

***Pandit Teaches the Bible Series***

# **Let's Read Hebrews!**

**International Edition**

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This book is the International version of a college level textbook prepared a few years ago for a Bible college in South India.

It can also be used for Bible study groups in local churches and for individual students of the Bible. It was written with the South Indian Christian context in mind. But with minor adaptations it should be useful in any cultural context.

To write a textbook like this requires resources. I have, of course, consulted Bible dictionaries and other reference books. I am particularly indebted to *The Message of Hebrews* by Raymond Brown in the "Bible Speaks Today Series."

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T. Pandit has many years of experience as an educationist, as a Bible teacher and a college principal, in India as well as internationally.

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## **Studies**

# Introduction to Hebrews

## 1. A different kind of book

Hebrews is different from the other New Testament letters. Most readers actually find it difficult to read and understand. I think there are good reasons for the difficulties:

- a. Hebrews contains many Old Testament references. It is evident that the first readers were well acquainted with the Old Testament, its priesthood, and its sacrificial system. Most of us don't have that knowledge.
- b. The author of Hebrews uses many Old Testament quotations. The way in which he interprets these quotations may confuse us. How he does it is explained in **Study 2: Greater than the angels**.
- c. The style of writing is quite intellectual. It is more like a sermon than a letter. So this text is quite different from the kind of texts we usually read.

## Questions

1. Have you read Hebrews before?
2. How did you find it? Easy or difficult? Explain why.
3. Do you have any more reasons why so many modern-day believers find Hebrews a difficult book?

[\(Go to Answers to 1. A different kind of book\)](#)

## 2. The author

The book is anonymous. This means that the author does not mention his name. So nobody knows for sure who the author is. Even in the earliest Christian traditions there was no agreement on this matter.

But the book itself gives us some clues to what kind of person he must have been:

- a. The author must have been a man. This is clear from the Greek grammar of 11:32. So it could not have been Priscilla, one of Paul's co-workers and one of the women leaders of the early church.
- b. The author must have had Jewish background. This is clear from the way he uses Old Testament material and references. So it could not have been Paul's co-worker Titus who was a Greek and whose parents were Gentiles.

- c. The author was probably not Paul. The style and language of the book are quite different from how Paul writes his letters.
- d. The author was probably not Paul's co-worker Timothy, unless the person conveying his greetings in Hebrews 13:23 is a different Timothy.
- e. The author must have been somebody who knew Greek very well. The Greek style and language of the book are excellent.
- f. The author must have been somebody who had authority in the early church. Otherwise the book would not have been included in the New Testament canon.
- g. But the author was not a man who had known Jesus personally. This is clear from 2:3. So the author's knowledge about Jesus and the gospel must have come from Jesus' disciples.
- h. So who could it be? Perhaps one of these three New Testament men:
  - Barnabas: He was a Jew of the tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe, and he came from the Jewish diaspora, from Cyprus (Acts 4:36; 11:22–26).
  - Apollos: He was also from the Jewish diaspora, as he came from Alexandria. In addition, he was a learned man with a deep knowledge of the Old Testament (Acts 18:24–26).
  - Silas/Silvanus: He was associated with the Jerusalem church, before he became one of Paul's close co-workers. He was probably a diaspora Jew as he was a Roman citizen (Acts 15:22, 32; 16:38; 1 Thess 1:1; 1 Pet 5:12).

## Questions

4. Why cannot Bible scholars agree about the authorship of Hebrews?
5. Give at least four reasons why Barnabas, Apollos, and Silas are good candidates for the authorship of Hebrews.
6. Who is your own suggestion? Explain why that person is the best candidate for the authorship of Hebrews.

[\(Go to Answers 2. The author\)](#)

## 3. The recipients

Hebrews does not clearly state for whom this book was intended. There are no names of persons or places mentioned. So we do not know for sure who the first

recipients were. But as we study the text we will form a picture of the first readers of the book:

- They must have been Jewish-background Christians. That is why the letter is called “to the Hebrews.” The word “Hebrews” refers to their Jewish nationality.
- They were probably from the diaspora and had Greek as their first language.
- They probably lived in Rome. That would explain why believers from Italy sent their greetings to them (13:24).
- They must have experienced persecution, most probably the persecution in Rome and surrounding areas under Emperor Nero, which took place around AD 65.
- They were Christian believers who were tempted to leave their Christian faith. Others had already done so. These people seem to have returned to their previous Jewish faith.

## Questions

7. Why can nobody know for certain who Hebrews was addressed to?
8. What would the expression “to the Hebrews” refer to?
9. What else can we deduce about the recipients of Hebrews from the book itself?

[\(Go to Answers to 3. The recipients\)](#)

## 4. When was it written?

Bible scholars do not agree about the dating of the book. But it was most probably written before AD 70 when the Jerusalem temple was destroyed. The book refers to temple rituals in the present tense, as if they were still being performed. This indicates that the temple was still in function when the author wrote his book. But it is not likely that it was written before AD 65 when Christians in Rome suffered persecution under Emperor Nero.

## Question

10. Why is it reasonable to say that Hebrews was written between AD 65 and AD 70?

[\(Go to Answers to 4. When was it written?\)](#)

## **5. Why was it written?**

From what we have seen earlier in this introduction we can conclude that the author wrote his book with a specific purpose in mind: He wanted to strengthen Jewish-background believers who were at risk of losing their faith in times of persecution. He does this by presenting a clear doctrine of Jesus and what Jesus accomplished for us by his sacrificial death. The author carefully points out that Jesus and his work are far superior to the previous priesthood and the previous covenant, from which the Jewish-background believers had been saved. So it would be foolish of them to abandon a better covenant (7:22) for something inferior.

### **Questions**

11. Why did the author write his book?
12. Explain how the author argues in order to strengthen the faith of his readers.

[\(Go to Answers to 5. Why was it written?\)](#)

## **6. The theme of the book**

The first time we read Hebrews we may feel overwhelmed by all the “big” words, the “deep” theology and the multitude of Old Testament references. But it is possible to summarize the main theme of the book in just a few words: Jesus, the Son of God, is the perfect high priest who has granted us his great and eternal salvation.

### **Questions**

13. State the main theme of Hebrews. Don’t just quote your textbook or your notes. But use your own words as much as possible.
14. Explain how this main theme fits the purpose of the book.

[\(Go to Answers to 6. The theme of the book\)](#)

# Reading of Hebrews

## Introduction

Before we study the various passages in Hebrews more in detail, it is important that you get a feeling for the book as a whole – its literary style, its vocabulary, its main themes, its style of argument. To achieve this, you need to read through the whole book from beginning to end in one or two sessions.

Work in groups of two or three. Read through the whole book. As you do so, try to answer the four questions below. But don't bother about all the details, and don't get stuck with matters that you don't understand.

## Questions

1. How is Jesus “explained” or “described” in chapters 1–6? Find your answers through this simple list of references.
  - a. 1:1–3
  - b. 1:4–14
  - c. 2:5–13
  - d. 2:14–18
  - e. 3:1–6
  - f. 4:14–5:10
2. What has Jesus done for us? Find your answers with the help of this simple list of references taken from 7:1–10:18.
  - a. 7:1–8:5
  - b. 8:6–9:14
  - c. 9:15–22
  - d. 9:23–10:18
3. What should be our response to Jesus and his work for us? Make a simple list based on 10:19–13:25.
4. The author of Hebrews again and again contrasts the previous covenant (Moses' covenant, the Sinai covenant) and the New Covenant. Look at these references and identify some of the contrasts that he brings up.
  - a. 5:2 and 7:26



- b. 7:23–25
- c. 9:13 and 7:27
- d. 9:9 and 9:14
- e. 10:3 and 9:28
- f. 10:11–12

[\(Go to Answers Reading of Hebrews\)](#)

# Study 1: God speaks through his Son, 1:1–3

## Introduction

Most Bible translations call Hebrews a “letter to the Hebrews.” But the book does not begin like a letter at all. There is no sender, and no recipients are mentioned. As we read the first chapter the text feels more like a sermon than like a letter.

But in spite of this beginning, it is not wrong to say that Hebrews is a letter. Because it ends like a letter with greetings and a brief blessing (13:24–25). And the author concludes his writings by calling his book *my words of exhortation, for I have only written a short letter to you* (13:22).

The writer begins his book by plunging right into his topic. This topic is “Jesus.” But it is interesting to note that Jesus is not mentioned by name in the first chapter at all. Not even his most common title “Christ” is used in the beginning of the book. Instead Jesus is identified as “the Son.”

## Read

Heb 1:1–3

## Questions

1. How did God speak to his people earlier?
2. How does God speak to his people now (“in these last days”)?
3. What does God speak about?
4. These three verses teach us eight things about who Jesus is. Which are they?  
Also try to explain what they mean (or their significance).

## Bible study/sermon/devotion

Prepare a Bible study about Jesus. Use your answer to question 4 above.

[\(Go to Answers 1\)](#)

## Study 2: Superior to the angels, 1:4–14

### Introduction

In the previous study we saw how God “in these last days” speaks through his Son, Jesus Christ. In the gospels, we find that Jesus very often used the title “Son” about himself. This was a Messianic title based on Ps 2:7 (*He said to me, ‘You are my Son. Today I have begotten you’*) and on 2 Sam 7:12–14, where God in a message to king David through the prophet Nathan makes these promises about David’s offspring/son (historically referring to Solomon, but prophetically referring to the Messiah): *I will establish his kingdom. “He will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son.”*

In this passage, the author supports his teaching about the superiority of Christ over the angels by quoting the two Old Testament Messianic prophecies mentioned above (Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:12–14).

This Messianic/prophetic use of Old Testament texts was well established in New Testament times, by both Christian and Jewish writers. But in some cases, we modern readers find their way of interpreting the Old Testament confusing and strange. In this study we will find two “strange” examples of this practice, 1:8–9 and 1:10. We will see how it is done, and conclude that we ourselves are **not** allowed to follow this practice.

When we compare the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament texts (including Hebrews) with the “original” texts in the Old Testament, we often find that the wording is different. Usually these differences are minor, but sometimes even the meaning is totally different. The reason for this is that our Bibles have translated the Old Testament books from the Hebrew Bible (the so called *Masoretic text*), while the New Testament writers mostly quote the Greek *Septuagint* translation of the Old Testament books.

### Read

Heb 1:4–14

### Questions

1. In what ways is Jesus superior to the angels? Make a list. You should be able to find at least six points in these verses.

2. In verse 8 the author quotes Ps 45:6–7. Look up these verses. Who is the psalmist writing about? How does Hebrews interpret the words of the psalmist?
3. In verse 8 the author quotes Ps 102:25–27. Look up these verses. Who is the psalmist writing about? How does Hebrews interpret the words of the psalmist?

## **Comments**

This is how the author of Hebrews understands the Old Testament:

1. The Old Testament is relevant even to the Christian New Testament believers. Its relevance is not limited to the historical context or to the Jewish faith.
2. The message of the Old Testament testifies to God's reliability, faithfulness and love. The God of the Old Testament is the same God who became man in Jesus Christ to bring us his salvation.
3. So the revelation of the Old Testament is still valid. That is why he uses Old Testament quotations to support his teaching about Jesus and his work.
4. He sees the whole Old Testament as Christ-centered. "It's all about Jesus!"
5. As a consequence, he interprets the Old Testament typologically. He finds a deeper level, a deeper message, in some of the texts. This deeper message is about Jesus the Messiah, even if the text literally and historically is about somebody else (an Israelite king, or Lord God).

However (and this is a warning to us), this deeper level, this deeper message, is the result of the divine inspiration of the author. The New Testament writers (the gospel writers, the apostles, Paul and the author of Hebrews) were allowed to interpret the Old Testament in this way – because they were inspired by the Holy Spirit who then ensured that their writings were included in the New Testament canon. We are not. So we must limit our typological interpretation of Old Testament passages to the cases found in the New Testament. We are not allowed create our own.

6. He uses Old Testament quotations (from the Greek Septuagint translation) to support the superiority of Jesus (over the angels) as the mediator between God and man. And to support Jesus' deity.

## **Bible study/sermon/devotion**

Prepare a devotion about Jesus being superior to the angels. Use your answer to question 1 above

[\(Go to Answers 2\)](#)

## **Study 3: “so that we do not drift away”, 2:1–4**

### **Introduction**

The author now interrupts his teaching about Jesus with an exhortation, as he tells his readers to pay careful attention to the message of the gospel (“to what we have heard”). He warns them about the consequences of drifting away from the message about Christ and his redemptive work on the cross.

### **Read**

Heb 2:1–4

### **Questions**

1. Why must the readers of Hebrews pay attention?
2. What do we learn about the “message spoken by angels”?
3. What can we understand about God’s message of salvation?
4. What is the message for us in this passage?
5. What would be the consequences of “drifting away”?

### **Bible study/sermon/devotion**

Prepare a sermon about God’s message of salvation. Use your answers to questions 3, 4 and 5 above.

[\(Go to Answers 3\)](#)

## Study 4: The author of our salvation, 2:5–13

### Introduction

The previous study (2:1–4) was a parenthesis exhorting the believers not to drift away from the message of the gospel. Now the author returns to his teaching about Jesus. Earlier (in chapter 1) we saw that Jesus is prophet, priest and king. In this passage we find that he is also the “author of our salvation”.

### Comments

1. The Greek word translated “a little” (in English NIV, similar in the Kannada Bibles) in v 7 and v 9 is often used about time, “a little while” (so the other English translations). This is how the author of Hebrews understands it in this passage.
2. The Greek word used about Jesus in v 10 (English NIV “author”) can also mean “leader, pioneer” (Kannada NIBV *nAyaka*, compare Kannada JV *kartanu*). The same word is found in 12:2.

### Read

Heb 2:5–13

### Questions

1. What do we learn about the angels in verse 5?
2. How should we understand the expression “the world to come” in verse 5 (compare “the last days” in 1:2 and “the coming age” in 6:5)?
3. What do we learn about Jesus in v 6–9?
4. What do we learn about Jesus in verse 10?
5. What do we learn about Christian believers in v 11–13?
6. What do we learn about Jesus in v 11–13

### Bible study/sermon/devotion

Prepare a Bible study called **Jesus, the author of our salvation**. Use your answers to questions 4 to 6 above.

## **Suggestions for library time/homework – Monday (the first day of the course)**

1. Finish **Reading of Hebrews**.
2. Finish studies 1–4.
3. If you have time: Go through **Answers to Introduction to Hebrews**.
4. If you have time: Prepare a Bible study/sermon/devotion based on one of the passages that you have just studied.

[\(Go to Answers 4\)](#)



## Study 5: Our deliverer from the devil, 2:14–18

### Introduction

Human beings need deliverance from sin and death. We need salvation. Only God can provide this salvation. And to do so he had to become like one of us. He became man in Jesus Christ.

This passage explains man's problems and shows how Jesus provides a solution to them.

### Read

Heb 2:14–18

### Questions

1. What do we learn about angels in this passage?
2. Which are man's three enemies, the three forces that keep him in slavery?
3. Why was it necessary for Jesus to become man?
4. What was Jesus' work as high priest?
5. The New Testament teaches that the coming of Jesus was the beginning of the end for the devil. How can this fact be seen in this passage?
6. So, if Jesus' victory over the devil has already been achieved, why is he still so active in this world?
7. This passage ends on a very comforting note: Because of what he achieved through his incarnation and work of atonement, Jesus is able to help us in our daily Christian lives. So we can say Jesus' work of deliverance is an ongoing process in our lives. Give some examples of this from your own experience.

### Bible study/sermon/devotion

Prepare a sermon study called **Jesus delivers us from the devil**. Use your answers to questions 2 to 7 above.

## **Comment**

In verse 17, the author uses the expression “high priest” about Jesus for the first time. He does so without really explaining what it stands for. But he will come back to it again and again in his book as he explains what Jesus has done for us as our “great high priest” (4:14).

In ancient Israel the high priest was the head of all the priests. He was the only one allowed to enter into God’s presence in the Most Holy Place, first in the Tabernacle and later in the Jerusalem temple. He could do so only once a year – on the Day of Atonement.

No other New Testament book uses the description “high priest” about Jesus. So this is a unique feature for Hebrews.

[\(Go to Answers 5\)](#)

## Study 6: Think about Jesus, 3:1–6

### Introduction

In chapter 1, Hebrews compared Jesus with the angels and found him far superior to them. In this chapter Jesus is compared with Moses and found far greater than him. So the believers should think about Jesus. They should reflect on what Jesus has done for them.

### Read

Heb 3:1–6

### Questions

1. What are the believers told to do in this passage? Compare 2:1–4. What is your conclusion?
2. How are the believers described in v 1? Explain the significance of this description.
3. How is Jesus described in v 1? Explain the significance of this description.
4. Jesus and Moses are compared in v 2–6. Similarities? Differences? What point does the author make through this comparison?
5. Compare v 1–2 in this passage (where we see that Jesus was appointed apostle and high priest – referring to the past) with 1:2 (where we see that God appointed Jesus heir of all things – pointing towards his future destiny) and 5:1, 5 (where we see that God is appointing Jesus as high priest – referring to the present). What are your conclusions?
6. In this passage (as well as in the rest of the book) we find a balance between the security that is promised to the believers and the need for them to persevere. Explain how.

### Bible study/sermon/devotion

Prepare a devotion study called **The security of the believer**. Use your answer to question 6 above to explain why we should “think about Jesus”.

[\(Go to Answers 6\)](#)

## Study 7: Firmly to the end, 3:7–4:13

### Introduction

This passage is a “Bible study” based on Ps 95:7–11. Psalm 95 was read every week as part of the Jewish synagogue service on the Sabbath. The first part of the psalm focuses on worship. The second part is about loyalty to God. The author of Hebrews makes use of the second part to bring out his message to his readers: They must stand firmly on God’s word (the gospel) in order to enter the eternal Sabbath rest that God has in store for them.

Note how the author understands Ps 95: Through this psalm God is still speaking to his people, the church. This old psalm has a message to the present situation (“as the Holy Spirit says”, 3:7) now that some Jewish believers were tempted to leave their Christian faith.

### Read

Heb 3:7–4:13

### Questions

1. What is the link between this passage and the previous one? Explain.
2. What features in the history of the Israelites do these expressions refer to:
  - a. The rebellion (3:8, 15)
  - b. The day of testing in the desert (3:8)
  - c. That generation (3:10)
  - d. Entering into God’s rest (3:11, 18)
3. This passage can be divided into three main parts (see below). What is the message to the readers in each part?
  - a. God’s word to the readers from the past (3:7–11)
  - b. God’s word to the readers in the present (3:12–19)
  - c. God’s word to the readers for the future (4:1–13)
4. Make four points about the word of God based on 3:12–19
  - a. 3:7, 15; 4:7
  - b. 3:12; 4:12

- c. 4:6, 11
  - d. 3:13
5. Explain the two parts of 4:12–13 in your own words.
6. Why do you think the word “today” is used five times in this passage?

### **Bible study/sermon/devotion**

Prepare a sermon based on this study called **The word of God**. Use your answers to question 4 –6 above to preach about how we as Christian believers today should relate to the word of God and to the gospel message.

[\(Go to Answers 7\)](#)

## **Study 8: A great high priest, 4:14–5:10**

### **Introduction**

In the previous study the author exhorted his readers to stand firmly in God's word and in the gospel. Only then would they finally enter "God's rest."

God is a holy God. But he also knows everything about our hearts and minds. He knows that we are sinners. Therefore, we stand guilty before him. So we need a "great high priest," a high priest like Jesus, who can deal with our sin and make it possible for us to enter into God's eternal rest.

### **Comment**

In this study the author introduces Melchizedek, a mysterious person from the Old Testament. Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. His name means "king of righteousness". Melchizedek came out to meet Abraham who was returning with all his loot from a victorious war against four Mesopotamian kings. Melchizedek gave Abraham bread and wine and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. In Hebrews Melchizedek is understood as a type for Jesus Christ.

### **Read**

Heb 4:14–5:10

### **Questions**

1. In the Greek text (also in English NIV, but not in the Kannada translations) this passage starts with "Therefore". Why? What is the link with the previous passage?
2. Explain the two parts of 4:14.
3. What could be the Old Testament context of these expressions?
  - a. High priest (4:14; compare 2:17 and 3:1)
  - b. Passed through the heavens (4:14)
  - c. The throne of grace (4:16)
4. What are the two specific qualifications for the office of the high priest (5:1, 4)?

5. Note down the information you find about Melchizedek in these Old Testament passages (these are the only places in the whole Bible, apart from Hebrews, where Melchizedek is mentioned):
  - a. Gen 14:17–20
  - b. Ps 110
6. How would you understand the expression “after the order of Melchizedek” (5:6) from the Old Testament references in the previous question?
7. Four aspects of Jesus’ “priesthood” can be found in this passage. Which are they and explain them in your own words? Use these references to identify them:
  - a. 4:14
  - b. 4:15
  - c. 5:4–5
  - d. 5:9–10

### **Bible study/sermon/devotion**

Prepare a Bible study based on this study called **Jesus our great high priest**.

### **Suggestions for library time/homework – Tuesday (the second day of the course)**

1. Finish your work from the studies you have done today (5–8)
2. Go through your notes from the previous studies.
3. In small groups (or individually): Do study 9 (**Our immaturity and God’s faithfulness**).
4. If you have time: Prepare a Bible study/sermon/devotion based on one of the passages that you have just studied.

[\(Go to Answers 8\)](#)

## Study 9: Our immaturity and God's faithfulness, 5:11–6:20

### Introduction

The previous study ended with a wonderful statement about Jesus: *He became the author of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God to be high priest after the order of Melchizedek* (5:10). The author of Hebrews will later return to his teaching about Jesus the high priest.

In this passage however, the author has yet another exhortation for his readers. They must leave the elementary teachings behind and strive for Christian maturity, the things that accompany their salvation. Only then will they inherit what God has promised. God is faithful to his promises. So the believers can confidently anchor their hope in what Jesus the high priest has achieved for their salvation.

### Read

Heb 5:11–6:20

### Questions

1. This passage starts with the statement, “About this we have much to say” (5:11). What does “this” refer to?
2. What metaphor does the author use to illustrate the spiritual immaturity of his readers?
3. What metaphor does the author use to illustrate his disappointment with those who “are crucifying again the Son of God and exposing him to public disgrace”?
4. Explain the imagery in 6:19.
5. What are the “basic teaching about Christ” according to the author? Make a list and explain give your comments: Would like to delete any point? If so, why? Would like to add any point? If so, why?
6. This passage contains some of the most confusing and discouraging verses (6:4–8) in the New Testament. Of course they have to be understood in the light of the teaching of the rest of the New Testament. So how do you interpret this passage?



7. What do we learn about God in 6:9–20? Try to identify a few main points. Use your own words and don't just copy the text in the Bible.
8. In this passage there are important lessons for us who are involved in ministry. What lessons do you find? Make a list.

### **Bible study/sermon/devotion**

1. Prepare a short devotion based on 6:9–20 called **God is just, generous and dependable**. Use your answer to question 7.
2. Prepare a Bible study called **Elementary teachings about Jesus**. Use your answer to question 5.
3. Prepare a counseling session with a young believer who has come to you for help. He/she has committed a sin and thinks that everything is now lost (based on Heb 6:4–6). Make use of your answer to question 6 to encourage and help this believer.

[\(Go to Answers 9\)](#)

## Study 10: A better priesthood, 7:1–28

### Introduction

In chapter 7 of his book, the author of Hebrews uses Melchizedek to prove that the priesthood of the New Covenant in Jesus surpasses the priesthood of the previous covenant.

### Comment

The second time the mysterious Melchizedek occurs in the Old Testament is in Ps 110:4: *You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*

Psalm 110 was considered a Messianic psalm by the Jews during New Testament times. Jesus applied verse 1 to himself: *Jesus said to them, “How then does David, speaking by the Spirit, call him ‘Lord’, saying, ‘The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’ (Matt 22:43–44; compare Mark 16:36–37; Luke 20:42–43).* Peter also quoted this verse in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, *For David did not ascend to heaven, but he said, “ ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”’ (Acts 2:34–35)*

In chapter 7 the author of Hebrews refers to verse 4 of Psalm 110. He understands the statement there (“You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek”) as a Messianic prophecy. Melchizedek is a “type” for Jesus, who is “forever.”

### Read

Heb 7:1–28

### Questions

1. This passage compares two priesthoods. What are they?
2. The name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness” in Hebrew. But why is he also called “king of peace” (v 2)?
3. What parallel between Melchizedek and Jesus does the author of Hebrews draw in v 3?
4. Why was Melchizedek so great according to v 4–10?
5. Why was there a need for another priest to come, one after the order of Melchizedek, and not after the order of Aaron (v 11)?

6. It was not only the priesthood in the order of Aaron that was imperfect, but also something that couldn't be separated from it. What was that, and why?
7. What is the main purpose for the author of Hebrews to use the story about Melchizedek in his book (compare 1:4; 3:2–4)?
8. What is the consequence of the change of the priesthood and the law (v 19)?
9. The author of Hebrews gives three reasons why the priesthood of Jesus is far superior to the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament (v 20–28). What are they?
10. The priesthood of Jesus is described in v 23–28. What are the main points?
11. In v 20–28 we find three “portraits” of Jesus. What are they?

### **Bible study/sermon/devotion**

Prepare a Bible study based on this study. Call your study **A better priesthood**.

[\(Go to Answers 10\)](#)

# **Study 11: Christ's sanctuary and a better covenant, 8:1–13**

## **Introduction**

In chapter 7 we found that Jesus' priesthood is superior to the previous Aaronitic or Levite priesthood. In chapter 8, Hebrews explains that the sanctuary of the previous priesthood was a copy and shadow of Jesus' heavenly sanctuary. Consequently, Jesus' New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant, which is obsolete and aging and will soon disappear.

## **Read**

Heb 8:1–13

## **Questions**

1. Identify the two sections of this chapter.
2. How are the two sanctuaries described and contrasted? Find four important points.
3. The first five verses of this chapter again have Jesus in focus. What do we learn about these two aspects of Jesus?
  - a. Who he is
  - b. What he does
4. What reasons are given in v 6–9 for the need of a new covenant?
5. The author of Hebrews quotes Jer 31:31–34, which is a prophecy about the New Covenant. It contains four “promises” (compare Heb 8:6). These are the promises that make the New Covenant superior to the old Sinai covenant (v 10–12). What are they?
6. A “covenant” is an agreement between two parties. So what is remarkable about the New Covenant (v 8–12)?
7. Explain v 13 using your own words as much as possible.
8. Apart from in Hebrews, the expression “new covenant” is used three times in the New Testament: Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; and 2 Cor 3:6. Look up these references. In what contexts is “new covenant” used?

9. How do you understand Gal 3:3–14 in the light of this study of “the better covenant”?

### **Bible study/sermon/devotion**

1. Prepare a Bible study based on this study. Call your study **A better covenant**.
2. Prepare a Bible study based on this study (particularly your answer to question 3). Call your study **Jesus our high priest** (it should be different study from the Bible study you prepared in study 8, even if the title is similar).

[\(Go to Answers 11\)](#)

## Study 12: The two tabernacles, 9:1–22

### Introduction

After a description of the worship in the earthly sanctuary (first the Tabernacle and later the Jerusalem temple) the author of Hebrews explains the need for a new order (a New Covenant whose mediator is Christ) with a more perfect Tabernacle and a more perfect sacrifice.

### Comment

Under the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant blood was used in two ways:

1. Covenants were put into effect (or ratified or inaugurated) by blood. When Moses sprinkled blood on the people they became people of the covenant. When Jesus took the cup at the Last Supper and said, *This is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*, he proclaimed that the New Covenant would be put into effect with the shedding of his blood on the cross.
2. Sanctuaries were sanctified by blood. Under the old covenant nothing was considered purified unless it had the red mark of blood. So the author of Hebrews understands this as a type for spiritual life. The sacrificial death of Jesus, the shedding of Christ's blood, is the condition for forgiveness of sins.

### Read

Heb 9:1–22

### Questions

1. This passage can be divided into two sections. What are they, and what is the focus of each section?
2. Identify the three weaknesses of the tabernacle of the first covenant (v 6–10).
3. Explain the following expressions in verse 11 using your own words:
  - a. The good things that are already here
  - b. The greater and more perfect tabernacle
  - c. Not made with hands, not a part of this creation
4. How are the two tabernacles contrasted in v 12?

5. How would you describe the effects of “the better covenant”? Try to find the three main points (v 11–14)?
6. Explain verse 15. Use your own words as much as possible.
7. In verse 16–17 we find a metaphorical illustration. From what area of life is it taken? What point does it make?
8. In verse 18–22 there are two Old Testament illustrations that are summed up in the last verse where the key expression is “with blood”. What are the two illustrations (note that there are **two**, not one!)?

### **Bible study/sermon/devotion**

Prepare a Bible study based on this study. Call your study **The two tabernacles**.

[\(Go to Answers 12\)](#)

## **Study 13: Christ's perfect sacrifice, 9:23–10:18**

### **Introduction**

We have now come to the last of the author's five themes in the central section (7:1–10:18) of his letter:

1. Christ's superior priesthood (7:1–28)
2. The heavenly sanctuary (8:1–5)
3. The inauguration of a better covenant (8:5–9:14)
4. The believer's inheritance through Christ's eternal legacy (9:15–22)
5. Christ's perfect sacrifice (9:23–10:18)

### **Read**

Heb 9:23–10:18

### **Questions**

1. What did Christ purify through his sacrifices (9:23)? How do you understand that expression?
2. Into what sanctuary did Christ bring his sacrifice? And what is the significance of that (9:24)?
3. How do you understand the second part of 9:24 ("now to appear in the presence of God for us")? What is the significance of "now"?
4. In 9:25–26, the author of Hebrews contrasts the sacrificial ministry of the high priest of the earthly sanctuary with the sacrificial ministry of Christ. What are his three points?
5. What does the expression "at the end of the ages" in 9:26 refer to?
6. We learn two things about Jesus in 9:28. What are they?
7. In 9:26 and 9:28, we find different expressions for what Christ did with sin as he was sacrificed: first we find "to do away with sin" then we find "to bear sin". What could be the difference between these two expressions?
8. In 10:1–4, the author of Hebrews gives a reason for the Old Testament sacrificial system. What reason is that?



9. In 10:5–7, we see how the author of Hebrews understands a quotation from Ps 40 (v 6–8; this psalm is written by David) as being uttered by Christ. Thereby these words become a prophecy about Jesus. Compare the text in Hebrews with the text in Psalms. What is the main difference? How can this difference be explained? Does this difference cause any significant difficulty for the interpreter? Why – why not?
10. In 10:11–12, we find a contrast between standing and sitting. Explain how?
11. Explain these expressions from 10:13–14:
  - a. From that time
  - b. He waits for his enemies to be made the footstool for his feet (a quotation from Ps 110:1; compare Heb 1:13)
  - c. Those who are being sanctified (compare 2:11)
12. In whose mouth does the author of Hebrews put the two quotations from Jer 31:31–34 (Heb 10:16–18)? What is the significance of the way he expresses this?

## **Bible study/sermon/devotion**

Prepare a Bible study based on this study. Call your study **Christ's perfect sacrifice**.

## **Suggestions for library time/homework – Wednesday (the third day of the course)**

1. Finish your work from the studies you have done today (10–13)
2. Go through your notes from the previous studies.
3. In small groups (or individually): Do study 14 (**Hold fast to the hope we profess**).
4. If you have time: Prepare a Bible study/sermon/devotion based on one of the passages that you have just studied.

[\(Go to Answers 13\)](#)

## **Study 14: Hold fast to the hope we profess, 10:19–39**

### **Introduction**

Now we have come to a new section of Hebrews. It starts with “Therefore, brothers (and sisters)”. So now the author turns to the believers (his readers) and asks them to draw the consequences of his previous teaching about Jesus and his work and apply it to their personal lives. It is a “word of exhortation” (13:22).

Just like all the New Testament writers (and the Old Testament prophets before them, but also Jesus) the author links doctrine with deeds. They all insisted on correct behavior that was consistent with correct teaching.

In the remaining part of his book, the author uses the doctrinal teaching of the earlier chapters to exhort, encourage and warn his readers to live a life that is consistent with their profession of faith.

### **Readings with questions**

#### **1. Read Heb 10:19–22**

The author exhorts the believers to draw near to God. Questions:

1. Why should we draw near to God?
2. How is it possible for us to draw near to God?
3. What does “curtain” refer to?
4. How should we draw near to God?

#### **2. Read Heb 10:23–25**

The author exhorts the believers to hold fast to their confession. Questions:

5. Why should we continue to profess our initial faith in Jesus?
6. As we see the Day of the Lord approach, what should we as believers do?

#### **3. Read Heb 10:26–35**

The author exhorts the believers not to fall away from their faith by willfully persisting in sin but to be confident in their faith and have endurance. Questions:

7. What expressions does the author use to describe the significance and consequences of committing the sin of apostasy (v 26–31)?
8. Explain why v 32–35 should be understood as an encouragement to the readers of Hebrews.

#### 4. Read Heb 10:36–39

The author exhorts the believers to persevere and not shrink away from their faith. Question:

9. What has God promised to those who persevere in their faith?

### Reflection

What are the most important things that you have learnt from this lesson? Explain why. Take time to note down a few points.

### Bible study/sermon/devotion

1. Prepare a short devotion based on Heb 10:19–22 called **Draw near to God!** Use your answers to questions 1–4.
2. Prepare a short devotion based on Heb 10:23–25 called **Hold to the hope you profess!** Use your answers to questions 5–6.
3. Prepare a short devotion based on Heb 10:26–35 called **Do not throw away your confidence!** Use your answers to questions 7–8.
4. Prepare a short devotion based on Heb 10:36–39 called **Persevere!** Use your answer to question 9.

[\(Go to Answers 14\)](#)

## **Study 15: Praised for their faith, 11:1–40**

### **Introduction**

This chapter begins with a very famous definition of “faith”: It is the assurance of things we hope for and conviction of things we do not see (11:1). Then the chapter continues with a long list of “heroes of faith” from Old Testament times. This chapter must, however, be understood with the exhortations in 10:19–39 as a background. So it does not cover everything that can be said about faith.

### **Readings with questions**

#### **1. Read Heb 11:1–3**

These verses are about faith. Questions:

1. Explain v 1 in your own words.
2. What were the ancients commended for (v 2)?
3. Explain the author’s point in v 3.

#### **2. Read Heb 11:4–7**

These verses are about three righteous men. Questions:

4. How should we understand the two statements about Abel’s faith:
  - a. “By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did”
  - b. “By faith he still speaks, even if he is dead”
5. How did Enoch please God?
6. How do you understand the statement that Noah condemned the world by his faith?

#### **3. Read Heb 11:8–12**

These verses are about Abraham and his family. Questions:

7. Abraham has been mentioned three times earlier in Hebrews. Look up these references and summarize what we learn about him there:
  - a. Heb 2:16
  - b. Heb 6:13–15

c. Heb 7:1–10

8. In Heb 11:8–12 the author uses Abraham and Sarah to illustrate various aspects of faith. Which are these aspects?

#### **4. Read Heb 11:13–16**

These verses are about faith's qualities. Question:

9. How do you understand the qualities (or characteristics) of faith as portrayed in these verses?

#### **5. Read Heb 11:17–38**

These verses are about faith in all kinds of circumstances. Questions:

10. Abraham received God's promise. How is faith in this promise carried on through the following generations (v 17–22)?
11. Moses received the law at Sinai and became God's servant to lead the Israelites back to the Promised Land. What can we learn about faith through his story (v 23–29)?
12. The author of Hebrews then jumps to the Promised Land. What examples of faith does he give (v 30–38)?

#### **6. Read Heb 11:39–40**

Here the author of Hebrews gives his concluding words. Questions:

13. What did all the "heroes of faith" have in common?
14. How should we understand v 40?

### **Reflection**

What are the most important things that you have learnt from this lesson? Explain why. Take time to note down a few points.

### **Bible study/sermon/devotion**

1. Prepare a devotion based on your answers to question 8. Call your devotion **Faith**.

*Studies*

2. Prepare a devotion based on your answers to question 10. Call your devotion **Faith in all kinds of circumstances.**
3. Prepare a Bible study based on your answers to questions 9, 11 and 12. Call your study **Characteristics of faith.**

[\(Go Answers 15\)](#)

## **Study 16: Look to Jesus, 12:1–3**

### **Introduction**

The author of Hebrews now turns from the Old Testament heroes of faith to the sufferings and achievement of Jesus – the greatest example of all.

The long list of persons mentioned in chapter 11 have witnessed to us about God’s faithfulness. Their witness can inspire us and be examples to us. But only Jesus can actually help us and strengthen us.

### **Questions**

1. Explain the link between this passage and the previous chapter.
2. What metaphor does the author use in v 1? Explain it using your own words.
3. In this passage we are told to remove two things. Explain what they are in your own words.
4. Why do we need to have perseverance?
5. How is Jesus described in v 2–3? Make a list. Use your own words as much as possible.
6. Why should we “consider Jesus” and why should we “look to him”?

### **Bible study/sermon/devotion**

Prepare a Bible study based on this study. You can call it **Look to Jesus!**

[\(Go to Answers 16\)](#)

## Study 17: The Lord's discipline, 12:4–11

### Introduction

In the previous passage we were exhorted to look to Jesus in order for us not to grow weary and loose heart as we run the course of our lives as Christians. In this passage we are told not to loose heart when the Lord disciplines and rebukes us. Instead we must face difficulties and trials in a way that gives honor to God and helps us mature as believers.

### Questions

1. What would be the logical connection between these verses (v 4–11) about the Lord's discipline and the previous verses about fixing our eyes on Jesus (v 1–3)?
2. As followers of Jesus in this fallen and sinful world we must expect suffering, testing and trials, just as Jesus told his disciples (Matt 10:22). But God will not let us be tested beyond what we can bear (1 Cor 10:13). It is important that we do not look at difficult experiences as pointless adversities. God can use these difficulties as a way to correct us and help us grow. The author of Hebrews gives three pieces of advice on how meet adversities:
  - a. The first piece of advice is to remember God's word (v 5–6), quoting Prov 3:11–12. In these verses we find three ways in which we can respond to "the Lord's discipline". What are they?
  - b. The second piece of advice is to remember God's care (v 7–9). Explain how God shows his care by disciplining his children?
  - c. The third piece of advice is to remember God's purpose (v 10–11). These verses contain two aspects of God's purpose for disciplining his children. What are they?

### Bible study/sermon/devotion

Prepare a Bible study based on this study. You can call it **Endure hardships!**

[\(Go to Answers 17\)](#)



## Study 18: Press forward, 12:12–17

### Introduction

After having presented a “doctrine of discipline, suffering and hardships,” the author moves on to exhort his readers to press forward with their Christian lives.

### Questions

1. Verse 12 starts with “Therefore”. What does that indicate? Explain.
2. Then the author introduces this theme with two Old Testament quotations (*Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees*, Is 35:3; *Make straight paths for your feet*, Prov 4:26). What do you think is he wants to say with these metaphors?
3. How do you understand the connection between the two parts of verse 13?
4. Explain the exhortations in verse 14 using your own words.
5. How do you understand the connection between “the grace of God” and “bitterness of believers” that the author makes in verse 15.
6. The remaining verses in this passage contain two exhortations. What are they?

### Bible study/sermon/devotion

Prepare a Bible study based on this study. You can call it **Press forward!**

### Suggestions for library time/homework – Thursday (the fourth day of the course)

1. Finish your work from the studies you have done today (15–18)
2. Go through your notes from the previous studies.
3. In small groups (or individually): Do study 19 (**The two mountains**).
4. If you have time: Prepare a Bible study/sermon/devotion based on one of the passages that you have just studied.

[\(Go Answers 18\)](#)

## Study 19: The two mountains, 12:18–29

### Introduction

In this passage the author explains why it is possible for his readers to press forward. There is a reason why believers can be strong and walk upright, why they can live in peace and be holy.

### Questions

1. This passage contains the last of the contrast pictures in Hebrews. Look up these earlier contrast pictures and fill in what they are about:
  - a. 1:4–14
  - b. 2:1–4
  - c. 3:1–6
  - d. 5:1–10
  - e. 7:20–28
  - f. 8:1–5
  - g. 8:6–9:14
  - h. 9:23–10:4
2. So what is contrasted in this passage?
3. How do you understand the link between this passage and the previous one?
4. In this passage we find a description of the kingdom of God that we belong to. How is it described? Make a list of its features.
5. What exhortations does the author of Hebrews have for us in this passage?

### Reflection

What are the most important things that you have learnt from this lesson? Explain why. Take time to note down a few points.

### Bible study/sermon/devotion

Prepare a Bible study based on this study. Call your study **Our mountain**.

[\(Go to Answers 19\)](#)

## Study 20: Exhortations part 1, 13:1–6

### Introduction

The author of Hebrews wants to make sure that his readers realize that it is not enough to have a correct understanding of the Christian faith, of Christian doctrine. No, doctrine must have consequences for life. So he concludes his book with a series of ethical and moral exhortations. In the two last studies of this course we will look at these exhortations.

### Questions

1. How do you understand the connection between the end of the previous chapter (12:28–29) and the exhortations in chapter 13?
2. Explain verse 1 in your own words.
3. What aspects of brotherly love do we find in v 2–3?
4. What about your own situation in South India today? In what ways is it important for you to express brotherly love? Also explain why.
5. The next exhortation is about sexual morality (v 4). Is this a problem in the South Indian church? Explain why – why not. What are the cultural threats against good Christian marriages in India today?
6. In v 5–6 the author of Hebrews uses two quotations from the Old Testament (*I will never fail you or forsake you*, Josh 1:5; *The Lord is with me. I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?* Ps 118:6) to support his next exhortation. Explain how.
7. Do you feel that the love of money is a problem to South Indian believers today? Explain.
8. What could pastors and Bible teachers do to help believers in the South Indian church to be content with what they have?

### Reflection

What are the most important things that you have learnt from this lesson? Explain why. Take time to note down a few points.

## **Bible study/sermon/devotion**

Prepare a Bible study based on your answers to questions 2–4. Call your study **Brotherly love**.

[\(Go to Answers 20\)](#)

## Study 21: Exhortations part 2, 13:7–24

### Introduction

This study concludes the series of exhortations that the author brings up in chapter 13. They concern various areas of Christian life, such as

1. Relationship between church leaders and believers
2. Strange teachings
3. Bearing disgrace in imitation of Christ
4. Sacrifices that please God

These – and other – areas of Christian lifestyle should be the consequence of a correct understanding of the Christian faith. They reflect that we belong to an enduring city that is to come (v 14), the heavenly Jerusalem, the kingdom of God.

### Questions

1. Explain the context of the well-known verse *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever* (13:8).
2. What could have been the “strange teachings” that the readers are warned against in 13:9?
3. What point does the author of Hebrews make in v 10–12?
4. How should the exhortation “Let us then go to him outside the camp” (v 13) be understood?
5. In v 15–16 the readers of Hebrews are exhorted to offer two kinds of sacrifices. What are they?
6. In chapter 13 there are three exhortations that refer to how believers should relate to their church leaders. What are they?
7. What do we learn about pastoral leadership from v 17–21?
8. What do you think that the author of Hebrews refers to with his request to bear with his word of exhortation (v 22)?

### Reflection

What are the most important things that you have learnt from this lesson? Explain why. Take time to note down a few points.

## **Bible study/sermon/devotion**

1. Prepare a short devotion for church leaders based on Heb 13:7–9 called **Jesus is with us!** Use your answers to question 1.
2. Prepare a short devotion for church leaders based on Heb 13:13 called **Let us follow Jesus outside the camp!** Use your answers to question 4.
3. Prepare a short devotion based on Heb 13:15–16 called **Sacrifices that please God.** Use your answers to question 5.
4. Prepare a Bible study based on your answers to questions 6–7. Call your study **Pastors and believers.**

[\(Go to Answers 21\)](#)

## **Answers**

# Answers to Introduction to Hebrews

## Notes to the teacher

1. Do not spend much time on this introduction. Half of the first lesson should be enough. But allow enough time for the students to digest the essentials.
2. Don't make the students memorize all the details. It is sufficient if they learn a few things as a general background to their study of the book. They can come back to this introduction later, perhaps at the end of the course.
3. Try to cover this introduction as you casually interact with the students. So let the students find answers to the questions in dialogue with you. Don't lecture or "teach"!
4. You can reinforce the students' learning by letting them read through the whole introduction once more during library time.

## Answers to 1. A different kind of book

1. Have you read Hebrews before?

Answer: –

2. How did you find it? Easy or difficult? Explain why.

Answer: –

3. Do you have any more reasons why so many modern-day believers find Hebrews a difficult book?

Answer: One additional reason could be the cultural gap between the first readers and us. They were Jewish-background believers, while most of us are Hindu-background believers. So the language and arguments used in Hebrews feel strange and alien to us. Another reason could be the religious gap between Judaism (strongly monotheistic, morally superior) and Hinduism (idol worship, morally corrupt). Judaism had a strong attraction on the Gentile peoples of those days, which made it even more tempting for persecuted Jewish-background Christians to return to their old faith. The temptation for persecuted Hindu-background Christians to return to their previous idol worship and social injustices should hopefully be less.

[\(Go to 2. The author\)](#)



## Answers to 2. The author

4. Why cannot Bible scholars agree about the authorship of Hebrews?

Answer: The book doesn't mention the name of the author. Early Christian historical records do not solve the matter either.

5. Give at least four reasons why Barnabas, Apollos, and Silas are good candidates for the authorship of Hebrews.

Answer:

- They are all men.
- They all have Jewish background.
- They are all Greek-speakers from the Jewish diaspora.
- They were all respected and well-known persons in the early church.
- None of them belonged to the group of people who had been together with Jesus during his lifetime.

If the Timothy mentioned in Heb 13:23 refers to an otherwise unknown person, Paul's close friend and co-worker Timothy would also be a good candidate.

6. Who is your own suggestion? Explain why that person is the best candidate for the authorship of Hebrews.

Answer: –

[\(Go to 3. The recipients\)](#)

## Answers to 3. The recipients

7. Why can nobody know for certain who Hebrews was addressed to?

Answer: The book doesn't mention the addressees.

8. What would the expression "to the Hebrews" refer to?

Answer: It refers to people of Jewish background, not necessarily to Hebrew-speaking Jews.

9. What else can we deduce about the recipients of Hebrews from the book itself?

Answer:

- They were from the diaspora and probably had Greek as their first language.
- They probably lived in Rome.
- They were experiencing persecution.
- They were tempted to leave the Christian faith and return to Judaism.

[\(Go to 4. When was it written?\)](#)

## **Answers to 4. When was it written?**

10. Why is it reasonable to say that Hebrews was written between AD 65 and AD 70?

Answer: The persecutions (under Emperor Nero around AD 65) that followed the great fire of Rome in AD 64 seems to be the historical background of the book. The religious background of the book is the sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem temple. The temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. This put an end to the temple rituals and the sacrifices.

[\(Go to 5. Why was it written?\)](#)

## **Answers to 5. Why was it written?**

11. Why did the author write his book?

Answer: He wanted to strengthen the faith of his readers, who were tempted to backslide and return to their old Jewish faith in order to escape the persecutions.

12. Explain how the author argues in order to strengthen the faith of his readers.

Answer: His main argument is that Jesus – his priesthood, his sacrificial death, and his covenant – are far superior to the previous covenant of the Jews. Consequently, his readers would be fools to leave something great (their present Christian faith) for something much inferior (their previous Jewish faith).

[\(Go to 6. The theme of the book\)](#)

## **Answers to 6. The theme of the book**

13. State the main theme of Hebrews. Don't just quote your textbook or your notes. But use your own words as much as possible.

Answer: –

14. Explain how this main theme fits the purpose of the book.

Answer: Hebrews is really all about Jesus and his sacrificial death which gives all those who believe in him eternal salvation (5:9).

[\(Go to Reading of Hebrews\)](#)

# Answers to Reading of Hebrews

## Notes to the teacher

1. Do not “teach” the answers to the first three questions! That would be a waste of time, as most of these matters will be taken up more systematically in the later studies. So just check that the students have tried to answer the questions reasonably well. Do **not** go through all the points!
2. Instead you can spend more time on the fourth question. Go through the answers in class together with the students. Clarify any misunderstandings.

## Answers to the questions

Work in groups of two or three. Read through the whole book. As you do so, try to answer these three questions:

1. How is Jesus “explained” or “described” in chapters 1–6? Find your answers through this simple list of references.

This is my list (you may have done it differently):

- a. God’s Son, the divine Christ, 1:1–3
  - b. Superior to the angels, 1:4–14
  - c. The author of our salvation, 2:5–13
  - d. Our deliverer from the power of the devil, 2:14–18
  - e. The author and high priest of our confession, 3:1–6
  - f. Our great high priest, 4:14–5:10
2. What has Jesus done for us? Find your answers with the help of this simple list of references taken from 7:1–10:18.

This is my list (you may have done it differently):

- a. As the perfect high priest he has brought us perfect salvation, 7:1–8:5
  - b. He has brought us a better covenant, 8:6–9:14
  - c. He gives us our promised eternal inheritance, 9:15–22
  - d. He provides for us the ultimate sacrifice for our sins, 9:23–10:18
3. What should be our response to Jesus and his work for us (based on 10:19–13:25)?

This is my list (you may have done it differently):

- We should draw near to God with a sincere heart, 10:22
- We should hold fast to the confession of our hope , 10:23
- We should encourage one another on toward love and good works, 10:24
- We should not neglect to meet together, 10:25
- We should encourage one another, 10:25
- We should not willfully persist in sinning, 10:26
- We should not abandon our boldness, 10:35
- We should persevere, 10:35
- We should have faith like the “heroes of faith”, chapter 11
- We should lay aside everything that hinders us. Sin can so easily entangle us, 12:1
- We should run with perseverance the race is set before us, 12:1
- We should have our eyes fixed on Jesus, 12:2
- We should endure hardship for the sake of discipline, 12:7
- We should strengthen our feeble hands and weak knees, 12:12
- We should pursue peace with all men and be sanctified, 12:14
- We should not miss the grace of God, 12:15
- We should not refuse God who speaks, 12:25
- We should give thanks, and so serve God with reverence and awe, 12:28
- We should keep on loving each other as brothers, 13:1
- We should remember to be hospitable to strangers, 13:2
- We should remember those who are in prison, 13:3
- We should let marriage be kept in honor, 13:4
- We should be free from the love of money and be content with what we have, 13:5
- We should remember our leaders, 13:7
- We should not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings, 13:9
- We should endure the disgrace that Jesus endured, 13:13

- We should continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, 13:15
  - We should not forget to do good and to share what we have with others, 13:16
  - We should obey our leaders and submit to their authority, 13:17
4. The author of Hebrews again and again contrasts the previous covenant (Moses' covenant, the Sinai covenant) and the New Covenant. Look at these references and identify some of the contrasts that he brings up.
- a. 5:2–3 and 7:26: The high priest of the previous covenant is subject to weakness and sin. But Christ is without sin. He is holy, blameless, pure, and exalted.
  - b. 7:23–25: The previous priesthood is imperfect and marred by death. Christ's priesthood is permanent and eternal and brings perfect salvation.
  - c. 9:13 and 7:27: The high priest of the previous covenant offers the blood of goats and bulls. But Christ offered himself, his own blood.
  - d. 9:9 and 9:14: The sacrifices offered under the previous covenant are not able to give the worshipers a clear conscience. Christ's sacrifice cleanses our consciences from acts that lead to death.
  - e. 10:3 and 9:28: The sacrifices of the previous covenant are a constant reminder to the worshipers of their sins. Christ's sacrifice remove the sins and brings salvation to those who follow him.
  - f. 10:11–12: The sacrifices of the previous covenant have to be repeated constantly, and they cannot remove sin. But Christ offered one sacrifice for sins, once for all.

[\(Go to Study 1\)](#)

# Answers 1: God speaks through his Son, 1:1–3

## Answers to Questions

1. This is how God spoke to his people earlier:
  - a. He spoke through his prophets. The expression “the prophets” refers to all the Old Testament books, all the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings.
  - b. He spoke many times.
  - c. He spoke in many different ways.
2. Now God speaks to his people through his Son. The expression “in these last days” refers to the whole New Testament period, the time between Jesus’ first and second comings. So in Old Testament times God spoke to his people through the “prophets” (referring to the Old Testament scriptures). In the New Covenant period God speaks through his son, Jesus Christ.
3. God speaks about the Son. Jesus, is not only the person who God speaks through “in these last days.” He is also God’s message. He is God’s powerful “word.” So God’s message is the gospel about Jesus and his redemptive work on the cross.
4. These three verses teach us these eight things about who Jesus is:
  - a. God speaks through him (just like he spoke through the Old Testament prophets): Here we see the continuation between the Old and the New Testaments. God spoke then. He speaks now. Jesus did not come to break with the past. He came to fulfill the past. Through him God speaks fully and definitely. There is no revelation beyond Jesus. With Jesus “the last days” have come. In him God’s prophecies are fulfilled.
  - b. He is God’s Son: He is not just a great man, a fantastic teacher, a mighty miracle-worker or a great leader. No, he is the Son of God. The Sonship of Jesus is a recurring theme in the book. If we reject him (10:29), we reject God’s salvation for us.
  - c. He is God’s appointed heir: In him God’s plan for the whole universe comes to fulfillment. He is not only the Alpha (see the next point). He is also the Omega, the end, the completion, of everything.
  - d. God has created the universe through him: He is the Alpha, the beginning, of everything. *All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that has been made* (John 1.3).

- e. God reveals his glory through him: In the Old Testament, the glory of God was God's visible and majestic presence among his people (at Mount Sinai when the Law was given to the Israelites in the "tent of meeting" (the Ark of the Covenant). So God's glory in these last days is revealed in Jesus. In him all the splendor of God is fully revealed. He is one with God (compare the following point).
- f. He is the very image of God: All the attributes of God have become visible in him. So he is also distinct from the Father (compare the previous point).
- g. He upholds everything: The Jews saw God as the sustainer of everything. Here Hebrews claims that Jesus is the one who upholds and sustains everything. So the Jewish Christians who were wavering in their faith are encouraged to trust Jesus. They are in his hands.
- h. He is the Savior (the one who provides purification for our sins): Jesus himself is the unique sacrifice. Hebrews will return to this topic in more detail later. Jesus gave his life once for all. Everything is now completed. He brought the Old Testament sacrificial system to an end. There is no other savior.

[\(Go to Study 2\)](#)



## Answers 2: Superior to the angels, 1:4–14

### Comment 1

**Angels** are God's messengers to his people at critical times. In the Old Testament as well as in the early church they were seen as mediators between God and man. They may be great and wonderful beings. But Jesus is superior to them in a lot of different ways.

### Answers to Questions

1. Jesus is superior to the angels in several ways:
  - a. His name is superior (v 4–5): The angels are only messengers. But Jesus is God's Son.
  - b. He has higher dignity (v 6): The angels worship Jesus (not the other way around).
  - c. His nature is higher (v 7–8): The angels are Jesus' servants. But he is God.
  - d. His role is higher (v 7–8a): The angels are servants. But Jesus is king.

Earlier we saw that Jesus is prophet (he has spoken, 1:1), and priest (he is seated after having completed his priestly work of salvation, 1:3). Now we learn that he is also king.
  - e. His example (moral and ethical qualities) is superior (v 8–9): Not all angels were good (some were fallen). But Jesus is righteous (in spite of human temptations).
  - f. His work is superior (v 10–12): The angels are created beings. But Jesus is the creator.
  - g. His achievement is superior (v 13): The angels serve. But Jesus saves.
  - h. His destiny is superior (v 13): The angels will never become more than servants;. But Jesus will forever be worthy of praise and worship: *every knee shall bow and every tongue confess ...* (Philippians 2:10–11).
2. In verse 8 the author quotes Ps 45:6–7. Psalm 45 is addressed to a king, even verses 6–7 where “God” does not refer to the Lord God but to the king, who is God's representative on earth. Hebrews interprets the words of the psalmist as referring to Jesus, claiming that Jesus is God seated on the throne and therefore superior to the angels.

3. In verse 8 the author quotes Ps 102:25–27. The psalmist writes about God creating the universe. This is clear from the context: “you” in verse 25 points back to “O my God” in the previous verse. Hebrews quotes it to claim that Jesus took part in God’s creative activity, which the angels didn’t do. So Jesus is superior to the angels.

## Comment 2

How can the author of Hebrews interpret the Old Testament passages like this? Is this really a correct way of using the Old Testament?

The author of Hebrews understands the Old Testament as a Christ-centered book. The Old Testament writers wrote about Jesus – whether they realized it or not. Compare how the suffering servant in Is 53 is understood as “really” referring to Jesus in Acts 8:34–35, where Philip explains to the Ethiopian that Is 53 was a prophecy about Jesus.

So in this passage (1:4–14) the author of Hebrews understands the verses from Ps 45 and Ps 102 mentioned in questions 2 and 3 to be “really” about Jesus. He is bringing out a truth which was already there in the Old Testament text. He has a deeper – and inspired – understanding of the Old Testament text. He was inspired by the Holy Spirit to see Jesus in these Old Testament texts, even if the Old Testament writers did not realize that fact themselves.

Consequently, the author of Hebrews uses Old Testament quotations to show his readers:

- a. That Jesus is superior to the angels (chapter 1)
- b. That Jesus is one with his people (chapter 2)
- c. That God appointed Jesus to his priestly ministry (chapter 5)
- d. That Jesus’ priestly ministry is eternal (chapter 7)
- e. Jesus’ obedience to his Father (chapter 10)

Even Jesus himself had this approach to the Old Testament. In the evening of the day of his resurrection Jesus walked with two disciples who were on their way home to Emmaus from Jerusalem (Luk 24:13–32). *He said to them, “Foolish men, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ suffered these things and then enter into his glory?” 27 And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said about himself in all the scriptures (v 25–27).*

Also the other New Testament writers sometimes made use of this deeper (prophetic, Messianic or typological) interpretation of Old Testament texts.

What about us? Is it correct for us to use Old Testament texts like this? No, it isn't. The New Testament writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit as they wrote their texts. We are not.

[\(Go to Study 3\)](#)

## Answers 3: “so that we do not drift away”, 2:1–4

### Answers to Questions

1. The readers of Hebrews must pay attention so that they do not drift away from the faith.
2. The “message spoken by angels” is the Old Testament law (compare Deut 33:2 where the Septuagint has “angels” instead of “holy ones” coming with God when he gave the law to the Israelites; see also Gal 3:19; Acts 7:53). The Old Testament law was binding, and the consequence of violating it was punishment.
3. We can understand five things about God’s message of salvation:
  - a. It is very important (v 1): We have to pay careful attention to it. Or else we will drift away from our faith. If we drift away, our salvation will be lost.
  - b. It has great authority (v 2–3): Even the Old Testament law (God’s message spoken through angels) had binding authority. But the message of salvation is so much more superior. Our eternal destiny is dependent on it.
  - c. It was first announced by the Lord Jesus (v 3). Then by his disciples who spread the gospel to thousands. This work has now to be continued by us. It must be our focus, or else we may drift away from it ourselves.
  - d. It was confirmed by those who heard it (v 3). They not only accepted it. They also personally experienced its transforming power. Have we “confirmed” the truth and the power of the gospel in our own lives?
  - e. God himself testified to the truth of the gospel by performing signs and wonders and various miracles (v 4). The gifts of the Spirit were also manifested.
4. This is the message for us in this passage:
  - a. The Jewish believers were at the risk of drifting away from their faith. In a similar way, we are at risk to lose the power of the gospel in our lives. So the message of this passage is really also for us.
  - b. This gospel is anchored in history. The gospel about Jesus is not philosophical speculation. Jesus was a historical person. His life, ministry, teaching, suffering and death are historical facts. So the gospel about Jesus is very relevant to human beings of all times.
  - c. The gospel about Jesus is not only theology and words. The gospel message is testified by God himself through signs, wonders and miracles. So these

things are part of genuine Christian life. Do we find these things in our own lives and in the life of our churches?

- d. The manifestations of spiritual gifts also accompany the gospel message. Do we find these things in our own lives and in the life of our churches?
  - e. When we receive the gospel, our lives should be transformed. Is that transformation evident in our lives and in the life of our churches?
  - f. The gospel about Jesus Christ is unique. He is the only way to God and to eternal life. Do we really believe that? Do we also practice that belief as we preach and teach? Or, do act as if there are many ways to God, or as if there are many ways by which man can be saved?
5. The consequence of “drifting away” would be well deserved punishment – just as the law of the Old Covenant resulted in just penalty for those who violated it. If we say “no thanks” to Jesus’ offer of salvation and eternal life, then we must suffer the consequences of our decision: We will not be part of his future eternal kingdom. We will be lost forever.

[\(Go to Study 4\)](#)

## Answers 4: The author of our salvation, 2:5–13

### Answers to Questions

1. This is what we learn about the angels in v 5:

The “world to come” (or the kingdom of God) is not ruled by angels, as some Jewish groups thought. No, that honor belongs to the Son, Jesus, who by becoming man became the “author of our salvation”. This is clear from this passage (and from other passages in Hebrews).

2. The expression “the world to come” in v 5 (and the expressions “the last days” in 1:2 and “the coming age” in 6:5) refers to the kingdom of God, the totally new world order that came with Jesus’ first coming and will be consummated at his second coming.
3. This is what we learn about Jesus in v 6–9:
  - a. The author quotes part of Ps 8 and interprets it as a prophecy about Jesus.
  - b. Jesus (the divine Word through whom everything was created) became man (for “a little while” he was made lower than angels).
  - c. He suffered death, not only for himself. No, he tasted death for everyone (thereby achieving salvation for all who believe in him).
  - d. Consequently he was crowned with glory and honor.
  - e. He is the ruler over everything, even if that fact is not evident at this point in history.
4. This is what we learn about Jesus in v 10:
  - a. God had a plan for Jesus to bring salvation to many people (“to bring many sons to glory”).
  - b. God, the Almighty Creator and Sustainer (“for whom and through whom all things exist”), executed this plan in his great wisdom (“It was fitting that...”).
  - c. Jesus is “the author” of salvation: He not only brought about our salvation through his death on the cross. He also opened the door and led the way to salvation and glory for lots of people (he led “many sons to glory”). In this verse we find the second aspect of “salvation” emphasized: We are saved here and now (we become “sons of God”) as we accept Jesus as our personal savior. But he will also ensure our glory (our final and eternal salvation) as he returns in glory.

- d. Suffering made Jesus perfect as the author of our salvation. Of course, Jesus was already morally perfect in the sense that he was without sin. So how should we understand this expression?

The Greek word for “perfect” has the additional meaning of “brought to completion, fulfilled.” Suffering made Jesus “perfect” in four ways:

- First, he became perfect in his calling. He was committed to fulfilling his Father’s will (10: 7, 9).
- Second, he became perfect in obedience to his Father’s will. As Paul expressed it: He became obedient to death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:4).
- Third, he became perfect in his identification with us in our humanity (compare Phil 2:6–7).
- Fourth, he became perfect in his victory over sin and death through his own death and resurrection.

Leon Morris (quoted by Raymond Brown): “Sufferings introduce a new perfection, a perfection of testedness. There is one perfection of the bud and another of the flower. In the same way there is a perfection involved in actually having suffered which is not present in any previous perfection. It adds something to the previous perfection. Also for us believers there is perfection in suffering.”

5. This is what we learn about Christian believers in v 11–13:
- a. Jesus sanctifies us (“justification”): We are justified as we receive him as our personal savior (v 11). We will be his for ever.
  - b. We are Jesus’ brothers (v 12): Like him, we are set apart (made holy, sanctified) for service (just like certain people and vessels were set apart for service in the Jerusalem temple).
  - c. We are Jesus’ children (v 13): He expects us to become more and more like him in holiness (“sanctification”) until he presents us before his Father “without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27). Sanctification is an important theme in Hebrews.
6. This is what we learn about Jesus in v 11–13:
- a. Jesus identified himself totally with mankind as he came to this world (v 11, the same father; calls them brothers). He became one of us.
  - b. Jesus put his trust in God (v 13): This is a quotation from Is 8:17, where the prophet put his trust in the Lord at a time when the house of Jacob

experienced the Lord's disfavor. Similarly Jesus put his trust in the Lord at the darkest moment of his life as he suffered and died on the cross.

- c. In v 12 the author has Jesus quote Ps 22:22 (one of the Messianic psalms): Jesus reveals God's character (his "name") to his followers, those who believe in him ("his brothers").

[\(Go to Study 5\)](#)



## Answers 5: Our deliverer from the devil, 2:14–18

### Answers to Questions

1. In this passage we learn that angels do not need salvation. It is man (“Abraham’s descendants”) who needs salvation.
2. Man’s three enemies – the three forces that keep him in slavery – are sin, death, and the devil.
3. It was necessary for Jesus to become man. Only by experiencing the flesh and blood of humanity and by dying could he destroy man’s three enemies: sin, death, and the devil. Only by experiencing the life and conditions of human beings could he reveal his sinlessness (Heb 4:15) and become “a merciful and faithful high priest.”
4. Jesus’ work as high priest was to “make atonement for the sins of the people.”
5. The New Testament teaches that the coming of Jesus was the beginning of the end for the devil. This fact can be seen in this passage:
  - a. Jesus victory began with his incarnation (v 14).
  - b. It was revealed by his sinlessness: He was tempted and suffered from temptation more than any human being has ever done – but he never succumbed to it (v 18).
  - c. It was achieved by his atonement for the sins of the people (v 17).
6. So, if Jesus’ victory over the devil has already been achieved, why is the devil still so active in this world?

Answer: We can compare the devil to a ferocious dog that is tied up. He growls and barks, and he jumps at you and tries to attack you. But if you stay out of his reach he cannot really harm you. In a similar way Satan was “bound up” when Jesus won his victory over him on the cross. And one day he will be destroyed forever.

7. This passage ends on a very comforting note: Because of what he achieved through his incarnation and work of atonement, Jesus is able to help us in our daily Christian lives. So we can say Jesus’ work of deliverance is an ongoing process in our lives. Here are some examples of this:
  - a. Jesus removes our fears. Give examples of this from your own experience.
  - b. Jesus again and again shows us his mercy and his forgiveness. Give examples of this from your own experience.

*Answers*

- c. Jesus is faithful to us. Give examples of this from your own experience.
- d. Jesus shares in our suffering. Give examples of this from your own experience.
- e. Jesus provides strength for us. Give examples of this from your own experience.

[\(Go to Study 6\)](#)

## Answers 6: Think about Jesus, 3:1–6

### Answers to Questions

1. What are the believers told to do in this passage? Compare 2:1–4. What is your conclusion?

Answer: The believers are told to think about Jesus (see also 12:2, where we find a similar expression). So this is an exhortation to the Jewish background believers to reflect on what Jesus has done for them.

We found an earlier exhortation to the believers in 2:1–4, where they were told to pay close attention to the gospel so that they would not drift away from their faith.

At the end of the passage the author also encourages the believers to hold on to their courage and their hope.

2. How are the believers described in v 1? Explain the significance of this description.

Answer:

- a. They are described as “brothers”. This word states that they in Christ belong to the same family. Jesus himself acknowledges them as his brothers (2:11). They are united with him.
  - b. They are also described as “sanctified” or “holy” (Kannada JV, however, has *dEvajanarAda*). This word states their nature. They have been made holy by the atoning work Jesus did on the cross and they are being sanctified by his continued work in their lives (2:10–11).
  - c. Finally they are described as “partners in the heavenly calling.” This expression states their privilege, as they share with Jesus the privilege of his heavenly calling. We have been called from heaven to serve him. But we are also called to the glory that he has prepared for us in heaven.
3. How is Jesus described in v 1? Explain the significance of this description.

Answer: Jesus is described with two words:

- a. The apostle (this Greek word means “a person who has been sent to represent, an ambassador”): Jesus was sent to the earth to represent God. He was sent to present God’s offer of salvation and to embody that offer in his own person. But he was also sent to build a “house” (v 3–6), a fellowship of believers, the church (compare Eph 2:19–22; 1 Tim 3:15).

- b. High priest of our confession: Jesus is our high priest, who has entered into God's presence as our savior, our intercessor and our friend.

Both "apostle" and "high priest" describe Jesus from the human perspective. This is one important characteristic of Hebrews – to focus on the incarnate Christ, "God in human flesh". That is one reason why the author uses his "human" name *Jesus*, in this passage and in many other passages of the book.

4. Jesus and Moses compared in v 2–6:

a. Similarities:

- Both had a calling from heaven (something that the believers also had).
- Both were faithful to God who appointed them.
- Both were faithful to God's people ("God's house").
- Both were worthy of honor.

b. Differences:

- Jesus was worthy of greater honor than Moses.
- Moses was a faithful servant. But Jesus was a son. The implication of this is that Moses' service was limited in time, but Jesus is always the Son, the beginning and the end.
- Moses was a faithful servant to God's people (to God's house). But Jesus is God who builds God's house. He is the owner of the house.
- Moses pointed forward to the future, which was fulfilled in Jesus.

- c. The point of the comparison between Moses and Jesus: Hebrews was written in a situation when Jewish background believers were tempted to leave their new faith (the gospel) and return to their old faith (Judaism). This passage makes it clear that it would be foolish of them to leave what is greater, better and permanent (Jesus) for that which is temporary and less good (Moses).

Another point that the author makes in this passage is the practical issue of fellowship. Previously, the Jewish background believers had belonged to the Jewish synagogue, which meant that they had a very clear identity. They belonged to a respected "brotherhood." But now as the church was facing persecution they felt lost. This passage shows them that in Christ, the Son, they belong to a more honorable "house" ("God's house"), which will stand forever (v 6).

5. Compare v 1–2 in this passage (where we see that Jesus was appointed apostle and high priest – referring to the past) with 1:2 (where we see that God

appointed Jesus heir of all things – pointing towards his future destiny) and 5:1, 5 (where we see that God is appointing Jesus as high priest – referring to the present). What are your conclusions?

Answer: Here are some of my conclusions:

- a. God had a long-term plan for our salvation. He will ensure that our salvation will be completed one day.
  - b. Jesus was/is faithful and obedient from the beginning to the end.
  - c. Jesus is God's apostle (ambassador, representative) all through eternity, from the beginning to the end (he is the Alpha and the Omega).
6. In this passage (as well as in the rest of the book) we find a balance between the security that is promised to the believers and the need for them to persevere. This is how:
- a. The believers' security is assured as long as they think about Jesus, their high priest, and confess their faith in him and his sacrificial death on the cross (v 1). Christ is faithful and merciful (v 6; 2:17) and will not abandon them or let them down.
  - b. But it is essential for the believers to continue in the faith and to persist in their faith until the end. Only as long as they hold on to this hope, do they have a place in God's house (v 6).

[\(Go to Study 7\)](#)

## Answers 7: Firmly to the end, 3:7–4:13

### Answers to Questions

1. This is the link between this passage and the previous one:
  - a. The word “therefore” links the two passages from a language point of view.
  - b. There is also another link, Moses: Moses is compared with Jesus in the first passage. In the second passage, events under Moses’ leadership are used to make three points to the readers of Hebrews about God’s word. But note how the author of Hebrews uses the text about these events found in Ps 95:7–11 (and not the texts about Moses and the Israelites from the Pentateuch) to make his third point clear.
2. These are the features in the history of the Israelites that the following four expressions refer to:
  - a. The rebellion (3:8, 15): The lack of faith and trust in God that the Israelites showed after the Lord had brought them out of bondage in Egypt “with a mighty hand”.
  - b. The day of testing in the desert (3:8): The forty years of wanderings in the wilderness.
  - c. That generation (3:10): The rebellious generation, which had to die in the desert because they had sinned by not trusting the Lord.
  - d. Entering into God’s rest (3:11, 18): The entering into the Promised Land under Joshua’s leadership (compare 4:8, where Joshua is mentioned).
3. This passage can be divided into three main parts. This is the message to the readers in each part:
  - a. God’s word to the readers from the past (3:7–11): The readers of Hebrews are warned not to repeat Israel’s mistake in the wilderness. Some of the believers were tempted to leave the Christian faith and return to Judaism. If they did that, they would have hardened their hearts just as the rebellious Israelites had done – and they would have to face the consequences.
  - b. God’s word to the readers in the present (3:12–19): The readers of Hebrews are urged not to follow the sinful example of the ancient Israelites – “Take care, brothers”; “encourage one another day by day”, “if we hold firmly to the end”; “do not harden your hearts”. The believers are always at risk to rebel, to sin, to disobey, to lose their focus and to harden their hearts.

- c. God's word to the readers for the future (4:1–13): The author of Hebrews explains to his readers that "the rest" was only partly fulfilled when the Israelite tribes settled in Canaan under Joshua's leadership. He uses the text in Ps 95 to make his point: As the psalmist quotes God saying, "They shall never enter my rest", it must mean that God has plans for a future rest (beyond the Israelite settlement in Canaan). So the readers of Hebrews have a rest to look forward to. All believers should "therefore make every effort to enter that rest" in God's eternal heaven.
- 4. Here are four points about the word of God based on 3:12–19:
  - a. 3:7, 15; 4:7: We must hear the word of God ("hear his voice").
  - b. 3:12: We must believe the word of God (not to have an unbelieving heart).
  - c. 4:6, 11: We must obey the word of God (not to follow the example of disobedience).
  - d. 3:13: We must share the word of God (encourage/exhort one another daily).
- 5. The two parts of 4:12–13 in my own words:
  - a. Verse 12 is about the word of God. It is living, active and always relevant. In Is 55:11 God said: "It will not return to me empty, but it will accomplish that which I please and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." It probes the unspoken thoughts and the hidden plans of the human heart and mind.
  - b. Verse 13 is about God's ability to use his word to see, to uncover everything, and to judge everything in the light of his word.
- 6. The reason why the word "today" is used five times in this passage (there are only three more instances of this word in the rest of Hebrews) must be that the author wants to stress the importance of the word of God in the present situation of his readers. The word of God does not only record the past (for example the history of the Israelite nation under Moses' leadership). Also, the word of God does not only contain promises for the future (for example about God's eternal rest). No, the word of God is active and relevant in the present. "Today" – and it is always "today" – we have to respond to God's word. We have to learn from God's past word. We can rejoice about God's promises for the future. But it is "today" that we have to allow the word to form and shape our lives – so that we can please and serve God now and so that we can be prepared for "God's eternal rest" in the future. It is "today" that we must preach the gospel so that the multitudes can be harvested for heaven and experience "God's eternal rest" together with us.

[\(Go to Study 8\)](#)

## Answers 8: A great high priest, 4:14–5:10

### Answers to Questions

1. In the Greek text (also in English NIV, but not in the Kannada translations) this passage starts with “therefore”. Why? This is the link with the previous passage:
  - a. The author uses “Therefore” to make a strong link between two paragraphs: The second paragraph presents the consequence of the first paragraph. Or the first paragraph gives the reason for the second paragraph.
  - b. Here the previous paragraph is about how God’s word exposes man’s deepest thoughts and plans and how God knows everything about a person’s heart and mind. “Therefore” (or “Consequently” or “As a result”) we stand guilty before a holy God and need a “great high priest,” a high priest like Jesus.
2. These are the two parts of 4:14:
  - a. The first part is a statement of faith: *We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God*. Jesus has finished his mission of bringing salvation to mankind and has now returned to God in heaven.
  - b. The second part is an exhortation to stand firm in that faith: *Let us hold firmly to our confession* (compare the earlier exhortations in 2:1 and 3:1).
3. What could be the Old Testament context of these expressions?
  - a. **High priest** (4:14; compare 2:17 and 3:1): The anointed and ordained priest in the line of Aaron (Lev 16:32). He was the only person who was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place (see also next point).
  - b. **Passed through the heavens** (4:14): The Old Testament background is probably the curtain in the Tabernacle (and later in the Jerusalem temple) through which the high priest passed from the sight of the people into the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement bringing blood from the atonement sacrifice for himself, his family and all the people (Lev 16). But the author of Hebrews uses “the heavens” (instead of “the curtain”) to proclaim that Jesus at his ascension went to his eternal divine glory.
  - c. **The throne of grace** (4:16): The Old Testament background is probably the “mercy seat” (English NIV has “atonement cover,” Ex 25:17), the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, which in a special way symbolized God’s presence. In Hebrews it becomes a “seat/throne of grace” because of what Jesus



accomplished as our merciful and faithful high priest. For those who believe in him (those who hold firmly to the faith they possess, 4:14) God's judgment seat has become a throne of grace.

4. The two specific qualifications for the office of the high priest (5:1, 4) are:
  - a. The high priest must be a man ("chosen from among men," 5:1). That was the reason for the incarnation: Jesus had to become man in order to be a "great" high priest, (4:14), a high priest great enough to offer the ultimate sacrifice and thereby bring to an end (or to fulfill) the whole Old Testament sacrificial system.
  - b. The high priest had to be called by God (5:4; compare Ex 28:1–3).
5. We find this information about Melchizedek in these two Old Testament passages (they are only places in the whole Bible, apart from Hebrews, where Melchizedek is mentioned):
  - a. Gen 14:17–20: Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. He gave Abram bread and wine and blessed him. Abram gave him a tenth or everything.
  - b. Ps 110: This is a Messianic psalm by David. The Lord has promised that the Messiah is a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. (The Hebrew name means "king of righteousness," see Heb 7:2.)
6. This is how I understand the expression "after the order of Melchizedek" (5:6) from the Old Testament references in the previous question:

Melchizedek was both king and priest. He was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. The high priests of the Old Covenant were of the tribe of Levi, and they were never kings. The Israelite kings of the line of David belonged to the tribe of Judah, so they could never become priests. But God's Messiah was to be both king and priest (Zech 6:12–13). So Jesus is the great high priest in the order of Melchizedek: He is both king (of the line of David) and priest (after the order of Melchizedek). In Heb 7 we find one more aspect of Jesus "after the order of Melchizedek": he is without beginning and end.

7. Four aspects of Jesus' "priesthood" can be found in this passage. They are:
  - a. 4:14: Jesus' priesthood is a victorious priesthood. Jesus as high priest completed the purpose of the Old Testament priesthood once and for all. He not only passed through "the curtain" of the Tabernacle/the Jerusalem temple to atone for the sins of the people once every year. He also passed through "the heavens" all the way to God's throne of grace and thereby brought eternal atonement for all those who believe in him.

- b. 4:15: Jesus' priesthood is a compassionate priesthood. Jesus as high priest knows our human conditions. So he – who himself is without sin – is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. So we can approach God with confidence and receive mercy and find the grace that we need for our everyday living.
- c. 5:4–5: Jesus' priesthood is a submissive priesthood. Jesus as high priest was not only appointed by God. He was also totally dependent on God as he submitted himself to God's plan and obediently suffered for our salvation (5:7–8).
- d. 5:9–10: Jesus' priesthood is an effective priesthood. Through his suffering Jesus became a high priest fully qualified to become our savior. So he became the effective source of eternal salvation for all who believe in him.

[\(Go to Study 9\)](#)

## Answers 9: Our immaturity and God's faithfulness, 5:11–6:20

### Answers to Questions

1. This passage starts with the statement, “About this we have much to say” (5:11). “This” refers to the teaching about Jesus as the “great high priest after the order of Melchizedek.” At the very end of this passage, the author of Hebrews returns to Melchizedek (6:20). So this passage should be understood as a “pastoral parenthesis” about spiritual immaturity of some believers and God’s faithfulness.
2. The author uses the metaphor of food to illustrate the spiritual immaturity of his readers (5:12–14): Milk for the immature and solid food for the mature believers. He is disappointed with his readers that they are still immature in their understanding of their faith, in spite of having been Christians for a considerable time.
3. The author uses the metaphor of good and bad farmland (6:7–8) to illustrate his disappointment with those who “are crucifying again the Son of God and exposing him to public disgrace” (6:6). In spite of having received God’s blessings (like the blessing of rain watering farmland) they are like land that produces thorns and thistles instead of a useful crop. In the end that land will be burned.

The application is that people who – in spite of God’s blessings – persist in denying the divinity of Jesus (denying that he is the Son of God) and keep on rejecting his offer of salvation (“exposing him to public disgrace”; in the way the Jews rejected him shouting “Crucify him!”) will be eternally lost (“be burned”).

4. The imagery in 6:19 should be understood like this: An anchor holds a ship in a secure position. In the same way our hope in Christ guarantees our safety. The ship’s anchor goes down to the ocean bed. But the anchor of faith goes up into the true, heavenly sanctuary.
5. These are the six points in the basic teaching about Christ (six fundamental doctrines) according the author (6:1–2):
  - a. **Repentance from dead works:** The change of mind that makes a person want to turn away from his old life (Mark 1:4, 14–15; Acts 2:8; 5:31). The expression “dead works” probably refers to the Jewish background of the readers of Hebrews. In our modern context, “repentance from your old sinful life” is perhaps more relevant.

- b. **Faith in God:** Turning to God; this is the counterpart of repentance (Mark 1:15; Acts 3:19; 20:21).
- c. **Instructions about baptisms:** This probably refers to correct teaching about baptism in the context of different kinds of ritual washings (Judaism) and baptisms (John the Baptist's) of those days. Jesus commanded his disciples to baptize and to teach (Matt 28:19).
- d. **The laying on of hands:** I think this refers to baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17; 19:6). But it could also refer to commissioning for service (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6). I personally think that the first alternative is more "fundamental" than the second.
- e. **The resurrection of the dead:** The resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked at the last day (John 5:25–29; Acts 24:15)
- f. **Eternal judgment** (compare 9:27): Resurrection and judgment were linked in Jesus' teaching (John 5:26–29) and in the theology of the early church (Acts 17:31). God's judgment on the last day will have eternal consequences for all people.

I feel that this six-point list is not complete. Probably it is a list adapted for the situation in which Hebrews was written when Jewish background believers were considering leaving their Christian faith. I would like to add at least three more "basic teachings":

- A "doctrine" of who Jesus is
- A "doctrine" of his work of salvation on the cross
- A "doctrine" of our eternal hope/inheritance: a new heaven and a new earth

Of course, Hebrews deals with these three points in other places. But a simple version of these "doctrines," in my opinion, belongs to the basics of Christian faith.

- 6. This passage contains some of the most confusing and discouraging verses (6:4–8) in the New Testament. Of course, they have to be understood in the light of the teaching of the rest of the Bible. This is how I understand this passage:
  - a. I think that the issue of believers backsliding (or turning away from the Christian faith) was a real issue for the church in those days, and not just a figure of speech (based on the "if"-construction in 6:6) as some commentators claim.

- b. I also think that it is a real possibility for true believers today to backslide. Consequently, I think that the teaching “once saved, always saved,” which is common in some Christian circles in India, is a heresy.
  - c. 6:4–5 **cannot** mean that it is impossible for a believer who has backslidden to come back to God. That would go totally against the spirit of the gospel (John 3:16–18). If Jesus told his disciples to forgive “seventy-seven times” (Matt 18:21–22; this expression stands for “always”), we know that our loving God will forgive us any number of times, if we sincerely turn to him and ask for his forgiveness.
  - d. It is clear from the expression “they are crucifying the Son of God again and exposing him to public disgrace” (6:6) that the author is referring to backsliders who continue in their state of apostasy: They do not repent. They do not sincerely turn back to God. They actually deny the divinity of Jesus. And they join those who mocked him at the crucifixion. Of course, for such people salvation is impossible. Only those who believe in Jesus can be saved. Those who refuse to believe in him are condemned. This is the sin that Jesus calls “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit,” the only sin which cannot be forgiven (Mark 3:29). The reason why this sin can never be forgiven is that it denies Jesus and his salvation. To “blaspheme against the Holy Spirit” is to say that Jesus comes from the devil and not from God.
  - e. Finally, I think it is the work of Satan that so many young believers in India (and elsewhere) struggle with these verses. It is Satan who constantly discredits God’s mercy and forgiveness. It is Satan who tricks people to think that they are eternally lost if they backslide, or if they commit a sin. Don’t listen to him! Believe in the gospel and trust God’s forgiveness!
7. This is what we learn about God in 6:9–20. My three main points are based on Raymond Brown:
- a. God is just (6:9–10): In the previous verses we saw that God’s justice will not ignore man’s spiritual rebellion. In these verses we see that God’s justice will not overlook man’s devoted service, love for him and help for his people.
  - b. God is generous (6:11–15): As he richly blessed Abraham, so he will richly bless the believers who will persevere in faith and hope.
  - c. God is dependable (6:16–20): God’s word is dependable: he keeps his promises. God’s nature is dependable: the nature of his purpose is unchanging. God’s Son is dependable: our hope is in him, our high priest forever.

8. In this passage there are important lessons for us who are involved in the ministry. Here is a list (based on Raymond Brown):
- a. We must be generous in our encouragement: In the ministry we come across people who are weak in their faith (some even backslide) and people who are immature in their faith. But with the author of Hebrews we should not forget “the better things” (6:9). There is always a danger for a pastor to constantly criticize, rebuke, admonish and exhort the church. But we should never forget the ministry of encouragement.
  - b. We must be balanced in our preaching: The author of Hebrews is careful to give a balanced presentation of the Christian faith. Any pastor who regularly preaches to the same congregation must ensure that he proclaims “the whole will of God” (Acts 20:27) so that he doesn’t distort the truth.
  - c. We must be exemplary in our living: Sound doctrine is not enough. We also need to be imitators of Christ (1 Cor 11:1; Eph 5:1; 1 Thess 1:6; 1 Pet 2:21). In this passage the author exhorts his readers to be diligent and not lazy (6:11–12). He also wants them to be “imitators of those who through faith and patience inherited what has been promised” (6:12), and he mentions the patience of Abraham as an example for us (6:15).

[\(Go to Study 10\)](#)

## Answers 10: A better priesthood, 7:1–28

### Answer to Questions

1. This passage compares the Old Testament priesthood (the Levitical priesthood or the priesthood “after the order of Aaron”) with the priesthood of a better covenant (the priesthood of Jesus).
2. The name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness” in Hebrew. But he is also called “king of peace” (v 2) because he was “king of Salem” (which most Bible scholars identify as another name for Jerusalem), and *salem/shalom* means “peace” in Hebrew.
3. The parallel between Melchizedek and Jesus that the author of Hebrews draws in v 3 is based on two points from the Old Testament:
  - a. The story about Melchizedek in Gen 14 has no information about his family, neither his ancestors nor his descendants. So he is like Jesus without “beginning and end.” The fact that Melchizedek was both king and priest is then used both in Ps 110 and in Heb 7:11–14 to make him a “type” for the Messiah.
  - b. The quotation from Ps 110:4 (“You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek”) is understood as a Messianic prophecy, a “type” for Jesus, who is “forever.”
4. Melchizedek was great according to v 4–10:
  - a. Because Abraham gave him tithes, which shows that Melchizedek was above Abraham (v 4)
  - b. Because Melchizedek received tithes even if he didn’t belong to the tribe of Levi (which was the tribe that received tithes in Old Testament system; v 5–6)
  - c. Because Melchizedek blessed Abraham, which again shows that he was above Abraham (v 7)
  - d. Because there is no record of Melchizedek’s birth or death, so he lived “forever,” which the priests in the order of Aaron didn’t do (v 8)
  - e. Because even the Levites can be said to have given tithes to Melchizedek (Abraham was the forefather of the Levites so they “were still in his body” when he gave tithes to Melchizedek; v 9–10)
5. There was a need for another priest to come, one after the order of Melchizedek, and not after the order of Aaron (v 11), because of the

imperfection of the Old Testament Levitical system. So the priesthood in the order of Aaron had to be replaced.

6. It was not only the priesthood in the order of Aaron that was imperfect, but also the Old Testament (v 12, 18–19), which could not be separated from it. Just like the Levitical priesthood, the law was “weak and ineffective,” because it could not make anything perfect.
7. The main purpose for the author of Hebrews to use the story about Melchizedek in his book is to emphasize Jesus’ superiority over the Old Testament priesthood (“the priesthood after the order of Aaron”) and the Old Testament law that accompanied it. Compare chapters 1–2 where he has shown Jesus’ superiority over angels, and chapter 3 where he has shown Jesus’ superiority over Moses.
8. This is the consequence of the change of the priesthood and the law: the old hope is replaced with a better hope, through which we can approach God (v 19).
9. The author of Hebrews gives three reasons why the priesthood of Jesus is far superior to the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament (v 20–28). They are:
  - a. It came with an oath (v 20–21): This information comes from Ps 110:4, which is quoted repeatedly in this chapter. *The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever’*. So God has promised that the priesthood of Jesus is both eternal and changeless.
  - b. Jesus is its guarantee (v 22): Jesus, who knows our needs because he has shared our human conditions, now sits in God’s presence and guarantees the effectiveness of the priesthood of his better covenant.
  - c. It has a better priest (v 23–28): Jesus is a high priest who meets our need. one who is holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.
10. The priesthood of Jesus is described in v 23–28. These are the five main points (based on Raymond Brown):
  - a. It is a permanent priesthood (v 23–24).
  - b. Its ability to save (its effectiveness) complete and permanent (v 25). The Greek expression used can mean both “for all time” (so in Kannada NIBV) and “completely” (so in English NIV and Kannada JV).
  - c. It is an ongoing and present ministry (v 25). Jesus always intercedes for us.
  - d. Jesus is himself without sin (v 26) in contrast to the priesthood of the Old Covenant.



- e. It has the perfect sacrifice (v 27–28): Jesus himself who offered himself for our sins once and for all.
11. In v 20–28 we find three “portraits” of Jesus. They are:
- a. The guarantor of a better covenant (v 22)
  - b. Our eternal priest (v 21, 24–25) who is able to save us completely and who always intercedes for us.
  - c. Our permanent, effective and perfect sacrifice (v 27).

[\(Go to Study 11\)](#)

## Answers 11: Christ's sanctuary and a better covenant, 8:1–13

### Answers to Questions

1. These are the two sections of this chapter:
  - a. The heavenly sanctuary, v 1–5
  - b. The superior covenant, v 6–13
2. The two sanctuaries are described and contrasted like this (four important points):

The sanctuary of the tabernacle (and later the Jerusalem temple):

1. It was set up by man (v 2).
2. It was a copy and a shadow of the original (v 5).
3. It is found on earth (v 5).
4. It is served by men who offer the gifts according to the law (v 4).

The sanctuary where Jesus ministers:

1. It is set up by the Lord (v 2)
  2. It is the original (v 5).
  3. It is found in heaven (v 1, 5).
  4. It is served by Jesus who offered himself (v 1–3).
3. The first five verses of this chapter (8:1–5) again have Jesus in focus. This is what we learn about two aspects of Jesus:
  - a. Who he is: Jesus is the ascended, exalted, glorified and triumphant Lord. The Hebrew expression “sits at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven” means that he is now forever with God, his Father, in the place of sovereignty and authority. He is the “high priest” in heaven (the heavenly “sanctuary” refers to God’s eternal realm).
  - b. What he does as he serves as the “high priest” in God’s eternal realm is what the Old Testament priests did:
    - Offer sacrifice: Jesus’ sacrifice was once for all (7:27) as he sacrificed himself on the cross. But the result of that sacrifice brought all who believe in him forgiveness that will have eternal effect.

- Pray for the people: The glorified Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary is our constant intercessor (7:25). He is constantly with us through his Holy Spirit, supporting us, strengthening us, guiding us, pleading with us and for us.
  - Be an example for the people: Jesus is our example. During his earthly life he was tempted in every way, just as we are – but he never sinned (4:15). He loved righteousness and hated wickedness (1:9). He suffered death for our sake (2:9). He was made perfect through suffering (2:10) and learned obedience through his suffering (5:8). He suffered so that we might become holy (13:12).
  - Teach: Jesus teaches us through his word (4:12), his example and through the presence of his Holy Spirit.
  - But Jesus' ministry is superior to that of the Old Covenant (8:6), because the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant. This is the topic for the remaining part of chapter 8.
4. These are the reasons given in v 6–9 for the need of a new covenant:
- a. The mediator (v 6): The mediator of the Sinai Covenant was Moses. He represented God to the people, and pleaded to God on behalf of the people. The mediator of the New Covenant is Jesus, who has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses (3:3). But Jesus is also the “guarantee” of a better covenant (7:22, see the previous study).
  - b. Established with better promises (v 6): See the next question.
  - c. There was something wrong with the old covenant, which made it necessary for it to be replaced (v 7).
  - d. What was wrong with the old covenant was that the people did not remain faithful to the old covenant, so God turned away from them (v 9). The people were not able to keep the laws and regulations of the Sinai covenant. So there was a need for a New Covenant which would be possible for the people to be faithful to (see the next question).
5. The author of Hebrews quotes Jer 31:31–34, a prophecy about the New Covenant. It contains four “promises” (compare Heb 8:6) that make the New Covenant superior to the old Sinai covenant (v 10–12):
- a. God's laws will be in the hearts and minds of his people – not only on tablets of stone (v 10).
  - b. God will be the God of his people and his people will belong to him (v 10). So they will have intimate relationship one with another.

- c. God's people will truly know the Lord (v 11).
  - d. It will bring forgiveness, and the sins of the people will never be remembered again (v 12).
6. A "covenant" is an agreement between two parties. So the New Covenant is remarkable (v 8–12), because not only was the initiative God's (that was also the case with the Old Testament covenants), but also because God promises to fulfill the people's side of the covenant: He will put his law in their hearts and minds so that they will surely keep it. He will also forgive them their wickedness.
7. In verse 13 the author of Hebrews states that God has made the previous covenant (referring to the Sinai covenant) obsolete. This means that it was outdated and that it had to be replaced with a "new" covenant. Two additional expressions are used to emphasize this fact: the previous covenant is "growing old" and "will soon disappear".

Raymond Brown makes five observations about the New Covenant:

- a. It brings reconciliation: At the time of Jeremiah's prophecy, the Israelites have been divided between the North (Israel) and the South (Judah) for hundreds of years. But God promises that the New Covenant will be with both Israel and Judah (v 8).
  - b. It is inward (while the Sinai covenant was external): The new covenant is with us, in our very souls. Consequently, God's people will now be able to obey his instruction (v 10).
  - c. It is universal: "They will all know me" (v 11). The previous covenant was exclusively for the Jewish people.
  - d. It is generous: "For I will forgive their iniquities" (v 12). The previous covenant did not provide forgiveness for all.
  - e. It is guaranteed: "The new covenant is unrestricted in its power, eternal in its duration and complete in its effects. God makes definite promises to his people and binds himself in honor to blot out their transgressions" (Raymond Brown). This is seen in the repeated "I will" (5 times). Man can now be sure.
8. Apart from in Hebrews, the expression "new covenant" is used three times in the New Testament:
- a. Luke 22:20: The context is Jesus celebrating the Last Supper with his disciples: *This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.* The cup symbolizes Jesus' death on the cross.

- b. 1 Cor 11:25: The context is Paul teaching about “holy communion” in the church. He quotes Jesus (see the previous point).
  - c. 2 Cor 3:6: The context is Christian ministry. It is ministry of a covenant that is of the Spirit, not of the letter.
9. Gal 3:3–14 should be understood like this in the light of this study of “the better covenant”:
- a. In the Old Testament God made covenants with Noah (Gen 6:18; 9:9–17), with Abram/Abraham (Gen 15:18), with Moses at Sinai (Ex 19:5) and with David (2 Sam 23:5).
  - b. In Gal 3, Paul writes about two of these covenants: the one with Abram/Abraham (v 3–9, 14) and the one with Moses (v 10–13).
  - c. The New Covenant (“better covenant”) is replacing the Sinai covenant, which is described as obsolete, aging and soon to disappear. God’s covenant with Abram/Abraham still stands (Heb 6:13–18; Rom 4:13–22; Eph 2:12).

[\(Go to Study 12\)](#)

## Answers 12: The two tabernacles, 9:1–22

### Answers to Questions

1. This passage can be divided into two sections, like this:
  - a. The sanctuary of the previous covenant, v 1–10
  - b. The sanctuary of the New Covenant, v 11–22
2. These were the three weaknesses of the tabernacle of the first covenant, the Sinai covenant (v 6–10):
  - a. Access to the Most Holy Place was limited: It could only be entered by the high priest and only once a year (on the Day of Atonement), v 7
  - b. The gifts and the sacrifices offered in it did not clear the conscience of the worshiper (v 9), as many sins could not be forgiven.
  - c. Its sacrificial system was limited to ceremonial purity (v 10). No atonement was offered for deliberate transgressions and offenses.
3. The following expressions in verse 11 can be explained like this:
  - a. The good things that are already here: This expression refers to the New Covenant with its new priesthood, new tabernacle and new sacrifice that Christ introduced.
  - b. The greater and more perfect tabernacle: This expression refers to heaven where the exalted and glorified Jesus dwells with his Father. This is the tabernacle of the New Covenant.
  - c. Not-made with hands, not a part of this creation: This expression refers to the heavenly sanctuary of God's presence where the glorified Jesus is the high priest. This sanctuary is not made by man, and it is not a part of this creation. This tabernacle is greater and more perfect than its earthly copy.
4. The two tabernacles contrasted like this in v 12, but some of the contrasts are not expressed, just implied:
  - a. Means of entry:
    - The previous tabernacle: Means of entry is through the blood of animal sacrifices
    - The new tabernacle: Means of entry is through the blood of Jesus
  - b. Frequency of entry:

- The previous tabernacle: Can only be entered once a year on the Day of Atonement
  - The new tabernacle: Jesus entered it once for all.
- c. High priest:
- The previous tabernacle: The high priest is of the tribe of Levi and the of family line of Aaron.
  - The new tabernacle: Jesus is the high priest “after the order of Melchizedek”
- d. Sacrifice:
- The previous tabernacle: Animals are sacrificed.
  - The new tabernacle: Jesus’ life, the Lamb of God, was sacrificed.
- e. Efficiency of sacrifice:
- The previous tabernacle: Its sacrifice was limited in scope (concerned mainly ceremonial purity) and time (had to be repeated every year)
  - The new tabernacle: Its sacrifice is perfect. It is eternally valid. It provides redemption. It removes sin and guilt. And it gives a clean conscience.
5. The effects of “the better covenant” in three main points (v 11–14; from Raymond Brown:
- a. It provides redemption for us, v 12
  - b. It cleanses our conscience, v 14
  - c. It sanctifies our service, v 14
6. Verse 15 can be explained like this:
- a. “For this reason” refers to the three reasons mentioned in the previous question.
  - b. That “Christ is the mediator of a new covenant” means two two things:
    - First, it is through his death on the cross that the New Covenant is established (Luke 22:20; Heb 9:12).
    - Second, he is also “the guarantor” of that better covenant (7:22).
  - c. “A new covenant” has replaced the previous covenant (the Sinai covenant) which God has made obsolete (8:13).

- d. “Those who are called” refers to all believers, those who have accepted Jesus.
  - e. “Receive the promised eternal inheritance”: The inheritance that all believers receive is eternal life with God in his heavenly kingdom.
  - f. “Redemption from transgressions”: Jesus’ death was the ransom paid for the redemption of all believers. When we accept Jesus as our personal savior our sins are forgiven. We are also delivered from the bondage of sin and death (Rom 6:18, 22; 8:2; Rev 1:5).
  - g. “The sin committed under the first covenant”: The first covenant refers to the previous covenant (the Sinai covenant), which could not set a person free from sin (9:10).
7. The metaphorical illustration in v 16–17 is taken from the area of law. The Greek word for “covenant” also means “testament/will.” This is a legal document which regulates what happens to a person’s property when he dies. The point of this illustration is that the death of Jesus makes “the promised eternal inheritance” (v 15) available to his heirs, the believers.
8. In v 18–22 there are two Old Testament illustrations that are summed up in the last verse where the key expression is “with blood.” The two (not one!) illustrations are:
- a. Covenants were put into effect (or ratified or inaugurated) by blood (v 18–20). When Moses sprinkled blood on the people they became people of the covenant (Ex 24:6–8; compare 1 Pet 1:2). As Jesus took the cup at the Last Supper, he said, “This is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:28).
  - b. Sanctuaries were sanctified by blood (v 21; Ex 24:6; Lev 8:15, 19; 16:14–16). Under the old covenant nothing was considered purified unless it had the red mark of blood. So the author of Hebrews understands this as a type for spiritual life. The sacrificial death of Jesus, the shedding of Christ’s blood, is the condition for forgiveness of sins (v 22).

[\(Go to Study 13\)](#)



## Answers 13: Christ's perfect sacrifice, 9:23–10:18

### Answers to Questions

1. Through his sacrifices Christ purified “the heavenly things” (9:23). Bible scholars have given various answers to what this expression might refer to – and why the author uses sacrifices in the plural.

There was, of course, no need for Christ to purify heaven in the meaning “the place where God dwells.” Also, we know that Jesus only made one sacrifice – his own body on the cross. To me the following explanation makes good sense:

The plural “sacrifices” is used because of the Jewish experience of various sacrifices that purified various things in the earthly sanctuary. And what do we find in heaven that in a similar way has been purified/sanctified by the blood of Christ? We find the message of the gospel (which is “good news” only as a result of Jesus death and resurrection). We find “the New Covenant” represented by the blood of Jesus (Luke 22:20). We find “Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God” (Heb 12:22). And we find the church of the firstborn, the church of God, which Christ bought with his own blood, the bride of the Lamb (Heb 12:23; Acts 20:28; Rev 21:9). So all these have been “purified” or “sanctified” by Jesus’ sacrifice (or “sacrifices” as the author has expressed it in this verse).

2. The sanctuary that Christ brought his sacrifice into was the true sanctuary of “heaven itself” (and not a man-made copy of it), 9:24.

The significance of this is that he thereby finished (or completed) the sacrificial system of the previous covenant. In the old system the sacrifices had to be repeated again and again: They were not perfect. They could never truly deal with the forgiveness of sins.

3. The second part of 9:24: “Now to appear in the presence of God for us” reveals that God’s purpose with Christ’s unique sacrifice was not limited to the past. It was not only the matter of the once for all work of bringing about the forgiveness of our sins. Christ also entered the heavenly sanctuary so that he could intercede for us, be our mediator before God. That is the significance of “now.” This interceding, mediating work of Christ’s goes on during the church age (during the period between Jesus’ first and second coming). It happens “now.”

4. In 9:25–26, the author of Hebrews contrasts the sacrificial ministry of the high priest of the earthly sanctuary with the sacrificial ministry of Christ. These are his three points:
  - a. The sacrifice: Blood that was not his own (the high priest) – Himself (Christ)
  - b. The frequency: Every year (the high priest) – Once for all (Christ)
  - c. The purpose: Could not do away with sin (the high priest) – To do away with sin (Christ)
5. The expression “at the end of the ages” in 9:26 refers to the period between Jesus’ first and second coming. This period is the “end times” of the Bible. Note the verb tense of the sentence: Jesus “has appeared” to end the power of sin by his death on the cross.
6. We learn two things about Jesus in 9:28. They are:
  - a. He came the first time to die for our sins (and thereby give us his salvation).
  - b. He will come a second time to bring us his final salvation (to save us from our present imperfect lives, to glorify us and to take us to his heavenly kingdom).
7. In 9:26 and 9:28, we find different expressions for what Christ did with sin as he was sacrificed: first we find “to do away with sin” then we find “to bear sin”. This is the difference between these two expressions:
  - a. The first expression (to do away with sin) is a legal expression: Sin is declared invalid. This means that the power of sin is annulled for us. It has no power over us who belong to Christ. In Christ we are free from the enslaving power of sin.
  - b. The second expression (to bear sin) is religious expression: Sin is carried away as an offering as it is carried by the high priest to the altar. This means that the penalty of sin is removed from us. The same expression is found in 1 Pet 2:24 (*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we having died to sins, might live for righteousness*). The Old Testament background is the scapegoat the bore away the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites into the desert (Lev 16:21–22). Another background is the Servant Song in Is 53 where we have the expression “he bore the sin of many” (v 12).
8. In 10:1–4, the author of Hebrews gives a reason for the Old Testament sacrificial system:

The Old Testament “sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins” (v 3). These sacrifices could not remove sin (v 4; or take away the guilt of sin, v 2). They

were “shadows” (v 1) of the good thing that would come, Christ’s perfect sacrifice “once for all.” So here we see that the Old Testament sacrificial system is a type for Christ: It points to its fulfillment in Jesus’ death on the cross.

9. In 10:5–7, we see how the author of Hebrews understands a quotation from Ps 40 (v 6–8; this psalm is written by David) as being uttered by Christ. Thereby these words become a prophecy about Jesus.

When we compare the text in Hebrews with the text in Psalms, we find one main difference: In Ps 40:6 it says, “but my ears you have pierced” (this word “pierced” can also be understood as “opened”). In Heb 10:6 it says “but a body you prepared for me.”

This difference can easily be explained: The author of Hebrews quoted Ps 40:6–8 from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), while our Bibles have been translated from the Old Testament Hebrew text.

In my opinion this difference does not cause any significant difficulty for the interpreter. The Hebrew version could either refer to the Old Testament regulation of piercing a servant’s ear to the doorpost as an expression of him agreeing to become a permanent slave (Ex 21:5–6) or to “having an open and listening ear.” The Greek version would imply that a person sacrificed or gave up his body. In the case of Jesus, all these things applied: He had an open, listening and obedient ear to God’s voice and will. He also became a willing “slave.” And he sacrificed his body as he died for our sins on the cross. The main point is Jesus’ willingness to fulfill his Father’s plans to save mankind: “*See, I have come to do your will*” (Heb 10:9. Compare Jesus’ words in Gethsemane “*not my will, but yours be done*”, Luke 22:42).

10. In 10:11–12, we find a contrast between standing and sitting:
  - a. The Levitical high priest always stood because his work was never finished (He again and again offered sacrifices that could never take away sins).
  - b. Christ (“this priest”) “he sat down at the right hand of God” because he had done what needed to be done. He had for all time offered one sacrifice for sins (compare 1:3; 7:27). His work was completed.
11. Expressions from 10:13–14 explained:
  - a. Since that time: This expression refers to Christ’s sacrifice of himself on the cross (the beginning of the “church age”).
  - b. He waits for his enemies to be made the footstool for his feet (a quotation from Ps 110:1; compare Heb 1:13): This is a metaphorical expression meaning “until all his enemies have been conquered,” referring to the time between Jesus’ first and second coming (the “church age”).

- c. Those who are being sanctified (compare 2:11): This expression shows that the sanctification of the believers is an ongoing process (compare 2:11). In 10:10, we find another aspect of believers' holiness: Sanctification is also an accomplished fact, a result of Jesus' death on the cross.
12. The author of Hebrews puts the two quotations from Jer 31:31–34 (Heb 10:16–18) in the mouth of the Holy Spirit. The way he expresses it by using the present tense is very significant: The Holy Spirit did not only speak to God's people in the past. He speaks in the present. He always has a message for God's people. God's covenant with his people is an ongoing covenant. God did away with the power of sin once for all as Jesus sacrificed his life for us on the cross. Our sins are forgiven and there is no longer any sacrifice for sin (v 18), and God no longer remembers our sins (v 17). But the effect of God's law written in our hearts and on our minds (v 16) is an ongoing process as long as we live in this world. The continuing process of sanctification in our lives is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.

[\(Go to Study 14\)](#)

## **Answers 14: Hold fast to the hope we profess, 10:19–39**

### **Answers to Questions**

#### **1. Answers to Heb 10:19–22**

1. We should draw near to God because we want to come to heaven (the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary).
2. It is possible for us to draw near to God because of the confidence we have in what Jesus has done for us and because he is our great high priest.
3. The “curtain” refers to the division between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place in the Israelite tabernacle (later in the Jerusalem temple). This curtain was torn from top to bottom at the death of Jesus on the cross (Matt 27:51). Jesus’ death (the “tearing” of his body, v 21) opens up the way for us to enter the heavenly sanctuary.
4. We should draw near to God with a true and sincere heart and a full assurance of faith as a result of our justification (having our hearts sprinkled clean from a bad conscience) and our participation in the body of Christ through baptism (having our bodies washed with pure water).

#### **2. Answers to Heb 10:23–25**

5. We continue to profess our initial faith in Jesus because he is faithful.
6. As we see the Day of the Lord approach, we as believers should do three things:
  - a. Spur one another toward love and good works
  - b. Be faithful to the fellowship of believers
  - c. Encourage one another

#### **3. Answers to Heb 10:26–35**

7. The author uses these expressions to describe apostasy and the consequences of committing the sin of apostasy (v 26–31):
  - a. Description of apostasy:
    - Trample the Son of God under one’s foot

- Treat the blood of Christ that saved him as an unholy thing
- Offended the Spirit of grace

b. Description of consequences:

- Worse consequences than rejecting the law of Moses
- The saving power of Jesus' sacrificial death is lost (no sacrifice for sins remains)
- A fearful expectation of God's judgment
- Punishment is deserved
- God's judgment
- To fall into the hands of the living God

8. Verse 32–35 should be understood as an encouragement to the readers of Hebrews. He reminds them of their excellent Christian behavior when they experienced severe persecution while they were still recent converts. They endured. They supported those who were insulted and mistreated. They sympathized with those who had been imprisoned for their faith. They accepted loss of their property, because they knew that their real treasures were in heaven.

#### **4. Answer to Heb 10:36–39**

9. This is what God has promised to those who persevere in their faith:
- a. They will prevail at the second coming of Jesus.
  - b. They will have eternal life (they will live as a result of their faith).
  - c. They will be saved through God's judgment.

[\(Go to Study 15\)](#)

## Answers 15: Praised for their faith, 11:1–40

### Comment

This chapter is “a vigorous exposition of what it means to have faith and obtain life” (Raymond Brown). It must be read as a sequel to the previous verses, where we find that Christians are people who believe and are saved (10:39). Earlier in Hebrews, the author has discussed the spiritual situation of those who started in faith but did not continue in faith (backsliders, or rather apostates). So now he needs to explain the meaning of “faith” with reference to the situation of his readers whom he wants to endure (10:36) and save their souls (10:39). So this chapter does not cover everything that can be said about faith.

### Answers to Questions:

#### 1. Answers to Heb 11:1–3

1. Verse 1 states that faith accepts God’s word. It takes seriously God’s message of truth as it is presented in the Bible. Because of God’s promises we can look forward to the future, knowing that we can trust his word – even with things that we have not yet seen or experienced. But this doesn’t mean that believers are unconcerned about the present. No, God’s promises about the future help us to have a correct understanding of how to live our in the present in a way that is pleasing him.
2. The ancients were commended for this kind of faith (v 2). They received God’s word for their own situation and responded to it in a way that pleased him. So this kind of faith receives God’s approval. To a believer God’s approval is more important than the approval of people.
3. The author’s point in v 3 is that faith recognizes God’s power. Only by faith is it possible for us to accept that God created the universe (what is seen) from nothing (what was invisible). God spoke, and it came into being.

#### 2. Answers to Heb 11:4–7

4. I understand the two statements about Abel’s faith like this:
  - a. “By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did” refers to the sincerity by which he gave his sacrifice. God saw that and commended him as a righteous man.

- b. “By faith he still speaks, even if he is dead refers” to the prophetic aspect of his sacrifice: But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock (Gen 4:4). The fulfillment of this first sacrifice when the “blood of the firstborn” was shed came with Jesus, whom Abel, of course, had not seen. So this “sacrifice of faith” still witnesses to us – even if Abel is dead.
- 5. Enoch pleased God by faithfully walking with him. He believed in God and trusted him. So God was pleased with his trust and faith and honored him by not letting him experience physical death.
- 6. The statement that Noah condemned the world by his faith refers to the fact that when his faith in God’s word (which led him to build the ark) was fulfilled with the arrival of the Flood, the eight people in the ark were saved by his faith. But all other people (the world) were condemned as they perished in the Flood.

### **3. Answers to Heb 11:8–12**

- 7. Abraham has been mentioned three times earlier in Hebrews. This is what we learn about him there:
  - a. Heb 2:16: Abraham is the father (not only of the Jewish people but also) of all believers (see also Rom 4:12, 16).
  - b. Heb 6:13–15: Abraham is an example of a person who inherited the promises through faith and patience.
  - c. Heb 7:1–10: Abraham (as the ancestor of the Levitical high priest) is inferior to Melchizedek (who is the type for Jesus, the superior high priest).
- 8. In Heb 11:8–12 the author uses Abraham and Sarah to illustrate various aspects of faith. These aspects are:
  - a. Obedient faith (v 8): Abraham obeyed God’s call to go even when he knew nothing about where God would lead him.
  - b. Sacrificial faith (8–9): Abraham’s willingness to obey God led to years of sacrifices. He had to leave his home country (relatives and friends) and his comfortable life there (city life, house, good food) for a nomadic existence as a stranger living in tents.
  - c. Courageous faith (v 8): Abraham’s willingness to obey God also required a fair amount of courage. It is always risky to leave your home without knowing where you will end up.
  - d. Persistent faith (v 9, 11–12): Most of the promises that God made to Abraham were not fulfilled during his lifetime. He had to wait many years for his “child of promise” Isaac. He never saw his numerous descendants.



He was never himself settled in the Promised Land. But he kept his faith in God's promises – even when he didn't see them fulfilled.

- e. Faith dependent on God (v 11–12): Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children, so a miracle was needed for God to fulfill his promise to give them a son. Their faith was not dependent on “natural circumstances”. No, it was totally dependent on God.

#### **4. Answer to Heb: 11:13–16**

- 9. I understand the qualities (or characteristics) of faith as portrayed in these verses like this (based on Raymond Brown):
  - a. These people of faith had confidence in God: They died without experiencing God's salvation through Jesus. But they saw it with their spiritual eyes and they trusted God to fulfill his plans.
  - b. These people of faith were witnesses to people around them: They acknowledged that they were aliens and strangers on earth and their way of life became a testimony about God's heaven to their fellow men.
  - c. These people of faith had a goal: They were seeking a country of their own which God had in store for them. They were looking forwards, not backwards.
  - d. These people of faith understood how to live in this world: They realized that they are foreigners and strangers on earth, so they didn't put their roots down in this world.
  - e. These people of faith had their security in God: So God was not ashamed to be called their God. And he prepared a secure city for them and for all those who followed their footsteps of faith.

#### **5. Answers to Heb 11:17–38**

- 10. Abraham received God's promise. Faith in this promise is carried on through the following generations like this (v 17–22):
  - a. Abraham trusted God even when he was asked to sacrifice Isaac, his son of promise.
  - b. Isaac followed God's plan when he blessed his sons in the wrong order. It was through the younger son Jacob that God's promise was to be fulfilled.
  - c. Jacob blessed his sons before he died in Egypt. He knew that it as through them God's promise to Abraham was to be fulfilled.

- d. Joseph showed faith in God's promise when he told his descendants to take his bones with them as they returned to the Promised Land.
- 11. Moses received the law at Sinai and became God's servant to lead the Israelites back to the Promised Land. We can learn five things about faith through his story (v 23–29) (based on Raymond Brown):
  - a. Faith conquers our fears (v 23)
  - b. Faith determines our options (v 24–26)
  - c. Faith sharpens our vision (v 27)
  - d. Faith recognizes our dependence on God (v 28)
  - e. Faith overcomes our difficulties (v 29)
- 12. The author of Hebrews then jumps to the Promised Land and gives these examples of faith (v 30–38):
  - a. The fall of Jericho: Faith against all odds
  - b. Rahab, the prostitute: Faith that saw the opportunity and took a risk
  - c. Judges, king David, Samuel and other prophets, and unnamed heroes of faith: Faith in all kinds of situations

## **6. Answers to Heb 11:39–40**

- 13. All the “heroes of faith” had two things in common:
  - a. God was pleased with their faith.
  - b. None of them received God's promise (God's revelation in Jesus Christ).
- 14. Verse 40 should be understood like this:
  - a. The “something better” that God has planned is his full revelation in Jesus Christ.
  - b. Perfection (or fulfillment) only comes through Jesus and his sacrifice in the New Covenant.
  - c. “The house of God” (10:21) consists of the faithful participants in the Old Covenant and the members of the New Covenant (“together with us). All alike are redeemed by Jesus Christ, the only perfecter of our faith (12:2).

[\(Go to Study 16\)](#)

## Answers 16: Look to Jesus, 12:1–3

### Answers to Questions

1. The author shows the link between this passage and the previous chapter in two ways:
  - a. He begins his new passage with “therefore, consequently”.
  - b. He uses the expression “so great a cloud of witnesses” with reference to the “heroes of faith” listed in the previous chapter.
2. The metaphor that the author uses in verse 1 is a race. A believer’s life is like running a race. Paul uses the same metaphor in 1 Cor 9:24 and Gal 2:2. Those who participated in sports during Hellenistic times didn’t wear any clothes. So that is why this metaphor begins with “let us remove everything that hinders.”
3. In this passage we are told to remove these two things:
  - a. Everything that hinders our running. This means that we for example must rid ourselves of everything that weakens our Christian testimony and stops us from reflecting God’s glory.
  - b. All the common sins of this world that will choke our Christian life and lead us away from God’s salvation.
4. We need to have perseverance so that God’s plan for our lives (the race that he has marked out for us) may be fulfilled.
5. Jesus is described like this in v 2–3:
  - a. He is the author of our faith: The Greek word translated “author” in English NIV means both “leader, pioneer” and “founder.” Jesus is not only the one who is the source (the beginning, the foundation) of our Christian faith. He is also our leader who shows us how our Christian faith should be lived out.
  - b. He is the perfecter of our faith: He is our high priest in heaven who intercedes for us and who sends his Holy Spirit to guide and support us. It is only through him our faith can be made perfect.
  - c. He is the suffering Jesus: He is our sacrifice who suffered for us and gave his life on the cross for our redemption.
  - d. He is the victorious Jesus: He rose victoriously from the dead, ascended into heaven and “sat down” (symbolizing that his work was accomplished).
  - e. He is our perfect example: Nobody suffered more on this earth than he did. Our sufferings and the persecutions that we may experience cannot be

compared to what he, the Son of God, had to suffer innocently for the sins of mankind. He shows us what “perfect faith” really looks like.

6. We should “consider Jesus” and we should “look to him” so that we do not give up (“grow weary” or “lose heart”) as we live our lives in this world (run the race that is set before us). Only when we “consider Jesus” and “look to him” can our faith be safe. Otherwise we may – like many of the believers at the time when Hebrews was written – lose our faith and become apostates.

[\(Go to Study 17\)](#)

## Answers 17: The Lord's discipline, 12:4–11

### Answers to Questions

1. The logical connection between these verses (v 4–11) about the Lord's discipline and the previous verses about fixing our eyes on Jesus (v 1–3) is Jesus' suffering (v 2–3) and our suffering (v 4), but also "the joy that was set before Jesus" (probably referring to his looking forward to the victory that was the result of his suffering) and the goal ahead of us. As God's sons we will have an eternal future with him in his heavenly glory.
2. As followers of Jesus in this fallen and sinful world we must expect suffering, testing and trials, just as Jesus told his disciples (Matt 10:22). But God will not let us be tested beyond what we can bear (1 Cor 10:13). It is important that we do not look at difficult experiences as pointless adversities. God can use these difficulties as a way to correct us and help us grow. The author of Hebrews gives three pieces of advice on how meet adversities:
  - b. The first piece of advice is to remember God's word (v 5–6), quoting Prov 3:11–12. In these verses we find these three ways in which we can respond to "the Lord's discipline":
    - To take God's discipline lightly: Those who do so are indifferent to God's discipline. They don't understand that discipline is one way for God to prune them so that they will bear more fruit and be more useful in his service (compare John 15:2). To take God's discipline lightly is the first wrong way of responding to suffering.
    - To lose heart when God disciplines them: Those who do so get upset and discouraged. They may even feel that God has deserted them and that he doesn't care for them any more. To lose heart is the second wrong way of responding to suffering.
    - To take God's discipline in a right way: This means to understand that God uses discipline to make us more fruitful (see the first point above) and that God cares for us even in times of difficulty (see the second point above). Those who do so may even rejoice at their suffering as a proof of their sonship. God's discipline shows that we are his sons, that we belong to him. These are correct ways of responding to suffering.
  - b. The second piece of advice is to remember God's care (v 7–9). This is how God shows his care by disciplining his children: God is truly our Father, and he wants us as his children to grow and develop spiritually. Note the

contrast between “human fathers” and “the Father of spirits” (referring to God the Father). If we submit to our heavenly Father we will live forever.

- c. The third piece of advice is to remember God’s purpose (v 10–11). These verses contain two aspects of God’s purpose for disciplining his children:
- The first aspect is present: God disciplines us for our good (even if discipline isn’t pleasant, but painful) now so that we can live sanctified lives in this world and share in his holiness in our life and testimony now.
  - The second aspect is future: God’s discipline now will produce a harvest of righteousness and peace for eternity.

[\(Go to Study 18\)](#)

## Answers 18: Press forward, 12:12–17

### Answers to Questions

1. Verse 12 starts with “Therefore”. That indicates a close connection between the previous verses and this passage. Because of what we know about God’s loving and fatherly discipline, we should now press forward with our Christian lives.
2. The author introduces this theme with two Old Testament quotations (*Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees*, Is 35:3; *Make straight paths for your feet*, Prov 4:26). This is what I think the author wants to say with these metaphors:
  - a. He uses the first quotation (the metaphors with “feeble arms” and “weak knees”) to say that we should be strong. We should not be discouraged.
  - b. He uses the second quotation (“straight paths for your feet”) to say that we should walk straight. We should not turn away from God’s righteous ways. This interpretation becomes clear when we see the context of the quotation: *Make the paths for your feet level, and take only ways that are firm. Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil* (Prov 4:26–27).
3. This is how I understand the connection between the two parts of verse 13:
  - a. I have given my understanding of the first part of the verse in my answer to 2 b above.
  - b. The second half of the verse says that our righteous lives will be an encouragement to immature or weak believers. When they see our lives and when they follow our example, they will be “healed” rather than “dislocated.”
4. Verse 14 contains two exhortations:
  - a. The first one: We should live in harmony with people around us. Not only that, but we should work hard and do our very best to live in peace.
  - b. The second one: We must also make every effort to live holy lives, lives that bring glory to God and his kingdom. Unless we are separated (sanctified, made holy) for God we cannot really have fellowship with him (“see the Lord”).
5. This is how I understand the connection between “the grace of God” and “the bitterness of believers” that the author makes in verse 15:

- a. There is a risk for believers who experience difficulties and hardship to become bitter. This bitterness will grow and affect not only the person who is bitter, but also those around him. It will cause trouble and defile many.
  - b. Instead we as Christian believers must help one another to remember God's grace. If we focus our lives on God's grace, we will not become bitter.
  - c. But we can also see it as the grace of God that he – through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives – removes bitterness from our hearts. Then we will become channels of God's grace to people around us, instead of causing them trouble and spreading our bitterness to them (defiling them with our bitterness).
6. The remaining verses in this passage contain two exhortations. They are:
- a. Seek the grace of God (v 15)!
  - b. Avoid defilement (v 15–17)! Two examples of defilement are given:
    - Sexual immorality
    - Godlessness: Esau is mentioned as a warning. He despised the promises and sold his father's blessing for a simple meal.

[\(Go to Study 19\)](#)



## Answers 19: The two mountains, 12:18–29

### Answers to Questions

1. This passage contains the last of the contrast pictures in Hebrews. Look up these earlier contrast pictures and fill in what they are about:
  - a. Jesus is superior to the angels, 1:4–14.
  - b. Jesus' message is superior to that of the angels, 2:1–4.
  - c. Jesus is superior to Moses, 3:1–6.
  - d. Jesus is a greater high priest than the high priests of the Old Covenant, 5:1–10.
  - e. Jesus is the high priest of a superior priesthood than that of the Levites, 7:20–28.
  - f. The heavenly sanctuary is better than the earthly sanctuary, 8:1–5.
  - g. The New Covenant is better than the Old Covenant, 8:6–9:14.
  - h. Jesus' sacrifice was better than the sacrifices of the Old Covenant, 9:23–10:4.
2. In this passage two mountains are contrasted:
  - a. Sinai is the mountain of the Old Covenant. It is a physical mountain. It stands for the terrifying proclamation of the law.
  - b. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, is the mountain of the New Covenant. It is a spiritual mountain. It stands for the joyful proclamation of the gospel.
3. This is how I understand the link between this passage and the previous one: The reason why it is possible for believers to be strong and to walk upright (v 12–13), and to live in peace and be holy (v 14–16) is that they belong to the kingdom of God (Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the mountain of the New Covenant).
4. In this passage we find a description of the kingdom of God that we belong to:
  - a. It is not physical (it cannot be touched, v 18) but spiritual.
  - b. It is not terrifying or dangerous or burning with fire or dark or gloomy (v 18–21).
  - c. It belongs to heaven (v 22).
  - d. Its king is the living God (v 22).

- e. It is full of worshiping and joyful angels (v 22).
  - f. It is inhabited by the righteous who have been made perfect by Jesus the mediator of the New Covenant. They are those who have been saved by the blood of Jesus, the high priest who sacrificed himself for our redemption (v 23–24).
  - g. It is an unshakable kingdom, which will remain when this present creation has passed away (v 26–27).
5. The author of Hebrews has two exhortations for us in this passage:
- a. We must listen to God's word and obey God's warnings (v 25).
  - b. We must be thankful to God for his promised kingdom and worship him with reverence and awe (v 28).

[\(Go Study 20\)](#)

## Answers 20: Exhortations part 1, 13:1–6

### Answers to Questions

1. I understand the connection between the end of the previous chapter (12:28–29) and the exhortations in chapter 13 like this:
  - a. We belong to God's kingdom which we will receive in full measure at the return of Jesus. This is a kingdom that cannot be shaken. For this promise we should be thankful. Our thankfulness should be expressed in a way that is acceptable to God (who is a consuming fire) with worship, reverence and awe (12:28–29).
  - b. As people of God and citizens of God's kingdom our worship of him is expressed in a lifestyle that reflects God's character and the values of his kingdom. So the exhortations in chapter 13 will remind us of that fact and guide us in our pursuit of holiness. So the message that the author of Hebrews has for us in chapter 13 is: "These are really important things for you if you want to be holy in God's eyes!"
2. These are important things to consider in verse 1:
  - a. The key role of love in Christian ethics
  - b. Christian love must be a constant aspect of our lives ("Keep on loving")
  - c. As brothers: In Hebrews "brothers" is an important word. Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers (2:11–12). We should be like him, not only "holy brothers" (3:1), but also "loving brothers". As individual believers we belong to his family, his church. His and his Father's love must be seen in us – constantly, always.
3. We find these aspects of brotherly love in v 2–3:
  - a. Hospitality to strangers: In the Roman Empire many people had occupations that required extensive traveling. But inns were immoral, unhygienic, dangerous, and expensive places. So it was an important expression of brotherly love to give accommodation to traveling believers, even if you didn't know them personally.
  - b. Practical responsibilities to those in need: Two kinds of people in need are mentioned. First, "prisoners," probably referring to believers imprisoned for their faith. Second, "those who are ill-treated", probably referring to believers who had been beaten in times of persecution.
4. –

5. –
6. In v 5–6 the author of Hebrews uses two quotations from the Old Testament (*I will never fail you or forsake you*, Josh 1:5; *The Lord is with me. I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?* Ps 118:6) to support his next exhortation. This is how:
- a. His next exhortation is: Avoid the love of money. Instead be content with what you have.
  - b. He uses the two Old Testament quotations to remind his readers about God's promises: God has promised not to forsake those who belong to him. He has promised to be our helper. So we need not depend on man or the circumstances around us for our daily lives.
  - c. Consequently, we can have full confidence in God's provisions for us and be content with what we have. To "love money" is absolutely unnecessary (also, it is a form of idolatry, see Matt 6:24).
7. –
8. –

[\(Go to Study 21\)](#)

## Answers 21: Exhortations part 2, 13:7–24

### Answers to Questions

1. The context of the well-known verse *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever* (13:8) is the life and teaching of “servants of God”:
  - a. Verse 7 exhorts the readers of Hebrews to remember their leaders who spoke the word of God to them. They are now longer alive. But they served God faithfully. We should imitate them.
  - b. Verse 9 warns the readers not to believe and follow all kinds of strange teachings. This kind of teaching will lead them astray.
  - c. In between these two verses we find the statement *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*. Jesus is faithful, even if “servants of God” are not. Jesus was with his faithful servants as they ministered in times of persecution and difficulties. They kept their eyes focused on him, and he blessed their ministry. Jesus is always the same. He is with his servants today, if they listen to him and faithfully proclaim the gospel. He is with them all the way into his glorious eternity.
2. The “strange teachings” that the readers are warned against in 13:9:
  - a. They must have something to do with “salvation through works,” as they are contrasted with “grace.”
  - b. They must have something to do with “ceremonies” (rituals) and food. We know from other sources that both Jews and Gentiles propagated dietary restrictions and fasting as means to earn religious “merits” (compare 9:10). So it must have been tempting for Christian preachers to fall into this kind of heresies.
  - c. The lesson for us (just as it was for the first readers of Hebrews) is that salvation can never be “earned” though our own efforts. The only “food” that can bring salvation to our hearts is God’s grace through the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross.
3. The point that the author of Hebrews makes in v 10–12 is that the old sacrificial system with animal offerings, sacred meals and its priesthood and tabernacle has been replaced by Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross (the “altar” of v 10). But the consequence of the “strange teachings” (v 9) is that these teachers (those who minister at the tabernacle, v 10) still are under the Old Covenant which does not offer any salvation (have no right to eat, v 10). Under the Old Covenant the priests (and others) could eat the meat of the

sacrificed animals – except on the Day of Atonement when the animal bodies were burned outside the camp (v 11). This sacrificial system could not procure salvation. But with Jesus sacrifice is complete: he makes us holy through his own blood (v 12).

4. The exhortation “Let us then go to him outside the camp” (v 13) actually means, “Be bold!” We should follow in Jesus’ footsteps. He was willing to be sacrificed (to go “outside the camp”) and bear disgrace for our sake. So should we be willing to face hardship and risk our lives for the sake of the gospel. We do not belong to this world but to heaven (v 14).
5. In v 15–16 the readers of Hebrews are exhorted to offer two kinds of sacrifices. They are:
  - a. Praise, understood as a confession of our faith in God (v 15)
  - b. To do good and to spread the gospel (v 16).
6. In chapter 13 there are three exhortations that refer to how believers should relate to their church leaders. They are:
  - a. Remember, honor, and imitate your leaders (v 7).
  - b. Obey your leaders and submit to their authority (v 17).
  - c. Greet all your leaders (v 24).
7. We learn these four things about pastoral leadership from v 17–21:
  - a. Pastors and elders keep watch over the believers (v 17).
  - b. Pastors and elders are accountable to God for their leadership (v 17).
  - c. Pastors and elders need the prayers of the believers (v 18–19). So they are actually dependent of the spiritual support of the believers.
  - d. Pastors and elders must pray for and bless the believers. Pastors and elders long for believers to grow spiritually and be equipped for the work that God has called them to accomplish (v 20–21).
8. I think that the author of Hebrews refers to his main message in the whole book of Hebrews with his request to bear with his word of exhortation (v 22). The reason for this is that he mentions his “short letter” in the same verse.

So what is his exhortation? It is for his readers to remain faithful to the gospel about Jesus and his sacrificial death, so that they don’t become apostates by returning to the Jewish faith (the Old Covenant with its inferior message, its inferior high priest and its inferior sacrifice which cannot remove the guilt of sin).

**For the teacher**

## **General suggestions**

### **Five student goals**

1. The students should further develop their reading and understanding skills.
2. The students should constantly be encouraged to think about what they have read and to draw conclusions from what they have understood.
3. The students should get to know the book of Hebrews well.
4. The students should be challenged to apply what they have studied to their own South Indian contemporary situation.
5. The students should be encouraged to use texts from the book of Hebrews for devotions, Bible studies and sermons.

### **A few general suggestions for the teacher**

1. Lecture and “teach” as little as possible.
2. Base your teaching on the dynamics of group work. This textbook has been designed to help you do so.
3. Make sure that all the students are active in class. Encourage those who are silent, shy or weak.
4. Never ridicule a student. Always encourage.
5. Encourage questions, and don’t be embarrassed if you cannot answer all of them. No Bible teachers has all the answers.
6. Don’t let students sidetrack you and your class by silly or irrelevant questions. Class time is precious and should not be wasted.

### **How to cover a study in four steps**

1. You introduce the study.
2. The students read the Bible text and work through the questions in groups of three or four.
3. Go through their answers in class. Don’t waste time. Skip the simple questions and focus on those that the students have struggled with. Clarify misunderstandings.



4. Encourage the students to complete unfinished work during library time. They should also take time to review each study.

[\(Go to Table of contents\)](#)

## Planning day 1

### Planning suggestions for the teacher – Monday (the first day of the course)

1. You need to plan your week (20 lessons and four days of library time/homework) in such a way that the book/the course can be completed in time, without too much stress on Thursday and Friday.
2. So I suggest you use your first day (Monday) like this:
  - a. Lesson 1: **Introduction to Hebrews**. Instructions to **Reading of Hebrews**.. Let the students disperse into small groups and start reading.
  - b. Lesson 2: Students work on **Reading of Hebrews** in small groups.
  - c. Lesson 3: Cover studies 1 and 2 in class (don't spend more time).
  - d. Lesson 4: Cover studies 3 and 4 in class (don't spend more time).
  - e. Library time/homework:
    - Students finish **Reading of Hebrews**
    - Students finish studies 1–4
    - If time: students read through **Introduction to Hebrews**
  - f. The following morning (use only half the first lesson for this and don't waste your time):
    - Make sure all the students have completed **Reading of Hebrews**.
      - Check briefly that the students have worked with questions 1–3.
      - Go through the students' answers to question 4.
    - Make sure the students have finished studies 1–4.

### Suggestions for library time/homework – Monday (the first day of the course)

1. Finish **Reading of Hebrews**.
2. Finish studies 1–4.
3. If you have time: Go through **Answers to Introduction to Hebrews**.
4. If you have time: Prepare a Bible study/sermon/devotion based on one of the passages that you have just studied.

## **How to use “Bible study/sermon/devotion”**

For most of the studies, I have included suggestions for one or more topics for Bible studies, sermons and devotions. It is very important that the students learn to apply their study of a Bible passage to real life situations. That is the reason why I have included this section in the studies.

But you as their teacher should not make all the students do all these Bible studies, sermons and devotions. Time will not be enough for that. In addition, some of the students might find this kind of assignments very challenging. So the you must use your discretion. Bright and fast students will be able to do many. Slower students will only manage one or two.

But don't neglect this work. Instead you should encourage your students to do as many of the Bible studies, sermons and devotions as possible. You should also tell your students not to forget this resource for their future ministry. I am convinced that there will be many occasions for them to come back to this resource of ideas as they preach and teach in the future.

[\(Go to Table of contents\)](#)

## Planning “Introduction...” and “Reading...”

### Introduction to Hebrews

1. Do not spend much time on this introduction. Half of the first lesson should be enough. But allow enough time for the students to digest the essentials.
2. Don't make the students memorize all the details. It is sufficient if they learn a few things as a general background to their study of the book. They can come back to this lesson later, perhaps at the end of the course.
3. Try to cover this introduction as you casually interact with the students. So let the students find answers to the questions in dialogue with you. Don't lecture or “teach”!
4. You can reinforce the students' learning by letting them read through the whole introduction once more during library time.

### Reading of Hebrews

1. Do not “teach” the answers to the first three questions! That would be a waste of time, as most of these matters will be taken up more systematically in the later studies. So just check that the students have tried to answer the questions reasonably well. Do **not** go through all the points!
2. Instead you can spend more time on the fourth question. Go through the answers in class together with the students. Clarify any misunderstandings.

[\(Go to Table of contents\)](#)

## Planning day 2

### **Planning suggestions for the teacher – Tuesday (the second day of the course)**

I suggest you use your second day (Tuesday) like this:

1. The first half of lesson 1: Make sure the students have done their the previous day's library time/homework
2. The second half of lesson 1: Cover study 5 in class (if necessary, let the students finish during library time)
3. Lesson 2: Cover study 6 in class
4. Lesson 3: Cover study 7 in class
5. Lesson 4:
  - a. Cover study 8 in class
  - b. Give the students clear instructions about library time/homework

### **Suggestions for library time/homework – Tuesday (the second day of the course)**

1. Finish your work from the studies you have done today (5–8)
2. Go through your notes from the previous studies.
3. In small groups (or individually): Do study 9 (**Our immaturity and God's faithfulness**).
4. If you have time: Prepare a Bible study/sermon/devotion based on one of the passages that you have just studied.

[\(Go to Table of contents\)](#)

## Planning day 3

### **Planning suggestions for the teacher – Wednesday (the third day of the course)**

I suggest you use your third day (Wednesday) like this:

1. The first half of lesson 1: Make sure the students have done their the previous day's library time/homework
2. The second half of lesson 1: Cover study 10 in class (if necessary, let the students finish during library time)
3. Lesson 2: Cover study 11 in class
4. Lesson 3: Cover study 12 in class
5. Lesson 4:
  - a. Cover study 13 in class
  - b. Give the students clear instructions about library time/homework

### **Suggestions for library time/homework – Wednesday (the third day of the course)**

1. Finish your work from the studies you have done today (10–13)
2. Go through your notes from the previous studies.
3. In small groups (or individually): Do study 14 (**Hold fast to the hope we profess**).
4. If you have time: Prepare a Bible study/sermon/devotion based on one of the passages that you have just studied.

[\(Go to Table of contents\)](#)

## Planning day 4

### **Planning suggestions for the teacher – Thursday (the fourth day of the course)**

I suggest you use your fourth day (Thursday) like this:

1. The first half of lesson 1: Make sure the students have done their the previous day's library time/homework
2. The second half of lesson 1: Cover study 15 in class (if necessary, let the students finish during library time)
3. Lessons 2: Cover study 16 in class
4. Lessons 2: Cover study 17 in class
5. Lessons 2: Cover study 18 in class
6. Give the students clear instructions about library time/homework

### **Suggestions for library time/homework – Thursday (the fourth day of the course)**

1. Finish your work from the studies you have done today (15–18)
2. Go through your notes from the previous studies.
3. In small groups (or individually): Do study 19 (**The two mountains**).
4. If you have time: Prepare a Bible study/sermon/devotion based on one of the passages that you have just studied.

[\(Go to Table of contents\)](#)

## **Planning day 5**

### **Planning suggestions for the teacher – Friday (the fifth day of the course)**

I suggest you use your fifth day (Friday) like this:

1. The first half of lesson 1: Make sure all the students have completed the previous day's library time/homework.
2. The second half of lesson 1 and lesson 2: Cover studies 20–21 in class.
3. Lessons 3–4: Exam paper

### **The Exam paper**

The main purpose of the Exam paper is to help the students review and summarize. That is why they should be allowed to use all their resources: their Bible, their textbook, and their notes.

The students must use their own words as much as possible when they write down their answers. Discourage them from copying. They should not just quote verses from the Bible. They should not copy sentences from the textbook or from their notes.

If the students want to (or need to), they should be allowed to work in pairs or groups of three. This would help the weaker students to understand and learn more.

If the teacher wants to, the exam paper can be used as a tool for evaluating the students. But evaluation should not be the main purpose of the exam paper!

[\(Go to Table of contents\)](#)



## Exam Paper

### Instructions

1. You can use your Bible, your textbook and your notes.
2. Use your own words as you write. Avoid copying from the textbook. Do not just quote the Bible.
3. Time: two lessons (or as per instructions from your teacher)
4. Hand in to your teacher for grading/evaluation.

### Questions

1. Summarize Hebrews' "doctrine of Jesus."
2. Give examples of how the message of Hebrews has been adapted to the background and situation of the book's original readers.
3. What is the most important thing that you have learnt from your study of Hebrews this past week? Explain!
4. Make a list of the most important lessons that Hebrews has for the church in South India today. Explain why you have made this choice!
5. **If you have time:** What could be the dangers of Hebrews to the church in South India today? In other words: How could a Bible teacher in South India today misuse texts from Hebrews?

# Table of contents

## Studies

Introduction to Hebrews	4
Reading of Hebrews	8
Study 1: God speaks through his Son, 1:1–3	10
Study 2: Superior to the angels, 1:4–14	11
Study 3: “so that we do not drift away”, 2:1–4	14
Study 4: The author of our salvation, 2:5–13	15
Study 5: Our deliverer from the devil, 2:14–18	17
Study 6: Think about Jesus, 3:1–6	19
Study 7: Firmly to the end, 3:7–4:13	20
Study 8: A great high priest, 4:14–5:10	22
Study 9: Our immaturity and God’s faithfulness, 5:11–6:20	24
Study 10: A better priesthood, 7:1–28	26
Study 11: Christ’s sanctuary and a better covenant, 8:1–13	28
Study 12: The two tabernacles, 9:1–22	30
Study 13: Christ’s perfect sacrifice, 9:23–10:18	32
Study 14: Hold fast to the hope we profess, 10:19–39	34
Study 15: Praised for their faith, 11:1–40	36
Study 16: Look to Jesus, 12:1–3	39
Study 17: The Lord’s discipline, 12:4–11	40
Study 18: Press forward, 12:12–17	41
Study 19: The two mountains, 12:18–29	42
Study 20: Exhortations part 1, 13:1–6	43
Study 21: Exhortations part 2, 13:7–24	45

## Answers

Answers to Introduction to Hebrews	48
Answers to Reading of Hebrews	52
Answers 1: God speaks through his Son, 1:1–3	55
Answers 2: Superior to the angels, 1:4–14	57
Answers 3: “so that we do not drift away”, 2:1–4	60
Answers 4: The author of our salvation, 2:5–13	62
Answers 5: Our deliverer from the devil, 2:14–18	65
Answers 6: Think about Jesus, 3:1–6	67
Answers 7: Firmly to the end, 3:7–4:13	70
Answers 8: A great high priest, 4:14–5:10	72
Answers 9: Our immaturity and God’s faithfulness, 5:11–6:20	75
Answers 10: A better priesthood, 7:1–28	79
Answers 11: Christ’s sanctuary and a better covenant, 8:1–13	82

Answers 12: The two tabernacles, 9:1–22	86
Answers 13: Christ’s perfect sacrifice, 9:23–10:18	89
Answers 14: Hold fast to the hope we profess, 10:19–39	93
Answers 15: Praised for their faith, 11:1–40	95
Answers 16: Look to Jesus, 12:1–3	99
Answers 17: The Lord’s discipline, 12:4–11	101
Answers 18: Press forward, 12:12–17	103
Answers 19: The two mountains, 12:18–29	105
Answers 20: Exhortations part 1, 13:1–6	107
Answers 21: Exhortations part 2, 13:7–24	109

## **For the teacher**

General suggestions	112
Planning day 1	114
How to use “Bible study/sermon/devotion”	115
Planning “Introduction...” and “Reading...”	116
Planning day 2	117
Planning day 3	118
Planning day 4	119
Planning day 5	120
Exam Paper	121