

# Hebrews

## Lesson 1 Chapter 1:1-14

### Participant Guide

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## **Lesson 1, The Superiority of Christ Hebrews 1:1-14**

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,<sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.<sup>3</sup> The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. *Hebrews 1:1-3*

### **Prayers**

### **Introduction**

It is unknown who wrote Hebrews, when it was written, or where the Jewish-Christian recipients were. The author was a masterful theologian whose letter was regarded as canon in the early church (Clement of Rome, 95AD).

The author of Hebrews did not sign their name to the letter, unlike Paul, who commonly identified himself at the beginning and end of his letters. Nonetheless, Paul was regarded as the author in the early church [Clement of Rome (88-99AD), Saint Jerome and Augustine of Hippo (400AD)]. In 200AD, Tertullian attributed authorship to Barnabas, the disciple from Antioch who mentored Paul and accompanied him on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-4). The view that Paul was the author of Hebrews was widely held until the Reformation when Luther speculated the author of Hebrews was Apollos (a learned man with a thorough knowledge of the scripture, Acts 18:24). Other scholars propose various authors, including Luke, Timothy, Priscilla (who discipled Apollos with her husband Aquilla, Acts 18:26), and Clement of Rome.

Most scholars agree that Hebrews was written before 70 AD because it does not mention the Romans' destruction of Herod's temple in Jerusalem. The letter mentions persecution, imprisonment, confiscation of property (10:33-34), and enduring hardship (12:7). Persecution of Jewish Christians by Jewish leaders began immediately following Jesus' death. Emperor Claudius expelled Christians from Rome in 49 AD. Emperors Nero and Domitian murdered Christians for entertainment beginning in 64AD and through the 90s.

The closing farewell in Hebrews, "Those from Italy send you their greetings" (Hebrews 13:24), suggest to some scholars the intended audience was Rome. However, scholars also speculate the letter was intended for Jewish-Christian communities in Greece or Asia Minor (Turkey) because the letter was written in Greek, not Aramaic, and quotes the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Torah.

### **Read Hebrews 1:1-14**

<sup>Heb 1:1</sup> In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,<sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.<sup>3</sup> The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

<sup>4</sup> So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

Heb 1:5 For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father”?

Or again, “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son”?

Heb 1:6 And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.”

Heb 1:7 In speaking of the angels he says, “He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire.”

Heb 1:8 But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. <sup>9</sup> You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.”

Heb 1:10 He also says, “In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. <sup>11</sup> They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. <sup>12</sup> You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.”

Heb 1:13 To which of the angels did God ever say, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”? <sup>14</sup> Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

1. Introduction, what unique challenges did the Jewish-Christian community face in their faith?

**The Jews were God’s covenant people who worshipped in a manner ordered by God for at least 1600 years. Now they were faced with placing their faith in a new covenant through Jesus Christ. They also faced intense social and financial pressure to conform to their Jewish faith from family, friends, and civil and religious authorities. Some faced death for their faith.**

2. Introduction, what characters and traditions do Jews hold to be most sacred?

The writer uses the following comparisons to illustrate Christ’s superiority over their former faith:

Chapter 1-2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4:8

Chapter 5

Chapter 8.

Chapter 8-10

3. In the opening verses, the author of Hebrews reminds the Jewish Christians of their rich spiritual heritage through the words of the prophets. How does God speak to us today?

4. Verse 2. How was Jesus’ testimony similar yet superior to the prophets?

5. Verse 2. The Father appointed his Son to be the heir of all things. What does this also promise us? (Many supporting verses, see Galatians 4:4-7, Ephesians 3:6, Titus 3:7, 1 Peter 3:7 )

Galatians 4:4-7 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. <sup>6</sup> Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son<sup>f</sup> into our hearts, <sup>g</sup> the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

6. Hebrews 1:2-3 are two of the most profound statements on the divinity of Christ found anywhere in scripture. The author follows up the statements with quotations from Psalms in verses 5-13. Discuss how Jewish Christians would have interpreted these passages from their Jewish beliefs and later from their Christian beliefs.

- a. Verses 2 and 5, As a Son?

Psalm 2:7 I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father.

**Jewish belief: God adopted the King of Israel as his son.**

**Christian belief:**

- c. Verse 2, 10-12 As Creator?

Psalm 102:25-27, <sup>25</sup>In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. <sup>26</sup> They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. <sup>27</sup> But you remain the same, and your years will never end.

**Jewish interpretation: God, the one and only created the heavens and earth, he is eternal.**

**Christian interpretation:**

- d. Verse 3, As the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of God's being?

Ezekiel 1:26 Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. <sup>27</sup> I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. <sup>28</sup> Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

**Jewish interpretation: Ezekiel's vision describes a type of angel, a seraphim**

**Christian interpretation:**

- e. Verse 3, By providing purification of sins?

Isaiah 49:6 “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”

**Jewish interpretation: God would raise up Israel to be a light to the world and lead men to God through the law of Moses and the sacrificial system.**

**Christian interpretation:**

- f. Verse 3, 8-9 Reigning in heaven?  
Psalm 45:6-7 Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. <sup>7</sup> You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.

**Jewish interpretation: Psalm 45 is a song performed for the king. God placed the king of Israel above his companions.**

**Christian interpretation:**

- 7. In verse 3, the author makes another profound statement. Not only did the Son create the universe, but he also upholds the universe by the power of his word. How did Jesus demonstrate this power during his ministry?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 8. In the King James Bible and the creeds of the church, Jesus is called God’s “only begotten Son.” This expression is sometimes misunderstood to mean that the Father created the Son or that the Son was not eternal, but the word has other meanings, including “only,” “one and only,” and “honored.” Discuss Genesis 22:12 to understand alternative uses of the phrase as it relates to Abraham, Isaac, and Ishmael: “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now, I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 9. In Verse 1:7, the writer tells the Hebrews that Christ is superior to angels. Angels became prominent in the early church, Jewish thought, and rabbinical writing between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. The interest in angels was similar to how the New Age Movement increased the interest of angels in mainstream Christianity after the 1970s. Angel means “messenger.” As God’s messengers, they appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Acts 7:30), brought the law to Moses on Sinai (Acts 7:38), and served as mediators between God and man. Others believed God did nothing without consulting his heavenly host (Let us make man in our image). What spiritual danger does the interest in angels pose – if any?

### **Read Hebrews 2:1-4**

<sup>Heb 2:1</sup> We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. <sup>Heb 2:2</sup> For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, <sup>Heb 2:3</sup> how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. <sup>4</sup> God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

10. Let's be clear- what is the great salvation (verse 3) the Hebrews were turning from?

11. How was the message of this salvation testified (verses 2-4)?

12. What is your story about how you came to faith in Jesus as your Savior?

### **Closing Prayers and Blessing**