter 1 – Application Questions

1. In New Testament times, the ‘name’ of a person summed up a person’s character. The writer of Hebrews says that ‘the name’ (either ‘Jesus’ or ‘Son’) was superior to all, including angels. Think of some names of people that immediately remind you of their character (good or bad). What will come to mind when people think of your name?
2. God has revealed himself in many ways, through many people, in many places. Do you believe that these revelations were finished when Jesus came, died, and was resurrected? Why or why not?
3. Angels are supposed to be ministering servants for “those who will inherit salvation”. If I don’t seem to have an angel around doing stuff for me, does that mean I won’t inherit salvation? How do angels fit into the way you think about God and his kingdom?
4. These quotes from the Old Testament don’t necessarily talk about the “Messiah”, and they certainly don’t use the name Jesus. The writer showed how they fit what he strongly believed. Am I free to find scriptures that fit what I believe?

5 Hebrews – Chapter 2 – Scripture Questions

1. If we don't pay close attention to what we have heard/learned – what might happen? (vs. 1)
2. What were the three ways in which the new salvation was unique? (vs. 3-4)
 - a. Declared (or announced) by whom? (vs. 3)
 - b. Confirmed by whom? (vs. 3)
 - c. Testified to by whom? (vs. 4)
3. In the hierarchy of God's universe, where do angels and humans rank? (vs. 6, 7)
4. What was put into subjection to mankind? (vs. 8)
5. Who was made for a little while lower than the angels, and where is he now? (vs. 9)
6. The 'family' of God is composed of the one who MAKES men _____ and those who are MADE _____. (vs. 11)
7. Why did Jesus call believers his children? Why did he share their humanity? (vs. 14)
8. What was the point of Jesus being like humans in every way? (vs. 17)
9. What is Jesus able to do because he suffered in temptation? (vs. 18)

Atonement: satisfaction or "payback" for a wrong or injury: amends, making something right.

Salvation: deliverance from the power and penalty of sin.

6 Hebrews – Chapter 2 – What Did It Mean To Them?

The second step in the writer's discussion about Jesus' superiority shows that he is infinitely great because of the salvation he won. This salvation involved 'tasting' death for everyone, so it was much greater than anything brought by angels.

The writer certainly seems to think that it is possible to let this salvation slip, or drift, away. The idea is that if one becomes distracted by other beliefs or concerns, their salvation becomes less and less important to them. Eventually it is gone, not taken by God but left behind by the former believer.

A very great emphasis is placed on the truthfulness of this salvation, possibly to counteract the problems the readers were encountering in their lives. The fact that this salvation was announced by the Lord (Luke 19:9), confirmed by the original disciples, and testified to by God himself (John 5:37) is presented as witness to the Gospel. Some of the readers may have known the original disciples, or been witness to some of the miracles. Certainly they would have been able to testify about the power of the Holy Spirit.

The teaching about Jesus' place in God's kingdom may have been necessary in order to counteract false teachings the readers were encountering. Even this early in the time of the Church, people were trying to teach "Jesus AND" messages: Jesus AND angelic leaders, Jesus AND numerology, Jesus AND asceticism. The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that only Jesus is necessary for salvation, and that all others are subject to him.

On the other hand, it is important for the readers to know that Jesus was, while he was here on earth, completely human. This was another false teaching that was a problem, the teaching that Jesus was never actually human but was a divinity in human shape. The writer shows that in order for Jesus to be the High Priest to his followers, it was necessary that he be fully human. Because of his humanity, he is able to not only sympathize with us, but to empathize with us. He knows, in a way that non-humans cannot, what it means to fear death. His power over death gives us hope and encouragement.

7 Hebrews – Chapter 2 – Application Questions

1. How easy is it to slip away from God? What is the way that is easiest for you? How do you know when you're slipping?
2. What does it mean that God meant us to be just below God and the Angels? Do we think too highly of ourselves or too little of ourselves? Just how important are people?
3. What does it mean to be a child of God? How does it show in our lives? In our attitudes? In our treatment of other people? In our politics?
4. Jesus' life and death, his suffering, was part of God's plan of salvation for us. How can we tell if the things that happen to us are part of God's plan or if they are a result of our own choices?

8 Hebrews – Chapter 3 – Scripture Questions

Apostle: One who is sent; an ambassador with full authority.

1. How was Jesus described? (vs. 1)
2. To whom was Jesus faithful? (vs. 2)
3. Who was found worthy of greater honor than Moses? (vs. 3)
4. Moses was found faithful as a _____, but Jesus was found faithful as a _____ . (vs. 5,6)
5. We are God's house, if we hold on to _____ . (vs. 6b)
6. What did the Israelites do during the time of testing in the desert? (vs. 8-10)
7. The readers are warned, instructed and encouraged.
The warning: (vs. 12) _____
The instruction: (vs. 13) _____
The encouragement: (vs. 14) _____
8. What was the effect of the Israelites' rebellion, sin and disobedience? (vs. 16-19)

The first generation of Israelites lost the blessing of the Promised Land. God makes us an offer, too: it requires trust and obedience, and we only have this lifetime to accept it.

9 Hebrews – Chapter 3 - What Did It Mean To Them?

The writer is still developing the theme of the greatness of Jesus. In earlier sections he has taught that Jesus is greater than the angels, the author of a great salvation, and great enough to become human to accomplish it. Now he turns his attention to Moses, regarded by the Jews as the greatest person of all. Some even thought Moses was greater than the angels since he brought the Law to the people directly from God. The writer does not belittle Moses, or even criticize him. He accepts Moses' greatness but shows that as great as he was, Jesus was greater by far. Jesus was sent by God (apostle) and as the ultimate high priest. It is as a human being that this work was accomplished.

The writer uses the image of a house to describe both the people of God and the place of Jesus. This 'house', or the collection of human beings who make up the household of God, was a familiar idea to the readers. A household was more than just the place one lived, it was the source of identity. Moses is spoken of as a very important member of this house/household. To the Jews, as the bringer of the Law he was the most important person in their history. Jesus, however, held two places: as a human being he was a member (brother) of the house. As the divine Christ, equal to God himself, he was the architect of the house. As the One who fulfilled all the Law and as the Builder of the House, he was far greater than Moses.

Near the end of this section, the writer compares the behavior of the followers of Christ and Moses. The behavior of the Israelites after the Exodus is used as a way to challenge the readers to a closer walk with God. Also, there was a promise in the Old Testament that God's people would someday "enter into rest". The writer sees this promise as fulfilled—not in anything in the Old Testament—but in Christ. This 'rest' can be understood in a couple of ways. One way is that after believers die, they will be in heaven with Christ. Another way to understand this term 'rest' is that while we live, we are secure in our place in God's household because of Christ's death, resurrection, and his defeat of sin and death.

The Psalm quoted is 95:7-11. The example of Israel under Moses was used by the psalmist to warn the Israelites of his day against unbelief and disobedience.

10 Hebrews – Chapter 3 – Application Questions

1. Because we are committed to following Jesus, we are called to ‘focus’ on him. What are some of the ways we do this? How can I tell if I’m focusing on Christ?
2. God’s “House” is his family—believers in him and his promises. There are a lot of nice people who aren’t believers. What do you think happens to them after they die?
3. God didn’t say the rebellious Israelites were kicked out of the family, but he sure punished them for their sins. Can we live in sin and still get to heaven?
4. How much leeway do we have in deciding how we show our faith? I don’t like being uncomfortable. Is it a sin to only show my faith in easy, comfortable settings? Do people who live their faith publicly get ‘extra points’ with God?

One evidence of salvation is to be persistent in faith.

11 Hebrews – Chapter 4 – Scripture Questions

1. Since the promise of God’s rest still stands, be careful that none of us _____ . (vs. 1)
2. What was supposed to be combined with the hearing of the gospel? (vs. 2)
3. Who enters God’s rest (eternal salvation)? (vs. 3)
4. What kept the Israelites from entering into God’s rest? (vs. 6)
5. What should we make every effort to do? (vs. 11)
6. How is the word of God described? (vs. 12)
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
7. How much of creation can God see? (vs. 13)
8. Since our great high priest, Jesus, has ‘gone through the heavens, we should hold firmly to _____.’ (vs. 14)
9. We have a high priest who has been tempted in _____. (vs. 15)
10. How should we approach the throne of grace? With _____. (vs. 16)

Think of God’s promise like this: imagine a wealthy person who sets up a foundation that will award a prize for the people who accomplish a certain goal. He may have had some specific people in mind for the original award, but if they fail to follow through, then the prize will be awarded to any other people who come along that accomplish the goal.

Verse 1 may mean: “Be careful—don’t think that you have arrived too late in history to enjoy the rest of God.” The days of great promise and great achievement are not behind us, like some kind of Golden Age of religion. Now is still God’s Today.

12 Hebrews – Chapter 4 - What Did It Mean To Them?

Remember, the Israelites who didn't believe God's promises didn't enter Canaan. However, God's promise about eternal rest, or salvation, still stands, so be careful that you really believe what God says. The Israelites heard his promises, but since they didn't really believe, it didn't do them any good. We've heard the Good News, and if we believe it we'll be saved.

God's work (his plan) was finished with creation itself. His salvation is still open to believers. He warned people through writers and prophets not to ignore this available salvation, not to 'harden their hearts', but to respond in faith: that is, to trust God wholeheartedly.

Joshua, the leader after Moses, led them into Canaan, the physical 'place of rest'. If God had only been talking about that land, he wouldn't have talked through the Psalmists about the 'Sabbath Rest'. No, he was talking about eternal salvation.

We need to be obedient to God, and that means believing his promise: the promise that believing in Jesus would save us. God's word isn't just printed letters—it is real and alive and will cut to the heart of us, seeing everything there is to see. We won't be able to fake our belief.

In one sense, Christian salvation means we stop trying to save ourselves and 'rest' on what Christ has done. In another sense, works that we do because of our belief in Christ give us a sense of completeness and fulfillment that can be called 'rest'.

13 Hebrews – Chapter 4 – Application Questions

1. It's impossible for us to know, with our human brains, whether or not we're REALLY understanding what God wants of us. I don't like the uncertainty. What can I do to feel more comfortable with my religious beliefs?
2. Belief and faith seem to be more about DOING stuff than THINKING stuff. I thought we were saved by God's grace and Jesus' sacrifice. Is God keeping lists of what we do? Why?
3. My inside self doesn't always match what my outside self is doing. Sometimes I do "good things" but inside I'm really aggravated about the time it takes. I know my salvation doesn't depend on works, but do I still get credit for doing good works even when I'm not feeling it?
4. Okay, God's 'rest' is eternal salvation. I could use a little HUMAN rest. If I say "No" to requests, how can I tell if I'm just tired or if I'm being disobedient or lazy?

The word 'rest' can mean various things. For instance, God's rest after creation: the word 'rest' in this verse may be better understood as 'satisfaction of a job well done.'

14 Hebrews – Chapter 5 – Scripture Questions

1. What was the high priest appointed to do? (vs. 1)
2. How was he to deal with those who were ignorant and going astray? (vs. 2)
3. What did the high priest do to deal with his own sin? (vs. 3)
4. How did Christ receive the position (and glory) of high priest? (vs. 5)
5. For how long would Jesus be considered a high priest? (vs. 6)
6. What kind of prayer life did Jesus have? (vs. 7)
7. Why were Jesus' prayers heard by God? (vs. 7b)
8. What was the result of Jesus' perfection (completion) through suffering? (vs. 8-10)
9. How had the readers of this letter slipped in their spiritual lives? (vs. 11-12)
10. What kind of teaching is required for the spiritually mature? (vs. 14)

High priests have these qualifications:

1. They are one with the people.
2. They are compassionate.
3. They are appointed by God.

Melchizadek was a Priest-King who honored and blessed Abram (Abraham) after a battle. *See Genesis 14:18*. Melchizadek was a ruler of a Canaanite city. In those times it was common for the King of a city to also be the spiritual leader of the community. After God set up the priesthood through Aaron, these positions were separated. In Christ, they are joined permanently.

15 Hebrews – Chapter 5 - What Did It Mean To Them?

We are so fortunate! Our great high priest, Jesus, the Son of God, is in the highest place of honor with God. So hold on tight to faith! Our priest struggled with the same things we struggle with, but he didn't give in to sin. So we can confidently expect that he will treat us kindly and strengthen us to deal with the troubles in our lives.

When God set up the priestly system for Israel, human high priests didn't choose to be priests. God chose the family of Aaron. God wanted people who were compassionate with other's failures because they knew their own failures. In fact, before they could go before God to ask for forgiveness for the people they had to get their own sins forgiven.

Jesus, as God's Son, was appointed by God to be the final High Priest-King, and he is the Priest-King forever. While he lived on earth, he stayed in close contact with God by his passionate, heart-felt prayers. He knew God was listening. And even though his position as Son might have spared him the agony he knew was coming, he was obedient to the very end of his life. And because he completed his life in obedience, he became the perfect bridge between us and God.

In the author's opinion, the whole subject required more explanation, but it was going to be difficult because they haven't been studying the way they should. In fact, they had gotten to the point that they needed simple things explained again. By this time, they should have been teaching the basics to others. Spending too much time on simple things keeps one from gaining the knowledge necessary for maturity. Mature believers have trained and practiced so they know how to live.

Standing up to temptation (like Jesus did) until it goes away gives you an understanding of it that you just can't have if you give in. There is a difference in *willingness* and *experience*. Jesus experienced temptation to its fullest possible extent BECAUSE he resisted it.

16 Hebrews – Chapter 5 – Application Questions

1. There are simple, elementary teachings and doctrines - “milk”; and more mature, stronger concepts - “meat”. Some Christians never seem to graduate beyond “milk”. What is something about Christianity that is easy for you to understand? What is something about Christianity that is hard for you to understand? Is there a difference between *understanding* and *acceptance*?
2. Christ submitted to God’s will even when it meant death. What does “submitting to God’s will” mean?
3. As we strive to live like Christ, why is obedience so important? Why is disobedience wrong?
4. The author of Hebrews uses Melchizedek as an example for his readers. Who is a famous person that we could use as an example of a Godly person? What is it about them and their character that is helpful to people trying to live faithful lives?

17 Hebrews – Chapter 6 – Scripture Questions

1. Let us leave the _____ teachings about Christ and move on to _____ (vs. 1)
2. Name the six elementary teachings. (vs. 1-3)
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
 - f. _____
3. To reject Christ, to “crucify the Son of God all over again”, means rejecting five things: (vs. 4-5)
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
4. Land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being _____. (vs. 8)
5. How did the writer feel about his readers? (vs. 9)
6. What did the writer want each of his readers to do? (vs. 11, 12)
7. What did God promise to Abraham? (vs. 14)
8. How is God’s nature described? (vs. 17)
9. How is our hope described? (vs. 19)
10. Who has entered the Holy of Holies on our behalf? (vs. 20)

It is probable that the readers of Hebrews were being pulled to return to Orthodox Judaism. That would explain why they needed to be reminded of elementary teachings.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the **gift of God.**”
Ephesians 2:8

In Judaism there were different kinds of baptisms, meant to be ritual washings or purification ceremonies. Converts to Judaism were baptized, John the Baptist baptized people, and there were special washings for weddings, births and deaths. It was important that new Christians understand about the baptism commanded by Jesus. *See Matthew 28:19 – The Great Commission*

“Milk” doctrines

1. **Repentance from our sins is necessary.** It creates a fundamental change in our relationship with God.
2. **Faith in God is necessary.** It includes a belief in or confident attitude toward God, involving commitment to His will for our lives.
3. **There are two baptisms that Christians encounter:** the baptism of the Holy Spirit, when the heart is given/committed to God, and the public baptism by water as commanded by Christ. (Mark 16:16)
4. **Laying on of hands.** This is the most obscure for us. However, it can be understood in the sense of having one person’s sins transferred to another, as the High Priest did when he laid his hands on the sacrifice for the Day of Atonement. **Our sins have been transferred to Jesus Christ, who is our atonement.** A second meaning is that of giving someone else authority, or ordination. In the New Testament, authority was given by the ‘laying on of hands’ for specific work, commission to ministry, and so on. Third, it was a way that the Apostles transferred the Holy Spirit.
5. **Resurrection of the dead.** The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis of our entire relationship with God. It is our hope for the future. This resurrection is linked with the overcoming of the powers of evil and death.
6. **Eternal judgment.** Once we have finished life “in the flesh”, we will be judged. The basis for this judgment is whether or not we have repented of our sins and have believed upon Jesus Christ for our salvation.

19 Hebrews – Chapter 6 - What Did It Mean To Them?

Believers must make progress along the Christian way or risk trouble. When people have entered into the Christian experience far enough to know what it is all about and have then turned away, then, as far as they themselves are concerned, they are crucifying Christ. In that state of mind, they cannot repent.

Like rain that falls on the ground, God's gracious gifts are meant to produce results. If they don't, the life that wasted these gifts will be lost.

The writer is confident that his readers won't fall into this kind of disaster, but that they will continue in their faith-walk. God is the perfectly just judge who will not forget what they have done. Their changed lives showed where their hearts really were—love shown to others was proof of their real love for God. However, they needed to be persistent in the way they lived—not get lazy and take God for granted.

Though Abraham had God's promise, he had to live for many years in patient expectation—but that was enough. God is completely reliable. God's oath said that God's will does not change: God has his purpose and God will fulfill it. The two 'unchangeable things' are his promise (to bless Abraham and give him many descendants) and the oath (to fulfill his promise no matter what).

Hope not only secures the spiritual part of our life. It gives all of our lives a solid, steady anchor. Hope takes us into the very presence of God. And Jesus, who went into the presence of God before us and for us, will be with us in God's presence.

'Laying on of hands' was another common activity that had to be understood in a new context. It was used in the Old Testament for blessing, sin transfer and commissioning. In the New Testament it was for healing, blessing, commissioning and giving spiritual gifts.

20 Hebrews – Chapter 6 – Application Questions

1. Can someone who really truly commits to Christ turn their back on him to the point that their souls are lost?
2. Is it possible for God's gifts (salvation, grace, forgiveness, knowledge) to be wasted?
3. The writer wanted them to "imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." What does it mean to imitate someone? Who do you imitate?
4. Do you have a promise from God that you hold on to tightly? How did you pick that promise? How do you make it seem real?

21 Hebrews – Chapter 7 – Scripture Questions

1. Melchizadek was king of _____ and priest of _____. (vs. 1)
2. Melchizadek’s name means ‘King of _____’ and King of Salem means “King of _____ (vs. 2)
3. What did Abraham give Melchizadek? (vs. 4)
4. What did the Law require the priests (Levites) to collect from the people? (vs. 4)
5. The _____ person is blessed by the _____. (vs. 7)
6. Which tribe did Jesus descend from? (vs. 14) Did anyone from this tribe ever serve as priest?
7. What was the basis of Jesus’ priesthood? (vs. 16)
8. Why was the former law and priesthood set aside? (vs. 18,19)
9. How did Jesus receive his authority to be priest? (vs. 20-22)
10. Why is Jesus’ priesthood permanent? (vs. 24)
11. How is Jesus as high priest described? (vs. 26,27)
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
 5. _____
12. The law appoints as high priests men who are _____; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made _____ forever. (vs. 28)

The Law was holy and good, but it was not able to ‘make right’ those who sinned by breaking it. Also, it could not give the power necessary to fulfill its demands.

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizadek. Psalms 110:4

You can’t think of the Law and the priesthood as two separate things that operated at the same time. The priesthood was the basis of the law. Without the priesthood, it was impossible for the law to operate. So, for the Psalmist to declare that there would be another priest, not from Aaron but one like Melchizadek, was devastating.

22 Hebrews – Chapter 7 - What Did It Mean To Them?

We don't know where Melchizedek came from—we don't know his family, or lineage—but we know that Abraham recognized his greatness because Abraham gave him a tenth of all the 'spoils of war'. We also know Melchizedek was the greater man because he blessed Abraham. That's the way blessings go—from the greater to the lesser.

It was a rule that the Levites (the priests) collected a tenth of everything from the Israelites. So, you could say that since the Levites hadn't been born yet, but were still in Abraham's body, that the priests were giving a tenth to Melchizedek. This is another way that you can tell Melchizedek's priesthood was better than the Levite's priesthood—because the 'tenth' was given to him by Abraham.

If it had been possible for the Law and priests to make people perfect, then it wouldn't have been necessary for a 'better' priesthood to come along. Jesus wasn't from the Levite tribe, he was from the tribe of Judah. So Jesus' priesthood wasn't based on his lineage, but on God's promise (to the tribe of Judah through King David) that Jesus would be a priest forever, a priest like Melchizedek.

Because of God's promise, Jesus is the final, better covenant. We are forever, completely saved, because he lives forever and is our High Priest forever. There's no need for any more animal sacrifices, because Jesus gave his perfect life for the final sacrifice.

The tribe of Judah, in Jesus' time, was very small and low. After Solomon's reign the kingdom was broken in two. Then the kingdom of Judah was broken and almost destroyed by the Assyrian army. After the remaining people were taken away into captivity in Babylonia, the tribe was nearly gone.

23 Hebrews – Chapter 7 – Application Questions

1. Abraham recognized Melchizadek as a great man. What are the characteristics of a great person? Do you know anyone that you would consider great?
2. Sometimes when we hear people say “God bless you”, it just seems like a way of saying “have a nice day”. Shouldn’t it mean more than that? What does it mean to bless someone?
3. There’s a lot of talk in this chapter about sin and the need to have sin forgiven. Why did God make us so that we are sinning all the time? Wouldn’t it have been simpler just to make us good to begin with?
4. God spends a lot of time and effort using the small, lowly, or unexpected people to do amazing things for his kingdom, like having Jesus be from the tribe of Judah. Judah had a great history, but it wasn’t much by the time Jesus was born into it. Maybe we should be skeptical of any big, well-organized, super-successful groups like mega-churches. Or is that just jealousy?

24 Hebrews – Chapter 8 – Scripture Questions

1. Where does our high priest sit and serve? (vs. 1)
2. Each high priest is appointed to offer _____. (vs. 3)
3. How is the sanctuary on earth described? (vs. 5)
4. The ministry Jesus has received is _____ to the ministry of human high priests. The covenant of which he is mediator is _____ to the old one, and founded on _____ . (vs. 6)
5. “The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a _____ with the house of Israel” (vs. 8)
6. How did God describe the new covenant? (vs. 10, 12)
 - a. I will put my laws _____
 - b. I will write my laws _____
 - c. I will be _____
 - d. They will be _____
 - e. I will forgive their _____
 - f. I will remember their sins _____
7. Calling this covenant ‘new’ makes the first one _____. (vs. 13)

Covenant: a signed agreement between two or more parties to perform some action

Mediator: one who intervenes between two disputing parties

The basis of the new covenant is Jesus' once-and-for-all-time sacrifice. Because of his sacrifice, sins are forgiven. Because sins are forgiven, God places knowledge of himself into the very heart of believers. Sin is completely and finally dealt with.

25 Hebrews – Chapter 8 - What Did It Mean To Them?

One of the biggest differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament is the OT emphasis on God's relationship with the nation of Israel as a whole. Our understanding of the New Testament is that the focus is on individual connections with Jesus. The Israelites thought of their relationship with God in terms of a covenant, or contract. This was a fundamental part of their national identity. The new covenant, the one established by Jesus, was something radically new and daring. It replaced the entire system. The central point was the death and resurrection of Jesus, the sacrifice that established the new covenant. It meant the end of the Mosaic system.

On earth, the job of the high priest was to offer sacrifices. Jesus did this for us. The earthly tabernacle/sanctuary is only a shadow, or copy, of what really exists in heaven. (That's why Moses was warned by God to be very careful in the construction of the Tent of Meeting.) Jesus' acts as high priest are superior to the human high priests, just as the new relationship between us and God is better than the old relationship between God and the Israelites.

Verses 8-12 uses quotes from Jeremiah 31:31-34. Jeremiah was a prophet through the reigns of five kings, at a time when the entire area was torn by wars and invasions. Jeremiah was warned by God not to marry and raise children because divine judgment on Judah would sweep away the next generation. It was a brutal, bloody, terror-filled time for the Israelites. However, God (through Jeremiah) promised that there would be an end to judgment, that there would be a new covenant. This new agreement would depend on God's love and forgiveness, not on human ability.

If the old covenant had been good enough, we wouldn't have needed a new one. But God himself said that the old one would have to be replaced, because the Israelites didn't do their part. The new agreement/covenant would be enforced by God. He was going to 'hard-wire' his laws on believer's hearts and minds, to the point that people would know him directly. The old agreement was gone. It is easy to see how this would be world-shaking to the Jews, particularly those who were living away from Israel. Especially for these expats, the draw for returning to Orthodox Judaism would feel like returning to stable ground. The writer makes it very clear that for those who follow Jesus, there is no return to the old ways.

26 Hebrews – Chapter 8 – Application Questions

1. God's presence is the real sanctuary—buildings, organizations, groups of people are just shadows of that sanctuary. What can we do with our worship to make our “shadow” closer to God's reality?
2. When the Israelites broke their promise to God, they broke the agreements. In a sense, they broke the relationship to God. Nowadays, we believe in individual relationships with God. How do we fix a broken relationship with him?
3. Does a congregation have a relationship/covenant with God as a group? Should it?
4. If God is writing his law on the hearts of believers now, why do so many people who call themselves Christians act like fools and live like farm animals?

27 Hebrews – Chapter 9 – Scripture Questions

1. The first covenant had regulations for _____ and also an earthly _____. (vs. 1)
2. What was in the Ark, located in the Most Holy Place? (vs. 4)
3. (Vs. 7) Who was the only person allowed to enter the Most Holy Place?
How often could he enter?
What offering did he have to bring with him?
What was the purpose of this offering?
4. The gifts and sacrifices offered then were a matter of _____ and _____ and various _____, external regulations applying until the time of the new covenant. (vs. 10)
5. Christ went through the perfect tabernacle, the Most Holy Place, by his _____. (vs. 12)
6. What is the effect of Christ's blood? (vs. 14)
7. The Law required that nearly everything be cleansed with _____. Without the shedding of blood there is no _____. (vs. 22)
8. Christ has appeared _____ for all to do away with sin by the sacrifice of _____. (vs. 26)
9. Christ will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring _____ to those who are waiting for him. (vs. 28)

28 Hebrews – Chapter 9 - What Did It Mean To Them?

When the original agreement was established between the Israelites and God, there were specific regulations about how the tabernacle was set up and how the sacrifices were to be accomplished. The priests were responsible for keeping everything on track.

The gifts, sacrifices, all the rituals weren't what made people clean, really. All these regulations were set up so that they could point to Jesus. His perfect life, lived completely in God's purpose, was the perfect sacrifice that makes us right with God so we can serve him with a clean heart. We are free!

The blood of living beings is their life. Giving the blood is giving life. This is a way of showing a total commitment. The copies here on earth of the things that were in heaven had to be cleaned, so that they could come close to the reality of heaven. Jesus did away with all the repetition of sacrifices. One time he died—and that did away with sin for those who follow him.

Just as every person will live and die once, and then face God for judgment, Jesus died once to take away our sins. But he is coming back! This time he won't be paying for sin, but he will be here to reward those who have believed and waited for him.

29 Hebrews – Chapter 9 – Application Questions

1. The old covenant had such specific rules about how the worship place was to be set up and used. It would be so much simpler if WE had these kind of clear rules about how to do worship. It annoys me when people get upset about changes in our worship. It annoys other people when changes are made. How do we find a way to worship without making people upset?
2. Aaron had to make a sacrifice for ‘sins committed in ignorance’. It seems that we will, indeed, be held accountable for sin even if we didn’t know it was wrong. Does this seem fair?
3. Why does everything and everyone have to be ‘clean’ before God can be in contact with it? Surely he couldn’t be contaminated by us—what is he worried about?
4. Verse 26 says that Christ has appeared “once for all at the *end of the ages* to do away with sin”. Most commentators believe this means the end of the Mosaic covenant and the beginning of the Age of the Messiah. As far as we can see, sin is still here and damaging everything. Will humanity ever really change?

Hebrews – Contrast OT Priests and Jesus as High Priest

Jewish High Priests and Sacrifices	Jesus as High Priest and Perfect Sacrifice
are called by God, chosen from among mortals, like Aaron was (5:1, 4)	was appointed high priest by God, as God's own Son (4:14; 5:5)
can be compassionate with people, since they too are weak and sinful (5:2)	can sympathize with human weakness, since he was tempted/tested as we are, although without sinning himself (4:15)
offer sacrifices for their own sins as well as those of others (5:3; 7:27-28; 9:7, 9)	offers sacrifices and prayers only for others, not for himself, since he is sinless and perfect (5:15; 7:26-28; 9:14)
are priests in the order of Aaron, from the tribe of Levi (5:4; 7:11)	is a priest forever, "according to the order of Melchizedek" (5:6; 6:20; 7:3, 17, 24) – meaning he was a Priest-King.
have an imperfect priesthood (Levitical), inferior to Melchizedek's (7:1-11)	is a priest of a new order (Melchizedek's) that replaces the Levitical (7:11-19)
take office without an oath (7:20)	has his priesthood confirmed with an oath from God (7:21; cf. Ps 110:4)
all eventually die, so there must be many priests and high priests (7:23)	is the only permanent high priest, since he lives forever (7:16-17, 24-25)
offer sacrifices day after day, year after year (7:27; 9:6; 10:1, 11)	offered himself as a sacrifice once for all time (7:27; 9:12, 14, 26; 10:10, 14)
hold office on earth, according to the law (8:4)	has passed through the heavens, and is seated by God's throne (8:1; cf. 4:14)
worship in an earthly sanctuary, a mere shadow of the heavenly one (8:5; 9:1)	ministers in the heavenly tabernacle set up by God, not mortals (8:2, 9:11, 24)
follow the first covenant, the old covenant, given through Moses (8:7, 9)	is the "mediator of a better covenant," a new covenant (8:6-13; 9:15-28)
enter the innermost "Holy of Holies" once a year (9:7)	enters only once into the greater and perfect tabernacle (9:11-28; 10:10)
offer the blood of goats and calves (9:7, 13, 19, 25)	offers his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption (9:12; 10:19)
their sacrifices are imperfect, since they are animals (9:23; 10:4)	his sacrifice is perfect, since he is perfect/sinless (7:26, 28; 9:14)

31 Hebrews – Chapter 10 – Scripture Questions

1. What is the difference between the law and the realities of heaven? (vs. 1)
2. What would have happened if the sacrifices actually worked? (vs. 2)
3. How did God actually feel about the sacrifices offered in the Temple? (vs. 8)
4. How does the sacrifice of Jesus Christ affect us? (vs. 14)
5. Who else testifies about the truth of Jesus' sacrifice? (vs. 15)
6. Where will the laws of the Lord be written? (vs. 16)
7. What should we do because of this great gift? (vs. 22-25)
8. If we deliberately keep sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth about Jesus, is there anything that can be done for us? (vs. 26, 27)
9. How had the readers of Hebrews initially responded to their salvation? (vs. 32-24)
10. The writer speaks of two groups of people. What are these groups? (vs. 39)

32 Hebrews – Chapter 10 - What Did It Mean To Them?

When the old Law was set up, it was only a hint of heaven. It wasn't complete, and it couldn't make the people who tried to follow it complete. There was no amount of blood sacrifice that could actually make people clean from sin—if there was, then everyone could have just gone on their way without being dragged down by sin. Instead, the continual sacrifices actually made people MORE aware of their own sin.

God didn't actually want the sacrifices and offerings year after year. When Jesus said, "I'm here to do it your way," this new plan set aside the old Law. By this new way, God's way, we are made fit for God by the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus.

As our high priest, Christ made this single sacrifice and then was seated beside God in heaven. He had done everything necessary for those who wanted to be purified. This was confirmed by the Holy Spirit, written on the hearts of people. The slate was wiped clean. And, of course, once the sins are finished, there is no longer any need for sacrifices.

We are now free to approach God, and we can do this with full confidence. We shouldn't give up on living as believers, not the least because there will be a fierce punishment for those who turn their backs on God. We should be faithful, stick with Jesus and trust him all the way to the end.

33 Hebrews – Chapter 10 – Application Questions

1. We don't do physical sacrifices anymore (thank goodness!), at least not sacrifices to deal with sin. However, we do make what we call "sacrifices", like giving money to the church instead of spending it on ourselves. What other types of sacrifices do we make? What is the point of these sacrifices?
2. What do you think it means, to have God's new laws 'written on our hearts'?
3. The writer of Hebrews encourages his readers to stay confident, encourage one another and...keep worshipping together, not skipping as some of them were evidently doing. How important do you think it is to attend church regularly? Why do you think this?
4. There WILL be consequences for those who have deliberately rejected the Son of God. Those who hate him will be punished. What about those who don't hate him—those who simply don't know Jesus, or only know twisted ideas about Jesus? What do you think will happen to them?

34 Hebrews – Chapter 11 – Scripture Questions

1. How does the writer define faith? (vs. 1)
2. By faith we understand that God made the universe (which we can see and touch) out of _____ . (vs. 3)
3. Abel and Enoch pleased God: they believed that He _____ , and they believed that He would _____ those who earnestly sought Him. (vs. 6)
4. Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob: they all obeyed and went, even though they did not know _____ . (vs. 8)
5. How long did all these people live before they saw the promises fulfilled? (vs. 13)
6. Faith also led many (including Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses) to look to the _____ . (vs. 20)
7. Reread the section about Moses: because of his faith, he gave up privilege, accepted mistreatment, disregarded the anger of the pharaoh, and followed strange requirements from God. How would you describe his attitude? (vs. 24-28)
8. What was the difference between God's people and their enemies (the Egyptians, the people of Jericho)? (vs. 29, 30)
9. How did faith save Rahab? (vs. 31)
10. What was the one thing common to all these people whose faith was commended? (vs. 39, 40)

35 Hebrews – Chapter 11 - What Did It Mean To Them?

The writer of Hebrews now writes on a subject of great importance to believers: that of faith. He does not contrast faith with works as Paul often did, or talk about it as the way to receive salvation. Instead, he talks about faith in terms of the future. This trust in God makes believers able to press on steadfastly, whatever the future holds. They know they can rely on God. The method the writer uses is to choose some of the great people in the history of God's people and to show how faith motivated them and led them forward, no matter how hard their difficulties.

The chapter begins with general observations about faith. It is a living thing. There are realities for which we have no physical evidence. Faith is the basis, the substructure, of all that the Christian life means, all that we hope for. Not only that, there is no substitute for faith: without it, it is impossible to please God. There are only two things required. First, one must believe that God exists. Second, there must be a conviction about God's character, that he will reward those who 'earnestly seek him'. Without this deep conviction, faith is not possible.

The faith of the patriarchs went beyond their own deaths. They believed, and acted, in obedience to God's call. Even though they did not see the complete fulfillment of God's promises, they were given glimpses of the fulfillment.

36 Hebrews – Chapter 11 – Application Questions

1. The writer defines faith as being certain, or sure, about things that we cannot see. Does this definition work for you? How would you define faith for yourself?
2. Abel and Enoch believed that God existed, which pleased God. Why do you think that some people are able to believe in the existence of God, and others are not able to believe?
3. Other people (Noah and Abraham) believed so strongly in God's promise that they left their homes and never again lived a settled life. Do you know anyone who has uprooted their lives for God? Is this only possible for certain people, like missionaries?
4. The Red Sea was parted, and the walls of Jericho were brought down, because of the faith of God's people. Do you think large groups of people can focus their faith to accomplish miracles? Do you know any examples of this?

37 Hebrews – Chapter 12 – Scripture Questions

1. Because there is a huge cloud of witnesses all around us, what should we do? (vs. 1)
2. Whose example should we think about and imitate? (vs. 2, 3)
3. The readers had struggled against sin, but one thing had not yet happened to them. What was this one thing? (vs. 4)
4. How does the Lord feel about those whom he trains (disciplines)? (vs. 6)
5. Why does God train us? (vs. 10)
6. Discipline isn't pleasant when it is happening. What are the benefits? (vs. 11)
7. The writer lists several behaviors that require training and practice (vs. 14-16):
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
 5. _____
 6. _____
8. What kind of a 'mountain' are we approaching? (vs. 22-24)
9. What warning does the writer give his readers? (vs. 25)
10. Because we receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken, how should we respond? (vs. 28, 29)

38 Hebrews – Chapter 12 - What Did It Mean To Them?

The last main section of this letter is mostly devoted to the practical business of living out the Christian faith. The writer starts by pointing to what Jesus has done for us. He points to the Cross as the motivator that spurs Christian people to serious, concentrated effort as we face the difficulties of living out our faith.

The writer begins by pointing out how we are surrounded by a vast crowd of witnesses. This could refer to believers who have died and are encouraging us from heaven, or it could be referring to those around us who are ‘running the race’ with us. At any rate, we are encouraged to get rid of anything that is holding us back. This could be anything from habits that take our attention away from Jesus to actual sins. We are encouraged to do as Jesus did, to look past the current pain to the joy that comes after.

The writer speaks a great deal about the discipline, or training, that comes to us because we are children of God. We are reminded that this training is BECAUSE he loves us and wants the best for us. This is not to be confused with the sin of those people who were oppressing the believers. This oppression was tempting the believers to abandon their faith.

From the acceptance of life’s discipline in general, the writer then speaks of the way this discipline would be applied to the Christian experience. It is important that God’s people LIVE as God’s people. The standards that they use should not be the standards common to unbelievers. There seems to be an implication that the readers were spiritually paralyzed by fear. They are urged to put things right and get moving.

39 Hebrews – Chapter 12 – Application Questions

1. The writer encourages his readers to remember the story of Jesus when they feel themselves losing focus on their spiritual ‘race’ to heaven. What do you do when you feel yourself falling behind in your faith journey?
2. What sort of ‘discipline’ does God use on you when you need to be brought back in line, or when you need to learn something for your spiritual growth?
3. The writer contrasts the old Jewish experience of God, at Mount Sinai, with the Christian experience of Mount Zion, where the living God resides. It all sounds very mystical. When you are out of the church building, how do you know that God is near? How do you know that he is close, and cares for you?
4. We are told that we should be grateful for the unshakable kingdom of God. Does the church (as opposed to the Kingdom of God) seem unshakable to you? Why or why not?

Hebrews – Chapter 13 – Scripture Questions

1. How does the writer encourage the readers to treat:
 1. One another? (vs. 1) _____
 2. Strangers? (vs. 2) _____
 3. Those in prison? (vs. 3) _____
 4. Those who are abused? (vs. 3) _____
2. Who will judge those who are sexually immoral? (vs. 4)
3. What does our confidence in God's care make it possible to say? (vs. 6)
4. Who should we imitate? (vs. 7)
5. How are our hearts strengthened? (vs. 9)
6. How does the writer contrast the blood of animals with the blood of Jesus? (vs. 11-14)
7. What sacrifices please God? (vs. 15, 16)
8. How should we respond to the authority of our church leaders? (vs. 17)
9. Who equips us with what we need to do his will? (vs. 20, 21)

41 Hebrews – Chapter 13 - What Did It Mean To Them?

The first twelve chapters of this letter are closely connected. The last chapter is more of an appendix, where the writer talks about some practical points of living as Christians. Christians are to be concerned for others; Christianity is faith in action and that means love at work. So, the writer talks about some of the ideas involved in living in love.

The last section (verses 7 to the end) are several small, disconnected units. One is a few thoughts about Christian leaders. This is important, because the New Testament doesn't actually say very much about how Christians should treat their leaders (there is more about how leaders should behave).

Next, the writer goes back to a sacrificial ceremony, specifically the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement. There was evidently some wrong teaching going on among his readers, though he isn't specific. However, this ceremony is mentioned, along with a warning against being carried away by strange teachings. It seems possible that there were worshippers who had begun to think that a sacrificial meal had magical properties. The writer is careful to deny this.

A short appeal for prayer shows the writer's conviction that prayer is a powerful force, and that he hopes that he will soon see his readers again.

In the last section, the writer finishes with greetings, and with a beautiful doxology. (Doxology means a hymn or poem that praises God.) This doxology pulls together several of the themes of the letter: the blood, the eternal covenant, the lordship of Jesus, and the importance of doing his will. He adds in a lovely reference to Jesus as our Shepherd.

42 Hebrews – Chapter 13 – Application Questions

1. The structure of our church today is very different from that of the writer of Hebrews. Because neither society or the law of the land would help, those Christians had to be ready to host strangers, support prisoners, care for those abused by non-believers, and push back against the morality of the day. How can we use these principles in our time?
2. Early Christians tended to be among the poor (though not always). When this writer says, “The Lord is my helper”, do you think it was physical or spiritual care that was meant? Should we help each other out financially? If so, how?
3. What are some “strange teachings” that people try to mix in with Christianity? How do we recognize them?
4. If our church leaders will be called to account for their direction, how can we support them? Does this mean all church leaders, or just the pastors?