

The Key to  
Living By  
*Faith*

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### THE KEY TO LIVING BY FAITH

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS



Unlike the writers of the other letters in the New Testament, the author of Hebrews does not identify himself or the letter's recipients. But the content of the letter shows us that his audience is familiar with the Old Testament, the tabernacle, the Sabbath, the priesthood, the sacrifices...his audience is Jewish. That's why this book of the Bible is called the letter to the Hebrews.

But the message of the book is not for Jews alone; it is for Christians of all backgrounds. Still, its message is built on the Old Testament, which Paul in 2 Timothy 3:15 called "the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Hebrews will show you in a way no other New Testament book does the connection between the Old Testament and the New. It will encourage you and exhort you to live for Christ, and it will establish you in the truth of Christ's position and role in salvation.

# GOD HAS SPOKEN TO US IN JESUS



God began speaking to Israel through the prophets more than 3000 years ago. He used many different prophets—some who spoke verbally, like Nathan, some who wrote their message, like Malachi, and some who performed miracles, like Elijah. Some combined these methods of giving God’s message. They spoke “in many portions and in many ways.” But “in these last days, God has spoken to us in His Son” (Hebrews 1:1-2).



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## DAY ONE

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If you’ve studied any other letters in the New Inductive Study Series, you probably remember that we start by marking references to the author and recipients to see what we can learn about them, their situation, their motivations, their problems, and the like. Then we try to determine what is going on that caused the author to write the letter, and that leads us to the theme or bottom-line message of the letter.

But Hebrews is different. The author doesn’t identify himself the way a classic Greek letter writer would, nor does he specifically identify his audience. Only by making note of the

key ideas in the letter do you learn that the recipients were steeped in the Old Testament. And the way we note key ideas is by marking key words. So that's how we'll start. Key words repeatedly show us the key ideas and themes as well as the author's emphasis—what is most important or central to his message.

As we read and mark the text, the idea is to investigate the text. So each time you mark something key, ask the 5 W's and an H—who, what, when, where, why, and how. Read with a purpose—to discover what you can from the text. Ask questions like these: How does this sentence relate to the rest of the paragraph? Does this passage include a sequence, a comparison or contrast, or a cause and effect? To whom is the author referring?

Many of the key words and phrases occur throughout Hebrews, so list those on a three-by-five card and mark them the same way you plan to mark them in your Bible. (You can use this card as a bookmark.) Doing this as you go from chapter to chapter will help you mark consistently and save time. Remember, the point is not to fill your Bible with beautiful marks, but to unlock the author's message. Focus on what you learn, not on the way you mark. Your bookmark will not only save you time but also help you think about and process what you've read.

Read Hebrews 1 today, and mark references to *God the Father*, *Jesus*, and *angels*, as well as the word *better*. Put these on your bookmark. Many of us mark *God* with a purple triangle. The triangle reminds us of the Trinity, and purple is often a royal color, so it reminds us that God is the supreme ruler. Some people also shade the inside of the triangle with yellow because God is light. You can decide how you'll mark *God the Father*. Some use a similar symbol when marking *Son*, with the same colors and similar shape, but adding a

cross. Others draw a simple cross in red to remind them of the blood Jesus shed on the cross. Choose your own symbol and/or color you want to use to mark *angels*.

Ask the 5 W's and an H as you go so you can absorb the import of what the writer is communicating.

Another way to increase your understanding of the passage is to mark time phrases. Some people mark them with a clock, and some highlight them with a color. These phrases reveal sequences and show when events occur. Mark time references in Hebrews 1. As we progress through this study, mark them in each chapter.

## DAY TWO

Don't forget to begin your study time with prayer. Remember that God is the ultimate Author of the book of Hebrews and that He wants you to understand and live by every word it contains.

Make lists today of what you learn from chapter 1 about God, about the Son, and about angels. Just go through the text one key word at a time, and each time you see a marked word, write what you learn about the person or character. Keep asking the 5 W's and an H. Each item on your lists will answer one of these questions. These lists form the basis of the message about that character. Who is God? What do we learn about His character and His ways? What is the relationship between God and the Son? Between the Son and angels? The lists will show you.






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 DAY THREE
 

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Did you notice how much Hebrews 1 quotes the Old Testament? In the New American Standard Bible, quotes of the Old Testament appear in the New Testament in small capital letters. One principle of Bible study is that the best commentary on Scripture is Scripture itself, so we “cross-reference.” The New Testament often reveals a fuller meaning or understanding of Old Testament passages, and that’s what the writer of Hebrews does here. This is called *progressive revelation*. According to 2 Timothy 3:16, all Scripture is inspired (literally, God-breathed), so we know that the New Testament revelation provides us with *God’s* meaning. We don’t have to make up something on our own.

Old Testament quotes help us know whom the letter was written to. If the audience were not Jews, they would not have been convinced by appeals to the Old Testament. Read these Old Testament passages:

- ∞ *Psalms 2*. The quotation is from verse 7, but you need to read the whole psalm to get the context.
- ∞ *2 Samuel 7:14*. This is part of God’s covenant promise to build David’s house (to establish a lineage of kings through him), but God shows us in Hebrews that it applies to Jesus.
- ∞ *Psalms 97:7*. The last line of the verse (in the NASB rendering) is quoted in Hebrews. The marginal note in the NASB says that it could be translated “Worship Him, all you supernatural powers.”
- ∞ *Psalms 104:4*. Again, the marginal notes in the NASB line up with what God says through the writer of Hebrews.

∞ *Psalms 45:6-7.* This is a messianic psalm.

∞ *Psalms 102:25-27.*

∞ *Psalms 110:1.*

That's enough for today. Meditate on these things. Remember that the author of Hebrews said in verse 5 that God never said these things about angels, but He did say them about the Son.

## DAYS FOUR & FIVE

Yesterday you looked at the Old Testament evidence that the writer of Hebrews presents to show the difference between angels and Jesus. Now let's look at two other New Testament passages that quote some of these same Old Testament verses and see what we learn. Read Acts 13:26-37 and Matthew 22:41-46.

How does this relate to what you recorded on day 2 about Jesus? Perhaps you're beginning to form a conclusion about one of the author's purposes or his message about Jesus.

Hebrews 1:2 tells us that Jesus is heir of all things. What does that mean? Read the parable of the landowner in Matthew 21:33-46. Who is the landowner, who is the vineyard, who is the son of the landowner, and who are the vine growers?

Hebrews 1:2,10 also tells us that God made the world through Jesus. Many people believe it was only God the Father who created the world. Some cross-references will help us find the correct interpretation. Read the following and base your conclusions on Scripture:

- ☞ *Genesis 1:1-2*. “God” is the English translation of the Hebrew *Elohim*, which is plural. Who moves over the waters?
- ☞ *Genesis 1:26-27*. What do the words “our” and “us” tell you?
- ☞ *Colossians 1:15-16*. This passage also explains what is meant by the “firstborn” in Hebrews 1:6.

Hebrews 1:3 tells us that when Jesus had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. You’ll see this twice more as you study Hebrews, but read the following and record your insights:

Matthew 19:28

Matthew 26:63-64

Acts 2:32-35

Romans 8:34

Ephesians 1:20-23

Colossians 3:1

Revelation 3:21

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DAY SIX

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Finally, let’s look more closely at angels. People have a lot of funny beliefs about angels that aren’t based on the Bible. Many of these beliefs are spread by television, movies, and popular folklore. Hundreds of Bible verses illustrate the acts that angels have done, but who are angels? What is their relationship to us? Looking at verses about a topic like this forms the basis of what is called a topical study.

Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7 (Sons of God are angels.)

Psalms 34:7

Ezekiel 28:11-19 (This is about Satan.)

Luke 15:10

1 Corinthians 6:3

2 Corinthians 11:14

Galatians 3:19

Colossians 2:18

1 Timothy 3:16

1 Timothy 5:21

1 Peter 1:12

1 Peter 3:22

2 Peter 2:4,10-11

Jude 6-7

Revelation 12:7-9

Now summarize what you've learned about angels.

From all you've studied this week, using a few words or a key idea from Hebrews 1, determine the theme of Hebrews 1 and record it on HEBREWS AT A GLANCE on page 107. You'll determine a theme for each chapter in Hebrews, and when your AT A GLANCE chart is done, you'll have a table of contents and handy reference tool to find certain topics or themes within Hebrews. Then at the end of our study, our AT A GLANCE chart can help us understand the main theme of the letter.




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 DAY SEVEN
 

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Store in your heart: Hebrews 1:3

Read and discuss: Hebrews 1

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

- ∞ Discuss what you learned about angels.
- ∞ Discuss what you learned about Jesus.
- ∞ Compare Jesus to the angels.
- ∞ What did you learn about Jesus' relationship with God the Father?
- ∞ What did you learn about creation?

### THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

God says that His Son is different from the angels and different from the prophets. What makes Him different? Hebrews 1:3 says that Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature. The Greek word translated "radiance" is used only here in the New Testament, and it means "the perfect reflection of the brightness." The Greek word translated "exact representation" means an impression on something. The idea of the two together is that God's glory, which is His nature, is impressed on Jesus exactly, so that Jesus perfectly reflects God's glory.

If we understand that Jesus perfectly reflects God's glory, we can understand better what the writer means when he says that in these last days God has spoken to us in His Son. This is important: The text does not say that God has spoken

to us *through* the Son or *by* the Son, referring to what the Son has *said*. Instead, Jesus, the Son of God, is the way God speaks to us. He is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of God's nature. This also helps us understand John 14, where the disciple Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father. Jesus answers, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." In other words, to ask Jesus to show them the Father was silly. They had seen Jesus, so they had seen the Father's nature.

This means that Jesus *is* what God is. That's different from saying that Jesus *has* what God has. God didn't *give* Jesus something. Instead, Jesus *is* God.

And because Jesus is God, He upholds all things by the Word of His power. He was in on creating this world and all that is in it. Genesis teaches that in the beginning, God spoke all of creation into being. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit created the world. John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (John 1:1-3).

And Jesus isn't just the *Creator* of all; He is also the *Redeemer* of all. He made purification for sins. He did it Himself personally, and then Jesus, not just a prophet and not just an angel, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Prophets and angels are messengers of God's Word, but Jesus *is* the Word.