

Acts 2 Study and Discussion Questions

Lesson Four: Hebrews, Part 1 – Hebrews 1-7

Introduction to Hebrews

- 1) The authorship, audience, and dating of the book of Hebrews remains a mystery. What do the following verses suggest (you may have additional insights once you have studied through all seven chapters covered in this lesson): 2:3; 3:1a; 5:11-12; 10:32-34; 13:18-19; 13:23; 13:24? **The author's statement that salvation was announced by the Lord and confirmed "by those who heard him" (2:3) seems to imply that he (or she) was writing to the second generation of Christians (those who wouldn't have been alive in Jesus' time) and perhaps had not heard from the Lord firsthand himself (or herself). Since Jesus spoke directly to Paul, a case against Pauline authorship can be made. The audience had suffered persecution for their faith (10:32-34.) They were (by and large) believers (3:1a) but were not moving toward maturity in their faith (5:11-12). Timothy was alive but is not the author (13:23). Since "those from Italy" sent greetings (13:24), it was probably either written *to* people in Rome (and the author had Roman expatriates living near him who sent their greetings) or written *from* Rome. The plethora of quotations from the Old Testament and the arguments about Jesus' superiority and fulfillment of the Old Testament priesthood and laws suggest that the audience was Jewish. Although the author's name is never given, those to whom he wrote seemed to know him (13:18-19).**
- 2) From the following verses, give...
 - a) a suggested theme for Hebrews: 1:3-4; 3:3; 7:19 and 22; 8:6; 9:15. **Christ's superiority and fulfillment of the Old Testament laws, covenant and priesthood, including His superiority over angels (the words "better" and "superior" occur 15 times in the book of Hebrews).**
 - b) a recurring pastoral warning/concern: 2:1; 3:12; 4:11; 6:11; 10:23, 25, 36. **The author was concerned about his audience drifting from confidence in Christ back into Judaism. Throughout the book, he warns against turning back and encourages perseverance.**
- 3) What does Hebrews teach about Christ's present position and work (see 1:3; 2:18; 4:14-16; 7:24-25; 8:1-2, 6; 9:14, 24; 10:12-13; 12:2, 24)? What difference will this make in the way you approach all that lies before you this week? **Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven. His present ministry is helping those who are tempted: He is sympathetic and intercedes as our permanent priest, appearing for us in God's presence. He also cleanses our consciences and mediates the new covenant. He is waiting for His enemies to be made His footstool. Personal sharing**

Read Hebrews 1-2.

- 4) Hebrews 1:2-4 presents a forceful statement about the deity of Jesus Christ, declaring Him equal with God His Father. In light of this, 1:4 concludes that Jesus is certainly superior to angels. The quotes that follow in 1:5-13 offer evidence from the Old Testament of Jesus' superiority. Specifically what information do these quotes offer about the position, essence, or work of Jesus that proves His superiority over angels? **Jesus is God's own Son (1:5), while angels are merely God's servants (1:7) and commanded to worship Jesus (1:6). God the Father speaks of Jesus as His equal and has qualified Him to sit on His throne (1:8-9); The Son is also called "Lord" (1:10). He is described as having existed at "the beginning" and being involved in creation (1:10). He is eternal and unchangeable (1:11-12); The Father has offered Him the position at His right hand and said He would put all His enemies under His feet (1:13). By contrast, angels are servants of those who inherit the salvation Jesus authored (1:14).**
- 5) Reread Hebrews 2:10. Since Jesus was already morally perfect, in what sense could He become perfect (see verses 9, 17-18)? **Although Jesus was morally perfect, He became the perfect (ideal or qualified) Savior by experiencing the suffering (temptation and death) common to mankind. These experiences "perfected" Him in His role as Savior and as Mediator.**
- 6) Do you know anyone who worships angels? In what other ways do people you know diminish the person or work of Jesus? **Individual answers**

Read Hebrews 3:1-4:13.

- 7) The following questions and passages pertain to the discussion in Hebrews 3 about Moses' role in God's "house" and the warning not to harden our hearts, as Moses' generation did.
- a) Who was Moses? (See Exodus 3:4-10; 24:12; 34:27-28; Numbers 10:12-13; Deuteronomy 34; Acts 7:17-36) **Moses was the man through whom God delivered Israel from Egypt, through whom God gave Israel the entire Law, and through whom Israel was brought to the edge of the Promised Land of Canaan. He was a prophet without equal (Deuteronomy 34:10).**
 - b) With regard to Hebrews 3:7-19, what occurred during the years that Moses and the people of Israel were en route from Egypt to the Promised Land of Canaan? (See Exodus 15:24; 17:1-7; Numbers 13:1-2 with 14:1-11, 26-35) **The people continually grumbled against the Lord and showed disbelief. When they went so far as to refuse to enter the Promised Land, the Lord caused them to wander in the desert for 40 years, until that entire generation died. Their children entered the Promised Land in their place.**
 - c) According to Hebrews 3:11, what was the result of Israel's hard-heartedness and disbelief? **God swore they would never enter His rest.**
- 8) Read Exodus 33:14, Jeremiah 6:16, Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28-30, and Colossians 2:6 ("Just as...continue [in the same way]").
- a) According to Hebrews 3:18-19, failure to enter God's rest is the result of unbelief. Is there a measure of unbelief preventing you from entering the rest God offers you today? If so, what is the nature of your unbelief? **The Lord offers us rest. In Exodus, God's presence brought rest to the weary Moses. In Jeremiah, the Lord told Israel that they would find rest by following in His ways. In Matthew 11, Jesus offered rest to all those weary and burdened who were willing to learn from Him and take His yoke. First, we must stop striving to earn salvation; it is a gift of God. Second, we must stop striving to live the Christian life on our own. Only Christ can live the Christian life. Colossians 2:6 says we must live the Christian life in the same way we entered the Christian life. Both happen by resting in Christ's adequacy. Personal sharing.**
 - b) According to Hebrews 4:12, what will help you recognize the signs that you may be falling back into the old, stress-filled way of living by self-effort (it will also do the necessary "heart surgery" to teach you to rest in Christ's adequacy)? **The written word of God judges our motives and thoughts and reveals any movement from His rest back into self-effort.**

Read Hebrews 4:14-6:12.

- 9) The Hebrews were exhorted to "hold firmly to their faith" since Jesus, our "great high priest" can sympathize with our weaknesses (4:14-15). What kinds of things can weaken Christians and tempt us to move from a firm position in our faith? **Those who are immature in the faith and tempted to doubt God's goodness and promises are more likely to deny their faith or be weakened by persecution and difficulties. When sin has a Christian in its grip, some wander (or even deny their faith) in an attempt to suppress the Holy Spirit's conviction.**
- 10) According to Hebrews 5:7, how did Jesus handle temptation when He was on earth? What two methods of coping with weakness (temptation) does the author of Hebrews outline (4:14-6:3)? **When tempted, Jesus poured out His anguish in prayer with "loud cries and tears." He was "heard because of His reverent submission." Through the suffering involved in riding out and denying temptation, He "learned obedience." We are exhorted to approach God's throne (pray) to receive mercy and grace to help us when we are weak (4:15-16) and to digest the "solid food" of God's word, not just the elementary teachings. The deeper truths enable us to distinguish good from evil when applied to our everyday lives (5:11-14).**

- 11) Hebrews 6:4-6 is a difficult passage that issues a very serious warning in the context of prolonged immaturity in the faith. What marks of immaturity does the author mention in 5:11-6:3 and 6:7-12? In consideration of these, where are you on the road to spiritual maturity? **Those who are spiritually immature are incapable of teaching others (5:12); they have not learned by continual practice to discern good from evil (5:14); they only want to hear the same foundational teachings over and over again (6:1-2); there is no clear evidence of faith in their lives (6:8); and they are spiritually lazy, failing to imitate the example of the diligent (6:11-12). Personal sharing**

Read Hebrews 6:12 -7:28.

- 12) Hebrews 6:12-19 discusses the confidence we can have in God's promises. Read Genesis 15:1-6, 17:15-19, and Romans 4:13-22 in connection with Hebrews 6:12, 15. How did Abraham's hope become an "anchor for his soul" (Hebrews 6:19)? **Abram believed the Lord's promise and the Lord credited it to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). He waited patiently for a long time; the promise was not fulfilled until his old age. Yet, Abraham held tenaciously to God's promise because he believed God. "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed... Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead... Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised" (Romans 4:18-21).**
- 13) The background to the discussion on Melchizedek is found in Genesis 14:17-20. Melchizedek was a priest and a contemporary of Abraham, but he was not Abraham's relative. Four hundred years after Abraham lived, the Mosaic Law stated that only the descendants of Aaron were qualified to serve as Israel's priests. Aaron was a Levite (he descended from Abraham's great-grandson Levi). In what ways is Jesus "a priest in the order of Melchizedek" (one way is given in 7:6, 14 and a second way in 7:3, 16-17)? **Neither Jesus nor Melchizedek descended from the tribe of Levi (7:6, 14) and they are both "without genealogy" (7:3, 16-17 [Jesus is without genealogy in the sense that He is eternal God and Melchizedek is without genealogy in the sense that the Scriptures contain no genealogical record for him]).**
- 14) Jesus was declared by the author of Hebrews to be superior to:
- Angels (chapter 1) Give verses: 4, 5, 13-14
 - Moses (chapter 3) Give verses: 3, 5-6
 - The Aaronic Priesthood (chapter 7) Give verses: 11, 22, 24, 28
- 15) Trace the word "oath" in Hebrews 6:13-7:28. What oath did God make (cite verses), what is the implication of God's oath (see 7:25), and from what do you need Jesus to save you "completely"? **The term "oath" appears in 6:16, 17; 7:20, 21, 22, 28. God has sworn by oath that Jesus will eternally remain our high priest (7:21) and that Jesus guarantees a "better covenant" (7:22). The implication, given in 7:25, is that Jesus" is able to save completely those who come to God because He always lives to intercede" for us. Most commentators understand the word "completely" to mean Jesus offers full deliverance. While some translations render the word "forever," are not both true? Because Christ has a permanent priesthood, His salvation is available at every stage of our life, and it extends to every possible sin. Personal sharing**