

HEBREWS Bible Reading Schedule

3 Weeks

WEEK 1

The Bible student in you and me needs to show up and discover God's profound message in this Book. We will wade into these waters and courageously move toward the deep end. This book may be especially challenging but it also is very rewarding.

The mystery of Hebrews begins with the fact that we aren't sure who wrote this letter. But we do know the first audience as the material highlighted in the letter points to believers returning to Judaism. It was probably written to Christians in Rome. The opposition was growing in strength as the pagan society mistrusted the new religion of Christianity and then, the Jews added to the conflict with a stronger denial of Christ and a contrary interpretation of the Old Testament message about the Messiah. Thus, the spiritual fervor of many believers was waning and some were even abandoning Christ and the church.

The emphasis in Hebrews is on Christ as truly being the Son of God; the importance of perseverance and growing stronger in the Lord; on the validity of who Jesus is and what he accomplished; concluding with the call to remain faithful. There are three sections that will give us a three-week outline through this profound book. Chapters 1 to 4 introduce us to the superiority of the Son; chapters 5 to 9 point to the significance of Christ's sacrifice which supersedes the Jewish sacrificial system; chapters 10 to 13 contain exhortations to faithfulness. This will be a rich journey through the timeless teaching of what one author called the "sleeping giant" of the New Testament.

DAY 1 – Hebrews 1 to 4

Last week I found it so helpful when we read through the complete letter to the Colossians first before we looked more deeply to what Paul wrote. It helps to read a bigger section to get the flow of the book before probing more deeply into each chapter. It isn't realistic to have you read the whole book of Hebrews for one day, but this first section gives you a good sense of the purpose of the book. Elevating Christ as the Son of God is always an important emphasis. In these first four chapters Christ is the exact representation of the Living God and well surpasses the angels and even Moses. The confusion relates to Jesus becoming a man which caused some to think of him as less than. However, the author explains the purpose in chapter 2. Also, Moses was the hero of God's people and is venerated as someone closer to God than any other human being. Some suggested that Moses was more "perfect" than Jesus. These touch points were identified because the Messiah was clearly more significant than angels or the hero, Moses. The goal was to present Christ as the final Word. In the final chapter of our reading today we are introduced to the invitation to enter God's rest. This is something that Jesus offered/offers to those who believe in him. Christ's work of the cross covers our need to work to get to heaven. Salvation is a gift and

we are invited to rest in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Plus, rest is the description of heaven which we will enjoy one day as followers of Christ. I can imagine that reading through these four chapters only energizes your desire to read each chapter more reflectively. What would you say stood out to you the most in this reading overview?

DAY 2 – Hebrews 1

The title, The Letter to the Hebrews, tells us about its purpose. Right away the author is addressing a topic that was very pertinent to a first-century Jew. Angels had a high status for the Jews with a fascination for and worship of these invisible beings. You will notice that the author uses Old Testament passages to make his point as the record of the OT was the foundation of Jewish faith. The connection of Christ to the OT message was an essential part of this letter. The believing Jews were beginning to question the authority of Christ. He begins his argument by comparing Jesus to the angels. Personally, I revel in verses 1 to 4 because they introduce the glory of Jesus; I believe these words with all my heart. But some of the people he was writing to did not. So, he must give a credible apologetic beginning with the distorted understanding the people had about angels. Verses 5 to 14 are OT passages strung together to convince the hearer or readers of the scriptural evidence of the Son's superiority. Angels are real, according to the Bible. We can be thankful for angels. But their identity next to the Lord Jesus is lower by far. What phrase of comparison are you noticing? Verse 14 might be the most helpful and succinct statement about how to view angels in all the Bible: "Angels are only servants—spirits sent to care for people who will inherit salvation." One translation uses the description of "ministering agents" of God. But back to the beginning with my encouragement for you to pray a worship prayer with these four verses directing your prayer. Isn't this paragraph one of the most expressive and inspiring texts about Jesus found in the Bible?! What do you think?

DAY 3 – Hebrews 2

The first verse in this chapter appears to be the purpose behind the letter. The author was concerned that the believers "not drift away." (V1) This word literally refers to a ship getting off course. We will be discussing the meaning of these words while we read through Hebrews and examine the strong warnings that are delivered through this book. I think it is important to know that scholars are not in agreement about who is addressed in these "warning passages." It might be Jews who showed an interest in the Gospel but are now drifting away. It could be directed to believers who face God's judgment but are not in danger of actually losing their salvation. It could be directed at people who say they are true believers but show their lack of genuine faith by turning their back on Christ. My point is that the warnings of Hebrews are meant for us all to realize that nothing is more important than a genuine and continuous relationship with Christ. If that weakens, we have been forewarned; God loves us too much to let it just slide. He will discipline us as we will clearly read about in Hebrews 12. The last section teaches us about the importance of Jesus becoming human. Jesus came to be among us so that he could show us the way to glory. Jesus came with the main purpose of defeating the devil and dying in our place. Jesus came so that he might identify with us as brothers and sisters, facing suffering in this life that we all experience. He would then be able to sympathize with us concerning the trials and testing of life. This he did for us, making his role much higher and more significant than the angels. The author will revisit these themes several times. In what way does your love and appreciation for Jesus increase after reading this chapter?

DAY 4 – Hebrews 3

The NIV uses this phrase in verse 1, “fix your thoughts on Jesus.” This is the remedy for drifting as a believer. The author will share this idea again in Hebrews 12:2, “fixing our eyes on Jesus.” The literal word is “consider,” and it means riveted or dwell on. If we keep our eyes on Jesus, we will be able to persevere. And Jesus is the One who can help us continually because he is the Son and Moses was just the servant. Moses had such a high standing in the Jewish faith but the author clearly presents Jesus as greater than Moses. Like angels, Moses is inferior to Christ. Many Jews of the first century regarded Moses as the greatest person in history. So, the author points to something specific related to Moses and the Hebrew people of the Exodus. Moses was an exceptional leader but the people still responded in unbelief. However, believing in Christ has the power to sustain us for he will never let go. In fact, we can play an important role in the lives of fellow believers who might be tempted to drift in their faith and allegiance to God. Verse 13 tells us to “encourage one another.” This will be repeated again in Hebrews 10:24 – 25, “spur one another on” and “meet together for encouragement” as a community of believers. We actually have a very important role in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Simply, we are called to encourage one another which will keep us from being “hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” (V13) The message is one of warning again with 40 years of wandering in the wilderness as something that God did once as punishment and the idea is he will do it again if unbelief and disobedience grip our lives. How do you respond to another strong warning about drifting in your faith?

DAY 5 – Hebrews 4

The first 11 verses are the main topic for the chapter but not my main interest even though I think entering God’s rest is a beautiful thing. The connection to resting in the Promised Land is an example of missing out on God’s rest because of unbelief. This can still be true for people today. However, the rest that Jesus offers is permanent so don’t harden your heart to Him. Clearly, the gift of rest has two main components: 1) Those who believe in him have ceased from their own works; they no longer work for God’s acceptance, but they trust in Christ’s finished work and enjoy the blessings of peace with God. 2) But also, believers look forward to an eternal life of rest and enjoyment in God’s presence. Jesus gives complete and perfect rest! But my main focus is applying the truth of verses 12 to 16. God’s Word, God’s omniscience, God’s High Priest, and God’s gracious receptivity to us because of Jesus are found in these verses. They are inspirational and edifying to me. We know that God’s Word is eternal and life-changing. Verse 12 affirms our high view of the Word. What stands out to you? Verse 13 reminds me of Psalm 139, which tells us that God is everywhere, all-knowing, and completely powerful. We cannot pull the wool over God’s eyes. His eyes range throughout the earth (2 Chronicles 16:9). Asa, Judah’s King ignored this truth and suffered because he relied on a pagan king rather than on God who saw his disobedience clearly because nothing is hidden from God’s sight. But nothing matches the gracious posture of Christ as our High Priest who can empathize with our weaknesses and temptations. We are invited into the throne room of God’s grace with our prayers, concerns, and failures. How do these verses stir your heart? Let us continuously approach God with confidence knowing that he cares for us. “Cast all your cares upon the Lord for he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7) Amen!

WEEK 2

What a great choice for us as we dive into this profound book! I had forgotten how many soul-shaping verses there are in Hebrews. Hasn't it been especially rich as well as challenging?! I am also glad that we are slowing down enough to absorb the message and realize our own need to grow and not drift. This gets into the meat of the author's concern. The message of our Christian faith has no comparisons; there are no real rivals to Christ and his ministry, both in the first century and still today.

DAY 6 – Hebrews 5 to 9

I found that a read-through made a big difference for me, so I want to practice it again. We will focus on these five chapters this week but our first task is to read through this section in one setting. It will take about 15 minutes or so, but it will make the Scripture come alive as we look at each chapter one day at a time for the remaining days of the week. I bet you noticed the continued emphasis on Christ and his distinction as our high priest. Referring to Jesus as our High Priest is unique to Hebrews. That makes it even more profound to me. He also ties this idea to Melchizedek which is even more exciting and mysterious. These are powerful truths that cannot be overlooked and should be included in our understanding of Jesus. Plus, by the end of the week, we will be reading about the New Covenant and how it supersedes the old one. The New Covenant could not be more significant to our understanding of what Christ has done and what that means to us. Why is the New Covenant so significant? What aspect of the New Covenant especially gets your attention? What was your overall impression of these chapters on the Son and the sacrificial system? This week we are swimming in the deep end. May the Lord bless our pursuit of truth and a growing relationship with Christ!

DAY 7 – Hebrews 5

The topic of Jesus being a High Priest for us was launched in 4:14 last week. This is very unique as well as fascinating. We will read about what this means for the rest of the week. But Jesus isn't any old High Priest; "he is a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." (V6) This will be the main topic when we read chapter 7 but for now the idea that God appointed his Son to be our High Priest is the emphasis. However, I find the most challenging words to be found in verses 11 to 14. We can understand the rebuke in verse 12: "You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food." This one verse says so much. It tells us that God's plan is for us to learn and grow just like Jesus even learned (V8). Jesus learned obedience from suffering which is so interesting because we might think Jesus didn't need to learn a thing. But these Hebrew believers were not growing so they needed to be taught the basics all over again. It also tells us that God meant for us to pass on what we know and have learned to others. Their lack of maturity was affecting the whole body. Things were slowly declining and believers were drifting. Chapter 6 will carry this theme through verse 12 so you can anticipate words of deep concern about the lack of growth in the church. The main question is are you teaching anyone what you know about Christ and following him? If not, why not? Also, if you are not growing, what would you need to do so that you might have the greatest potential to grow in your faith?

DAY 8 – Hebrews 6

This chapter carries on with the theme of spiritual immaturity and a sluggishness about the things of God. The author lists the topics that need to be repeated and tells the readers it is time to move forward. But before he gives them any hope, he offers one of the heaviest warnings in the Bible. Verses 4 to 8 have been interpreted differently by a variety of theologians. So, my thoughts might differ from yours. I find it interesting that the author does not refer to those he is addressing as saved. They have lots of exposure to the things of God, yet seemingly turn their back on the marvel of knowing Christ and being one of His. The idea that there is a lot at stake also makes sense to me because one's eternal destiny is being addressed. There could be a point of no return because the person won't ever be inclined to truly repent. But verse 9 says, "We really don't believe it (this warning) applies to you. We are confident that you are meant for better things, things that come with salvation." That's big. Now the author mentions salvation. It is one of the most challenging spots in the Bible and affirms the lasting change the Lord makes in the hearts of those who truly believe. And the way he concludes this chapter is very hopeful. If the Hebrew believers take to heart their pursuit of God by embracing the promises of God, they then follow the example of Abraham and have hope. We have fled to the Lord for refuge (V18), so our hope is sure and our promises stand on the reliability of God. How often have people dabbled in the things of the Lord but ultimately go their own way? I wish that were never true but unfortunately, I have seen it as a pastor many times. This chapter does not make me nervous about my sure standing with the Lord but rather stirs my heart to know him even more deeply. How does this chapter speak to you?

DAY 9 – Hebrews 7

This topic may not seem that important to you but it is unique and profound as the author makes this statement, "Jesus is our high priest in the order of Melchizedek." We learn more about Melchizedek in these verses than anywhere else in the Bible. Melchizedek is an ideal example and forerunner for the Messiah as he was both king and priest. We know very little about him but the fact he is not from the tribe of Levi, since Levi had not yet been born, points to his representation of an eternal priesthood. So too, Jesus is from the tribe of Judah, not Levi, preparing for a change in God's plan which will be explained in the next chapter – the old covenant to a new one found in Jesus the Messiah. If you are curious about the Bible references for Melchizedek, I encourage you to read Genesis 14:17-20 and Psalm 110:4. That's all of them. David gives a prophetic message in Psalm 110 about the Son and his future reign through a victorious kingdom. The Messiah will be like Melchizedek who had no beginning and will have no end. Our understanding of Melchizedek is limited, of course, but the conclusions presented in this chapter are exceptional and assure us again of the superiority of Jesus. The trend with the Jewish believers who are addressed through this book was to lessen the identity and Lordship of Jesus. The mystery of Melchizedek was a perfect example of challenging the weakening posture of believers and affirming again Jesus, our new High Priest, is the one who never sinned and will never die, making him permanent and worthy of our highest allegiance. How might the Lord be speaking to you through this unique connection to Melchizedek?

DAY 10 – Hebrews 8

You have heard the phrase, “Those are fighting words,” right?! Verse 5, “They (the misguided Jews) serve a system of worship that is only a copy; a shadow of the real one in heaven.” That is pretty much a “putdown.” This chapter ends on a similar note saying that the Jewish covenant is obsolete and out of date. I imagine some Jews took offense but so much was at stake. The author challenges the old way of doing things and points to Jesus Christ as the mediator of a far better covenant with God. I, for one, am absolutely inspired by the meaning of the New Covenant and how Jesus ratified this new approach to knowing God through his shed blood on the cross. Even though this is a NEW Covenant, the idea of God initiating covenant relationships with his people is not new. He made promises to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the whole nation known as the Hebrews, as well as to David, for example. But the anticipation of a new covenant was clearly prophesied by Jeremiah in Jer 31:31-34 which is quoted in this chapter. The new covenant highlights knowing God, being empowered by God from the inside out, and having all our sins forgiven and forgotten. With his sacrificial death, Jesus established this new covenant between God and those who respond in faith. Which aspect of this covenant blesses you the most? Why? Tomorrow we will continue the comparisons between the old and new covenant. Aren't you glad to be on this side of our Lord's death and resurrection? Our faith brings freedom and access to God which previously only the High Priest could experience. There's nothing better in the world than to be a participant in a covenant relationship with God through his Son, Jesus Christ.

DAY 11 – Hebrews 9

Isn't this chapter interesting!? We learn some important aspects of the sacrificial system so crucial to the Jewish faith. The setup of the tabernacle was very purposeful. The curtain plays a big role in our understanding of what Jesus came to do. When our Lord died the curtain was torn in two giving access to people seeking God. The contents of the Ark of the Covenant are highlighted as well. The jar of manna reminds God's people of his miraculous provision. Aaron's staff reminds them not to rebel. But the tablets of the covenant supersede the other items directing the people on how to live out the covenant God has established. All this is in the first five verses. It goes on to identify the Most Holy Place and the role of the High Priest. This is a setup for presenting Jesus as superior to the rigid ways the old system was instituted. From verse 11 on we read a comparison that contrasts the old way to the “perfect” sacrifice made by Christ as High Priest. These arguments are directly given to Jewish believers who are questioning the significance of Christ and his identity as the Messiah. The sacrificial system made the shedding of blood central to the need for forgiveness. The second half of verse 26 says it all, “But now, once for all time, he has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice.” The end of the age is usually translated as “ages” pointing to the inauguration of the new covenant and access to salvation by faith and faith alone. This is sometimes referred to as the “church age.” We then believe that the only thing left in God's sovereign plan is for Christ to return and consummate the new covenant and usher in the eternal kingdom where Christ will reign forever just like this chapter closes with “He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him.” Amen! What stood out to you from this chapter filled with a theological argument on Christ's sufficient sacrifice?

WEEK 3

Welcome to my favorite and most practiced part of the Book of Hebrews. We will focus on the last four chapters. These are packed with memorable and meaningful verses that are sure to make this a spiritually stimulating week for us. You probably know of the chapter thought of as the “Hall of Faith.” Some of the most quoted verses pertain to God’s discipline in chapter 12. My favorite verse is 10:25, “And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.”

DAY 12 – Hebrews 10 to 13

I know for a fact that this section is a bit longer and probably more difficult for you to carve out time to read as well as the topics are deeper and catch our attention more readily. That means reading through these chapters will be slower. I totally affirm the idea of reading more quickly through parts of the Bible so that when I return to contemplate God’s Word for understanding and application, I have already some familiarity with it. So, I am not letting you off the hook. Our first day this week is to read all four chapters in one setting with the anticipation of God speaking to us through His Word as we slow down and fill our minds and hearts with His Truth. Quite frankly, from 10:19 through the end of chapter 12, I find some of the most significant aspects for living my faith in all the New Testament. I am often stopped in my tracks as I read these verses. Also, I cannot overstate the power and inspiration of the significance of faith in chapter 11. All that leads to the first thirteen verses in chapter 12 which I have preached on multiple times in my life. I hope you can take the time necessary to receive God’s message in these concluding chapters. What part are you looking forward to diving into this week? Do you already know your favorite chapter? Thank you for taking this journey with me.

DAY 13 – Hebrews 10

I am actually stirred up by the first eighteen verses as they elevate the significance of Jesus. His willing sacrifice, by offering his body, that permanently removes sin is at the heart of the Gospel. The New Covenant is mentioned again as a conclusion to this important teaching on the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice. This brings out something especially negative about the old system. It reminded people of their sins again and again. That means they were continually guilty before God. But Christ’s offering was once and for all, “good for all time” (V12). Doesn’t that sound marvelous? And what does this mean? “Dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven’s Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus.” (Verse 19) We have access to the Father and can enter into his very presence with confidence. What a tremendous invitation. Verses 19 to 22, summarizes the implications of a perfect sacrifice found in Jesus. We are made clean through a relationship with him by faith. The next few verses are memory verses because they apply so often and so well. Hold tightly, stir one another on, and find encouragement by being together are the everyday messages we need to be reminded of. Verses 26 to 31 are somewhat controversial like chapter 6:4-6. But again, it seems to me, that the person warned has had the opportunity to receive the grace offered through Jesus and has decided against it. But the sacrifice of Jesus is the only lasting provision for sin. Without it, the only thing waiting for that person is judgment as an enemy of God. Do you remember this statement: “It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the

living God” if you deny his mercy? (V31) The final paragraph is meant for you and me because we are called to persevere. We will not turn away from the One who saved our souls. “But we are not like those who turn away from God to their own destruction. We are the faithful ones, whose souls will be saved.” (V39) What an incredible chapter! What do you want to remember from these 39 verses? Why?

DAY 14 – Hebrews 11

This chapter is especially fascinating to me. Faith is significant but easily misunderstood. Some see faith as meaning any form of spirituality (“he is a person of faith”). Others understand it as a resolute belief that something good is going to happen to them, a ticket to health and wealth. Still, others think that faith is a blind leap against known facts. None of these constitutes biblical faith, right?! Cain believed in God but Abel demonstrated faith (V4). Esau was not identified as a man of faith but his brother Jacob was (V21). Faith did not mean a life of ease and success as some people of faith were mocked, beaten, tortured, put in prison, and killed (Verses 35 – 38). Faith is placing one’s trust in the character of God and what He has revealed through His Word. Faith is a top-tier aspect of our relationship with God. “And it is impossible to please God without faith.” (V6) These examples of faith reveal the strongest quality of faith is trust. Abraham trusted God to keep his promise for a son when he was “as good as dead.” (V12) The description of Abraham being almost dead is priceless as he was 100 years old when the promised son was born, Isaac. Moses chose the harder path because he believed God even though it meant suffering. Rahab is an amazing example of believing God even though she was surrounded by godless people. So impressive that God spared her life and her family but also that she would be an ancestor to Jesus (Matt. 1:5). The list had one thing in common, “none of them received all that God had promised.” (V39) They all died prior to Christ’s promised coming. This should be especially impressive to us as we live on this side of Jesus. Still, faith is the key to a relationship with God. I have heard the definition of faith = forsaking all I trust him. I am drawn to that because my total dependence is on God and his promises. That kind of faith carries power and promise both now and forever. How’s your faith? What has this chapter revealed to you about faith?

DAY 15 – Hebrews 12

This chapter is full of practice direction and advice. Which phrase do you identify with the most: “Run with endurance the race (V1);” “endure hardship as God’s discipline (V7);” “look after each other (V15);” “Let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him (V28)?” I have previously told you that the emphasis on God’s discipline is of special interest to me. It is not only a relevant topic for living the Christian life but it is also a reference to the wisdom of Solomon in Proverbs 3:11-12. We often forget the power of trials and difficulties in our lives. God clearly tells us that he will use them to train us to be godly. The fact that these words were initiated by Solomon is significant to me. Solomon often struggled with sin and drifted in his walk with God. He knew that God would implement tough love when necessary to get his attention. In that way, we are very much like Solomon who needed God’s correction from time to time. The author of Hebrews refers to verses 5 to 11 as encouraging. But he also admits that “No discipline is enjoyable (pleasant) while it is happening...” (V11) How might the challenges and difficulties you are facing be something God is allowing to help you be stronger? Our tendency is to interpret hard things as bad. But this important message says the opposite. How might you need to reevaluate the hard stuff differently? Which verse might you choose to memorize from this extremely

practical chapter? I would suggest verses 1, 7, 11, or even 15. Whichever you choose, it is sure to help you along the way.

DAY 16 – Hebrew 13

If you like the variety of practical advice that fills God's Word, you will love this chapter. My Bible says "Practical Instructions" from verses 1 to 19. There's a lot in there but my attention was raised as I read verses 5 & 6 with a new appreciation and a strong desire for application by living with this perspective. "Don't love money..." rather remember that God is near and he will carry me through as my Helper. The promise that God will never leave me or forsake me has always been a comfort to me. But I don't remember thinking of it in regard to God's provision. It makes sense now but it is a new application for me. The key phrase is "be satisfied with what you have." (V5) For that sentence challenges us to focus on God meeting our needs. Needs are sometimes different than wants. The word "satisfied" is often translated as "content" which also makes perfect sense. God's presence and provision is enough and we can trust him in such a way that it keeps us from the love of money which 1 Timothy 6:10 says is "the root of all kinds of evil." Those two verses jump off the page to me. What did you notice in these 19 verses about practical advice for Christian living? Verses 20 to 25 are of interest to me also. I appreciate the message contained in the author's concluding benediction. This is a common way to wrap up a letter or even a sermon. Verse 22 refers to this letter as a "word of exhortation" which is another way of calling it a sermon. Another point of curiosity is the author's connection to Timothy in verse 23. It is not surprising that this writer would know Timothy and also be connected to Paul previously. The idea of Hebrews being written in the late 60s AD would place it before the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, but after Paul was martyred. Timothy might well be the predominate pastor at that time and most everyone would know who he is. We can fully trust the inspired authority of this book. It has explained so many important truths about the identity of Jesus the Messiah. I have loved our study in Hebrews. Now I want to challenge us a bit more by heading to the Old Testament and reading Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. This will occupy our journey through God's Word for about 5 weeks. I am looking forward to it as I have not often read through these Scriptures except for Esther. Thanks for doing this journey with me.