

BRIARCLIFF CHURCH

Small Group Study Guide: Hebrews

Week of September 7 (Week 1)

Hebrews: Encouraged Towards Intimacy (1:1-14)



BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Author: Unidentified, debated.

Date: Mid 60s AD

Audience: The original recipients of the letter to the Hebrews had a rich background in Jewish worship and thought. The text itself provides several clues to this background. First, the author assumes his audience knew the Old Testament well, as seen in the extensive quotations and allusions woven throughout the letter. In fact, no other New Testament book is as saturated with Old Testament references as Hebrews. The author also expects his readers to be familiar with the rituals of Leviticus and the details of the tabernacle. Second, the letter draws on theological concepts common in Greek-speaking synagogues of the first century. These include the veneration of Moses as one with unique access to God (3:1–6), the role of angels as mediators of the old covenant revelation (2:1–4), and the divine Wisdom's part in creation (1:1–4). Finally, the warnings scattered through the letter indicate the audience was tempted to abandon Christianity and return fully to Judaism.

Destination: Knowing where the intended audience lived is difficult to determine. Among locations suggested are Jerusalem, Alexandria and Rome, with the latter being the best possibility.

Occasion: They had faced persecution and endured abuse, imprisonment and loss of property for their faith, but not martyrdom (Heb. 10:32-39; 12:4). They demonstrated their faith by serving fellow believers and particularly supported those who endured persecution (Heb. 6:10; 10:34). The readers of Hebrews may have been in danger of returning to Judaism in order to avoid persecution. The author warned them against such apostasy (6:4-9; 10:26-31) and urged them to return to the mainstream of Christian fellowship.

READING HEBREWS IN THE LIGHT OF ITS ARGUMENT AND STRUCTURE

It is important to note that the Book of Hebrews is built around the “superiority” motif: “Christ Superior to the Prophets (1:1-3), “Christ Superior to Angels (1:4-2:18), “Christ Superior to Moses” (3:1-4:13), etc. But also, it is important to note the two distinct types of literature found in Hebrews, namely, *exposition*, in which the author expounds the person and work of Christ, and *exhortation*, in which he seeks to motivate the

congregation to a positive response. (George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*. The NIV Application Commentary, 27).

- From verses 1-2, what do you understand about God's relationship with humanity?
- How is God's communication "in the past" different from his communication "in these last days"?
- What is the author's main argument in verses 1-3?
 - Reflection: "The Old Testament days were not the glory days: They were days of shadows and types that only pointed toward Christ. But we have seen more than Moses ever imagined, because we are witnesses to the glory of Christ revealed on earth. This is the fundamental takeaway point from these verses: That we have the honor and privilege of living in the age of Christ, through whom God has fully and finally spoken." (Michael J. Kruger, *Hebrews For You*. 18).

4. In verse 4, the writer of Hebrews says: "So he [the Son] became as much superior to the angels." In what ways is the Son superior to the angels according to verses 5-14?
5. Why does the unknown author of Hebrews feel the need to compare Jesus with angels?
6. What is the character and nature of God in Hebrews 1?
 - Reflection: "Are the angels glorious? Of course. Are they impressive? On one level, yes. But when you look at Christ in all his glory and wonder and beauty and magnificence, you realize you've been chasing the wrong thing. As we read these verses, we will be renewed again in our apprehension of the glory and greatness of Christ." (Kruger, 23).
7. Choose the description of Christ in Heb. 1:1-4 that is most impactful to you. How should the statement you chose impact your perspective on how to live "in these last days" as one of Christ's followers?

8. How can modern believers be guilty of giving misplaced attention—even worship—to the spiritual realm instead of to Christ? Why is it tempting to do so? Why is it dangerous?

PRAYER

PRAYER GUIDE

September 8-12, 2025

Read Hebrews 1

Monday: 1:1-2 “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.” God desires to communicate to us and he does that through the Bible today. Whatever situation you are going through, ask God to speak to you, for wisdom, clarity, conviction, comfort or hope.

Tuesday 1:3a *“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.”* Pray that God will help you see the “radiance of the Glory of God” and “his power” as Isaiah saw God’s glory and worshipped him as described in Isa. 6:1-7.

Wednesday: 1:3b *“After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”* In your prayer today reflect on Jesus’ work of purification for our sins. He is not only the High Priest but also the sacrificial lamb that atoned for our sins. Praise and thank God for his work of purifying our sins.

Thursday: 1:6 *“When he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him.’”* Jesus is greater than the angels, and he is the object of worship not only by men but also by angels. Ponder on the aspect of worshiping Jesus in everything you do.

Friday: 1:9 *“You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.”* What God loves and hates should be believers’ motivation. Pray that God would daily help you to love righteousness and hate wickedness. To do what is right and to shun evil in every way; thought, word and deed.