
Interpretation Bible Studies Leader's Helps—Hebrews

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The IBS Leader Helps are designed to facilitate group study by providing lesson plans for the ten units in each of the Interpretation Bible Studies. These lesson plans utilize a variety of interactive methods, which have been chosen for the express purpose of engaging participants in the learning process.

Each participant in the group should have a copy of the IBS study book and should make a commitment to do advance preparation for each session. The sessions are planned for forty-five minutes, giving the group that meets for one hour time to come together and complete any announcements or other business of the group. If the time allotted is shorter than an hour, it will be necessary to be selective about the activities, choosing those that are most appropriate for your group.

Leader Preparation

- *Read Hebrews in its entirety before beginning to teach.* It is important to familiarize yourself with the book's overall content, so you can see how the individual passages fit into the larger scope of the book.
- *Skim through the whole study book to discern its flow.* This is especially helpful if there are multiple teachers, in order to prevent leaping ahead into the next unit.
- *Prepare the room ahead of time.* For informal discussion and ease of sharing, a semicircular arrangement of chairs works best. Position yourself as one of the group, instead of setting yourself apart as "the authority."

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- *Secure necessary teaching aids.* A newsprint easel is an invaluable asset. Be sure to have markers and masking tape if you wish to display the sheets for future reference. Check the teaching suggestions for other necessary materials, such as hymnals, paper, pencils, art materials, and so on.
 - *Prepare necessary handouts.* A folder for each participant's handouts is helpful but not essential.
 - *Keep the key idea firmly in mind.* Make sure all activities point participants toward this goal.
 - *Pray for God's guidance.* Prior to making preparations for the session, allow time to pray for each participant and for yourself.

Jesus Christ Is the Exact Representation and Reflection of God's Radiance (Hebrews 1:1–4)

Key Idea: In the uncertain times in which we live, we can be assured that Jesus is above everything. By looking at Jesus, we can see the very light of God.

Advance Preparation

- On newsprint, a chalk or whiteboard, print the following from the introduction:

Studying the homily of Hebrews . . . is like going down a road you have traveled before, one where all the landmarks are familiar, only to discover this time that there are billboards, people, houses, streams, and side roads that you never noticed before.

- Also print on newsprint or poster board the sidebar “Ten Key Passages in Hebrews,” found on page 3. You will want to display this list for the duration of the study. Either print the portion of the Nicene Creed in activity 9 on newsprint or locate hymnals that contain the creed for participants.

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Say a Prayer

Pray the following prayer, or one of your own choosing:

God of our ancestors, you have revealed yourself through the glory of your son Jesus Christ. As we explore the book of Hebrews, draw us back to the centrality of our faith in Jesus Christ. Grant us the renewed certainty that God will keep us, and all believers, in powerful love, no matter when, no matter what. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

2. Sing a Hymn

Sing “The Universe Is God’s” (to the tune “Now Thank We All Our God”), the hymn by the author on page 10 of the study book.

3. Get Acquainted

Call the attention of participants to “Why Read Hebrews?” on pages 1–2 of the introduction to the study. The writer tells us that the original recipients of Hebrews faced situations impacting their lives in ways similar to what faces us today. Ask participants to introduce themselves and to take turns responding to this open-ended statement:

In this uncertain and violent world, in this study I hope to . . .

Jot down their responses on a sheet of newsprint. Save the newsprint until the conclusion of the study.

Presentation (10 minutes)

4. Introduce the Study

On the chalkboard, print “What Kind of Book? Who Was the Author? When Was It Written?” Then briefly summarize the information on pages 3–5 of the study book.

5. Hear the Sermon

Point out that the writer has identified this book as more like a sermon or exhortation. Since sermons are meant to be heard, invite a volunteer to read aloud Hebrews 1:1–4. Then call participants’ attention to the four scripture verses in the box on page 8. As other volunteers read these aloud, invite the group to listen for the lofty imagery used to describe Jesus Christ.

Exploration (15 minutes)

6. Explore Key Terms

Divide the group into five small groups or invite individuals to examine the key terms discussed on page 9 (and included in the box). Ask

each individual or group to quickly read over the information about the assigned term. Then read this statement from the top of page 9:

All five words are piled up to give an overwhelming impression of the brilliance, power, and prominence of Jesus and show how unique he is.

Discuss the following:

- How does your assigned term contribute to this picture?
- Consider the Gospel accounts. Is the same picture of Jesus painted there? Can you think of stories or incidents in the Gospels that would echo this depiction of Jesus? Can you name stories that focus more on Jesus' humanity?

7. Consider the Doxology

Call the attention of the group to question 1 on page 10. Invite half your group to say the words of the Doxology rhythmically. Then ask the other half to read Romans 11:33–36 in the same way.

8. Reflect on Light as a Metaphor

Ask the group to look at question 2 and then to read over the two suggested passages.

After allowing a few minutes for reading and reflection, print on newsprint or chalkboard the phrases “Light as a building block of the universe” and “Light of Christ.” Invite observations about the connection between the two.

For question 3, ask for a show of hands as to whether participants believe Christ was actually present with God at the time of creation. Then say that scientists say the light emanating from the Big Bang is still spreading out throughout the universe. What about the light of God revealed in Christ?

Response (5 minutes)

9. Say a Portion of the Nicene Creed

Remind participants that the writer tells us that the phrase “very being” was used by the church in the Nicene Creed to point to the

true essence or heart. Invite them to repeat the following from the Nicene Creed:

We believe . . . in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated on the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

Closing (5 minutes)

10. Join in Prayer

Tell participants you will use phrases from the Creed in the closing prayer, pausing for some moments of reflection about the phrases used to describe Jesus Christ as truly God:

Gracious and glorious God, we give thanks for the gift of your son Jesus Christ, God of God (pause), Light of Light (pause), Very God of Very God (pause). Grant us more glimpses of your majesty as revealed through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

11. Give an Assignment

Point out to participants the list “Ten Key Passages in Hebrews” you posted (also found on page 3 in the study book). Ask them to reread these passages frequently throughout the course of the study. Also ask that they read unit 2, “Jesus Christ Is Greater than All God’s Messengers and Servants” in the study book. Request that they read the seven Old Testament texts listed in the box on page 12 and be prepared to tell which of these texts strikes them as the most valuable in understanding Jesus’ relationship to God (question 1 on page 16). Ask for a volunteer or two to do some research on angels.

Jesus Christ Is Greater than All God's Messengers and Servants (Hebrews 1:5–14)

Key Idea: Through exploring a mosaic of images, we confront the greatness of Jesus Christ, who is far superior to any angels or messengers—or to any contemporary principalities and powers.

Advance Preparation

- Cut construction paper in several colors into 3" x 5" rectangles (enough for several for each participant), or get multicolored 3" x 5" index cards.
- Also get some fine-tipped black marking pens and masking tape, and post two blank sheets of newsprint for making mosaics of Jesus Christ.
- On newsprint, sketch the arc of Thomas Long's Parabola of Salvation, found on page 15 of the study book. Include the horizontal line and the line of parabola as well as the titles (without the descriptive phrases).

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Read Scripture and Pray

Read aloud Romans 11:33–36. Then pray the following prayer or one of your choosing:

Eternal God, we know that from and through and to you are all things. Open our eyes to your glory and to the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of the life in Christ that you offer. Amen.

Presentation (10 minutes)

2. Look at Old Testament Texts

Invite volunteers to tell which of the Old Testament texts from last week's reading assignment most spoke to them as being valuable in understanding Jesus' relationship to God. Ask them why they chose that text. Distribute the colored paper rectangles or index cards and the pens. Ask each person to print the selected Old Testament scripture on the paper. If participants did not choose some of the verses, print those on paper yourself. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the boxed quotation on page 13. Then invite each person to tape his or her piece of paper to the newsprint to make a mosaic of scripture verses. Discuss the three related questions in question 4 on page 16. Push the group to identify Old Testament ideas and prophecies that are particularly illuminating for them in understanding who Jesus is.

Exploration (15 minutes)

3. Explore Angels

Invite participants to share impressions they have gathered from popular culture of what angels are. Then ask for reports from the volunteers who did research on angels. Ask members of the group to look up and read aloud the references to angels in scripture listed on page 14. Discuss the following:

- How does your image of what an angel is, based on what we hear and see in our culture, differ from the biblical understanding? What differences do you see between the concept of the guardian angel and the messenger?
- If you were costuming an angel for the Christmas pageant, what would you consider a biblically authentic way for the angel to be garbed? Whom (or what type of person) might you choose to portray an angel if you were looking for appropriate typecasting or for translating the portrayal into the contemporary context?

4. Examine the Parabola of Salvation

Call the attention of participants to the diagram you sketched of Thomas Long's Parabola of Salvation. Ask the group to consider the three personas or images of Jesus that make up the diagram. Ask: Which images resonate most with you? Which seems the most remote or inscrutable? Are all three personas or images necessary for a more complete understanding of Jesus Christ? Invite a volunteer to read aloud Mark 9:2–8. Ask: why do you think Jesus' disciples did not know what to make of him?

5. Name Contemporary Idols

Call participants' attention to the information in "One Historical Parallel" on page 15. Now ask someone to read aloud question 2 on page 16. Ask the group to generate a list of people, systems, concepts, or forces that we are tempted to place above Jesus Christ in power and importance. Which ones does the group see as particularly insidious? How should the church respond to such idol making?

Response (10 minutes)

6. Create a Group Mosaic of Jesus

Distribute more pieces of colored paper and the fine-tipped pens to the group. Invite the members of the group to choose words, phrases, or symbols that they would use to honor Jesus Christ and print them on the paper. Then have them assemble these pieces of paper on the other sheet of newsprint to make a group mosaic of Jesus Christ.

Closing (5 minutes)

7. Examine Chain-Link Transitions

Refer the group to page 2 in the introduction where the writer discusses the devices used to make the sermon easier to listen to and remember. On newsprint, make a simple drawing of a chain link. Ask the group to identify the words or phrases in Hebrews 1:3–4 that provide this kind of transition to the next verses. Then draw another

chain link, and point them to verse 13. What is the transitional word or phrase here?

8. Sing a Hymn

Sing "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" as a closing prayer.

9. Give an Assignment

Ask participants to read unit 3, "Jesus Christ Is Our Trailblazer." Also ask a volunteer to do some research on Abraham and on his role in the three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Jesus Christ Is Our Trailblazer (Hebrews 2)

Key Idea: Through exploring key themes around the identity and nature of Jesus Christ, we deepen our understanding not just of who Jesus is but also of the key concepts of sanctification and atonement.

Advance Preparation

- Post four sheets of newsprint at intervals around the wall. If wall space is an issue, the sheets can be placed on tables. Print the following on the sheets:

Sheet 1: at the top, “The Human Being”; across the bottom, “What do you think is meant by the idea that Jesus is the heir to all things?”

Sheet 2: at the top, “The Trailblazer”; across the bottom, question 3 on page 23

Sheet 3: at the top, “Our Brother”; across the bottom, question 2 on page 23

Sheet 4: at the top, “High Priest”; across the bottom, question 4 on page 23

- Get four colors of felt-tipped markers.
- Continue to post the sheets with the Parabola of Salvation and the chain-link transitions.
- Also on newsprint, print this description of a cinquain:

Line 1: one word (a noun)

Line 2: two adjectives describing line 1

Line 3: three action verbs that relate to line 1

Line 4: four feeling words or a sentence that relates to line 1

Line 5: one word that is a synonym for line 1 or sums it up

Opening (5 minutes)

As participants arrive, invite them to use page 17 as a reference and to add to the newsprint sheet with the chain links some of the words and phrases that serve as transitions.

1. Read Scripture Together

Ask participants to find Psalm 8 in their Bibles. Invite them to read the first part of verse 1 (1a) in unison. Then ask individuals to take turns reading verses 1b–8. Close by reading verse 9 in unison.

2. Pray

Pray the following or a prayer of your own choosing:

Gracious God, capture our attention to what we will hear today. Grant that we do not drift away from your truth, but that we stay fast on the moorings of our faith. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Presentation (5 minutes)

3. Listen to Presentation on Abraham

Invite the volunteer to report on Abraham and his significance to the Abrahamic faiths.

Exploration (20 minutes)

4. Examine the Case

Call participants' attention to the information on pages 18–19 about the image of presenting evidence in a court of law. Briefly review the five sources of expert testimony cited by the writer of Hebrews. Then divide the group into two small groups. Assign to one group the paragraph about signs and wonders and to the other the paragraph about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Ask them to read the information as well as the scripture citations. Allow a few minutes for the groups to deliberate, and then ask each group to summarize the information, including any passage of scripture that particularly struck them. Ask: Where do you see signs and wonders today? Where do you see evidence in our church of the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

5. Examine Key Themes in the Sermon

Divide the two small groups into four groups or pairs, and assign one of the following key themes of the sermon to each: Jesus is higher

than angels; he is our trailblazer; he is brother to those who believe; he is our true high priest. Point out the four sheets of newsprint you posted around the room, give each group a marker, and ask that each group go to the assigned sheet of newsprint. Ask that they read the information in the study book on their theme, discuss it, and then note on their newsprint sheet what they believe to be two or three key insights about that theme. After about five minutes, ask each group to move to the next newsprint sheet, where they can add a comment or question about that theme and read over the question at the bottom of the sheet. Continue until each group has had a chance to comment on each of the key themes.

In the total group, allow each small group in turn a chance to make a comment or ask a question. Then discuss the four questions from the sheets. Ask: Which theme is most descriptive for you of who Jesus is? How do sanctification, atonement, and salvation relate to any of the key descriptive themes?

Response (10 minutes)

6. Write Cinquains

Ask someone to read aloud the study writer's poem in the box on page 21. Call the attention of the group to the newsprint where you outlined the form of cinquain poetry. Invite participants to choose one of the key themes and write a cinquain poem about it. If they like, participants can choose another form of poetry (even limerick). If anyone is really uncomfortable with writing poetry, he or she could write a descriptive paragraph or do a sketch or drawing. Invite volunteers to read aloud or share their creations.

Closing (5 minutes)

7. Pray Together

Remind participants of the opening words of chapter 2 that signal exhortation. Point out Hebrews 2:1 on the list of key scriptures, "Ten Key Passages in Hebrews." Read verse 1 aloud, and invite everyone to name things they have heard in the session that have further illuminated or extended their understanding of Jesus Christ or of their

faith. After allowing for a time of silence, close with, “In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.”

8. Give an Assignment

Ask participants to read unit 4, “Jesus Christ Is Greater than Faith’s Founders.”

Jesus Christ Is Greater than Faith's Founders (Hebrews 3:1–4:13)

Key Idea: By exploring the central Old Testament image of Moses and his role in the exodus as the servant of the house of God, we discover why the covenant between God and the people cannot be realized without Jesus Christ.

Advance Preparation

- Either obtain copies of your denominational hymnal containing the Apostles' Creed, or print it on newsprint for the closing activity.
- Provide paper and pencils or pens for the group.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Read a Psalm Responsively

Divide the group into two sections, and read Psalm 95 responsively.

2. Pray

Pray the following prayer or one of your own choosing:

*O Lord, our protector and our strength,
you guide us as the sheep of your fold.
In your goodness sustain us,
that our hearts may never be hardened
through unbelief of your holy Word,
but that we may serve you in true and living faith
and so enter into your heavenly rest **Amen.***
Daily Prayer, Supplemental Liturgical Resource 5¹

1. Daily Prayer, *Supplemental Liturgical Resource 5* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

Presentation (5 minutes)

3. Review Moses' Life

Using the first paragraph under “Moses and Jesus” (p. 24), ask participants to quickly review the life of Moses. Jot down the events of his life on a chalkboard or whiteboard. Point out that the writer of the study book calls Moses “the George Washington of the nation of Israel.” Ask someone to describe the comparison made by the author of Hebrews between Jesus and Moses.

Exploration (20 minutes)

4. Expand on the Metaphor of House

Call the attention of the group to the multiple meanings of the word *house*. Ask them to name some of the meanings of this metaphor in both the Old and New Testaments. Ask: How would you define the house of faith today? Is it a place, a people, or both? In what ways is God working as the architect and designer of our house of faith today?

5. Explore the Concept of Rest

Ask participants to name the various facets of spiritual rest the writer presents on pages 27–29. What does Hebrews mean when it says in 4:9 that “a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God”? Invite the group to discuss how Sabbath is lived out in contemporary society. Ask: Do you see Sunday as Sabbath, a time of spiritual rest, or as something else, like time to do grocery shopping or attend a child's soccer game? What happens when we do not make time for Sabbath in our lives? Ask someone to tell what sin is as defined by the writer of the study book. Does sin lead to spiritual unrest? Can the lack of Sabbath time lead to a basic attitude of rebellion against God's love?

Invite the group to read the scripture passages listed in question 1 on pages 29–30 and to discuss the question. Also discuss question 4 on page 30.

Response (10 minutes)

6. Characterize God's Word

Call the attention of the group to the way God's word is characterized in 4:12–13 and to the way the writer of the study makes the same point on page 29. Give participants paper and pencils or pens, and invite them to come up with their own comparisons that are descriptive of God's word and its precision in separating believers from their rationalizations. Invite some to share their comparisons.

Closing (5 minutes)

7. Use a Confession

Tell the group that the writer of the study comments that the confession of which Jesus is the apostle is “not merely a message, furthermore, but a certified statement of the truth that God wishes to transmit.” Further, this is a confession, a creedal statement like the Apostles' Creed. Invite the group to recite the Apostles' Creed together.

8. Give an Assignment

Ask participants to read unit 5, “Jesus Christ Is Greater than the Highest Religious Leaders.” Also ask for a volunteer to prepare to read Hebrews 5:11–6:12 aloud as a sermon.

5

Jesus Christ Is Greater than the Highest Religious Leaders (Hebrews 4:14–7:28)

Key Idea: Greater than the mysterious forerunner Melchizedek, Jesus is both higher than the highest priest and able to understand our human suffering.

Advance Preparation

- On separate sheets of paper, print the logical argument the author of Hebrews makes about Melchizedek found on page 32 of the study book. For example, on one sheet you would print, “A¹ The Jewish high priest offered animal sacrifices on the Day of Atonement for the forgiveness of sins (5:1–4).” On another sheet you would print the statement written after B¹, and so forth.
- Prepare to present a minilecture on Melchizedek, using the information in the study book as well as additional reference material.
- Also remind the volunteer who will present the “sermon.”

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Pray Together

Pray the following or a prayer of your own choosing:

Eternal God, we give thanks for your son, Jesus Christ, a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Open our minds to this complex piece of scripture we consider today. Shed light on its arguments and its logic. Provide us the means to digest what is indeed solid food, that our life and our faith may receive nourishment. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Presentation (5 minutes)

2. Present a Minilecture

Using the material on pages 33–34 and any other reference material to which you may have access, present a minilecture on Melchizedek.

Exploration (20 minutes)

3. Examine the Typology Argument

Point out that the writer of the study book tells us that the argument presented here that Jesus is an eternal high priest because he comes from the line of Melchizedek is the most difficult one in Hebrews. To help track the logic, the group will present orally what the study writer has laid out on page 32. Hand out the sheets of paper you prepared. Ask participants to read their sheets in order, that is, first the person with sheet A¹, then the person with B¹, and so forth. Encourage participants to listen carefully to the argument. Then discuss question 1 on page 37.

4. Explore the Humanity of Jesus

Say that up to this point, the author of Hebrews has focused on presenting the divinity of Jesus Christ, in the words of the writer of the study book, “the highest and most lofty view of Jesus Christ imaginable” (p. 7). But now the group will focus attention on Jesus’ humanity and his ability to empathize with our own sinfulness. Divide the group into two smaller groups. Ask one group to read the second paragraph on page 35 as well as the scripture citations about Jesus’ temptation, and ask the other group to read the third paragraph on that page and the scripture citations on Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Then discuss the following questions together:

- Where do you see evidence of Jesus’ empathy for us in these passages?
- What relevance do you see in the fact that Jesus was sinless?
- Question 2 on page 37.

Response (10 minutes)

5. Hear a Sermon

Tell participants that Hebrews 5:11–6:12 is characterized by the writer of the study book as some tough pastoral advice. Recalling that the entire book is exhortation, invite them to listen to this portion of the book being read as if it were a Sunday sermon. Then have the volunteer read the sermon.

6. Invite Sermon Response

Now invite the group to respond to the sermon. Ask:

- Do you believe blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is the unforgivable sin? Why or why not?
- What do you consider a “milk-fed” Christian?
- Where did you hear evidence of hope in this sermon?
- If this were a sermon you heard preached by your pastor, what points might you ponder on the way home? What questions would you have?

Closing (5 minutes)

7. Review Key Passages

Call the group’s attention to the list “Ten Key Passages in Hebrews.” Ask them to read over the first five. Ask: What insights are emerging for you from these passages? What questions?

8. Sing a Hymn

Close with a hymn such as “At the Name of Jesus” or “Crown Him with Many Crowns” that embodies both the deity and the humanity of Jesus.

9. Give an Assignment

Ask participants to read unit 6, “Jesus Christ Provides the More Excellent Ministry.”

Jesus Christ Provides the More Excellent Ministry (Hebrews 8)

Key Idea: In this center point of the book, we not only are reminded of Jesus' superiority but also are prepared to encounter Jesus, the mediator of a new and superior covenant.

Advance Preparation

- If possible, go online and find some information about Plato's Allegory of the Cave. An image of the cave, as well as a brief description, can be found at <http://www.people.cornell.edu/pages/gnl2/PlatoCave.jpg>.
- From red paper or poster board, cut out a heart shape for each participant.
- Obtain pens or fine-tipped black markers.

Opening (5 minutes)

As participants arrive, invite them to take paper and pencil and jot down briefly what they think is the main point of Hebrews 8:1.

1. Use a Call and Response

Open the session with this call and response from Psalm 15:

One: O LORD, who may abide in your tent?
Who may dwell on your holy hill?

All: Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak truth from their heart.

2. Pray

Pray the following or a prayer of your own choosing:

Gracious God, we give thanks that you dwell with us and that your presence is made known to us. We know that our lives are far from blameless and that we often shy away from what is right in favor of what is expedient. Open our hearts to your covenant of love, revealed in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Presentation (10 minutes)

3. Share the Main Point

Invite participants to share in turn what they wrote as the main point of Hebrews 8:1 (question 1 on p. 43). Then come up with a group consensus of the point, and print it on a chalkboard or whiteboard. Point out that the writer of the study book calls chapter 8 the center point of the letter, both reminding readers of the high concept of Jesus Christ and preparing them to move forward.

Exploration (15 minutes)

4. Describe the True Tent

Invite the group to create a verbal description of the tabernacle using the information on pages 39–40. Ask the first person to give one detail, and then invite other group members to add details one at a time until all information the group can come up with has been added. Then contrast the tabernacle with the Temple, making reference to the history of the Temple. Ask: how did the role of the priest evolve? Refer the group to page 41 and to Craig Koester’s assertion that Jesus may be more than the new high priest for Judaism. Discuss:

- How do you respond to the idea that Jesus is the center of true worship for every religion? Do you agree or disagree?
- What impact would this idea have on interfaith dialogue?
- Question 3 on page 43.

5. Explore Plato’s Allegory

Present the information you obtained about Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, including a diagram if you were able to find one. Then invite

the group to think of an allegorical reference from today's culture, whether literary or more popular culture, that might make the same point. Is there such an allegory?

6. Present Jeremiah's New Covenant

Invite participants to listen as someone reads Jeremiah 31:31–34 aloud. Then ask someone else to read the sixth of the “Ten Key Passages in Hebrews,” 8:6–7. Divide into three small groups or pairs, and assign to each one of the Old Testament passages at the bottom of page 42 (God's promise after the flood, the call of Abraham, and the giving of the Ten Commandments and the law). Ask them to discuss:

- What is the covenant in this passage? What promises are made?
- Why was a new covenant necessary by the time of Jeremiah?
- What is a covenant “written on the heart”? How is it better?
- Question 4 on page 43.

Response (10 minutes)

7. Discuss Covenants Written on the Heart

Remind the group that the history of God's dealings with the people of God is characterized by God's reaching out to make covenant promises, the people breaking the covenant, and God reaching out yet again. Invite them to consider the discussion of question 4 and to note on one side of their paper heart what promises they think God extends to them and on the other side what they feel they promise to God. Allow time for reflection on how they believe God responds when covenant promises are broken by individuals, as they inevitably will be.

Closing (5 minutes)

8. Close with Prayer

Invite those who are willing to read the words and phrases from their heart as part of a closing prayer:

God of the covenant, we trust in your promises to us: (invite individuals to read what they believe God has promised).

In response, O God, we promise: (invite response).

*With the knowledge that where we fall short you are always there in steadfast love, we ask your blessings on us. **Amen.***

9. Give an Assignment

Ask participants to read unit 7, “Jesus Christ Provides the Better Covenant and the Better Promises.” Remind them to continue to review the “Ten Key Passages from Hebrews.” Read ahead in unit 7 and decide if you would like a brief presentation on the Jewish Day of Atonement. If so, ask one or more volunteers to research it. A good Web site for information is <http://www.jewfaq.org>.

Jesus Christ Provides the Better Covenant and the Better Promises (Hebrews 9:1–10:18)

Key Idea: Through exploring the contrast between the old and new covenants, we discover that in Jesus the perfect sacrifice has been made for our sins, once and for all.

Advance Preparation

- If possible, obtain a detailed diagram of the tabernacle. You may find one among church school materials or on the Internet.
- Get a copy of the words of institution for the Lord's Supper. You may find them in your denomination's book of common worship or other worship reference book, or you can ask your pastor for a copy.

Opening (5 minutes)

As participants arrive, assign to each person one of the areas of the tent of meeting or implements of worship from pages 44–45 (if your group is large, two or more people may be assigned to one item). Ask them to read the description from the text as well as the scripture citations and to locate on the diagram on page 44 where it would be found.

1. Sing a Hymn

Sing “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.”

Presentation (10 minutes)

2. Explore the Implements of Tabernacle Worship

Ask participants to briefly describe the area or worship implement from the tent that they were assigned, including locating it on the diagram of the tabernacle.

Exploration (20 minutes)

3. Discuss the Concept of Atonement

Point out that the writer of the study says that the words “how much more” are central to understanding the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Discuss the following:

- The writer comments: “The question that must be raised today, of course, is just how effective is this concept for an understanding of the atonement in the modern world? Since the concept of animal sacrifice is meaningless to us, how do we understand the efficacy of Jesus’ death on the cross?” (p. 47). How do you respond?
- What is your response to the argument in Hebrews 9:15–22 that the covenant must be ratified by the blood of Jesus?
- Questions 2 and 4 on page 49.

4. Find God’s Presence in the Death of Jesus

If you asked a volunteer to research the Day of Atonement, ask him or her to present that information.

Discuss question 3 on page 49.

Response (5 minutes)

5. Respond to the Words of Institution

Call the attention of the group to question 2 on page 49. Read aloud the words of institution for the Lord’s Supper. Invite participants to reflect on what those words mean and to write a brief response

describing their meaning. When they have finished, invite volunteers to share their responses.

Closing (5 minutes)

6. Remember Words from the Liturgy of the Lord's Supper

Read the following, or use similar words from the service of the Lord's Supper in your denomination:

Remembering your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
we take from your creation this bread and this wine
and joyfully celebrate his dying and rising,
as we await the day of his coming.
With thanksgiving, we offer our very selves to you
to be a living and holy sacrifice
dedicated to your service.

*The Book of Common Worship*²

7. Give an Assignment

Ask participants to read unit 8, "The Practical Consequences of His Superiority." Also assign to each person one of the heroes of the faith (excluding Moses) under "Want to Know More?" on page 54. Ask them to read the scripture citations listed for their hero.

2. *The Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 154.

8

The Practical Consequences of His Superiority (Hebrews 10:19–11:40)

Key Idea: Through a positive assessment of the Christian faith, and exemplified in a litany of past heroes of the faith, we receive encouragement and hope for the fulfillment of promises not yet realized. In the face of difficult times, our journey is made vital through “provoking one another in love.”

Advance Preparation

- On newsprint, print question 1 from page 55. Post where it can be easily seen.
- Obtain drawing paper and markers, and decide where you will display “A New and Living Way” in activity 3.

Opening (5 minutes)

As participants arrive, call their attention to the posted question. Encourage them to make a list of people who have influenced their faith.

1. Read Six Central Texts

Point out that the writer of the study calls the scripture in today’s section one of the most encouraging and hopeful homilies in the New Testament. Invite volunteers to read aloud the six central texts the writer identifies, found on page 50 in the box. Ask that they read them one at a time slowly, with space for silent reflection after each text.

2. Pray Together

Invite participants to offer sentence prayers in response to one or more of the texts they just heard.

Presentation (10 minutes)

3. Expand on “a New and Living Way”

Call the attention of the group to the section “A New and Living Way,” pages 50–51. Read aloud the first sentence in the last paragraph of that section, “The use of the word *way* . . .”

Divide the group into pairs, and assign one of the “scenes” in the graphic image of the way the writer describes (through the Red Sea, through the Sinai, and so forth). Give each pair a sheet of paper and markers, and ask that they make some sort of graphic representation of the scene. When everyone is finished, attach the scenes to the wall or a bulletin board in order to make a pathway. Then ask: What scenes would you add of the “new and living way” today? What are important pilgrimages of faith for our congregation? Print responses on separate sheets of paper, and add them to the pathway.

Exploration (15 minutes)

4. Provoke One Another in Love

Call the attention of the group to the chart “Ten Key Passages in Hebrews,” and note that 10:24 is one of those listed by the writer of the study. Ask a volunteer to read aloud 10:24–25, and then have someone else read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7.

Using the material on pages 51–52, invite participants to develop a definition of “provoking to love.” Discuss question 4 on page 55.

5. Examine the Context of Suffering

Summarize for the group the information about the situation the first audience of Hebrews was most likely facing. If time allows, read aloud a few of the scriptures from New Testament books noted in this section. Then discuss the several questions in question 3 on page 55. Ask: what situations in the world today represent significant examples of persecution taking place for the sake of faith?

Response (10 minutes)

6. Explore the Heroes' Hall of Fame

Invite group members to provide brief summaries of the heroes of the faith they were assigned to explore. Then ask:

- Why do you think so few women are included in this list? Given the small number, why include Sarah and Rahab?
- If we were to continue the list of faith heroes, what famous names would you add? Why?
- Which of your own personal faith heroes would you add to the list? Why?

Closing (5 minutes)

7. Read Scripture

Invite participants to read Hebrews 11 aloud. Point out that 11:1 is one of the “Ten Key Passages in Hebrews.” Encourage them to listen to the recurring words “by faith.” Point out that the final unison reading is a preview of things to come in the next session.

All: 11:1–3

Reader 1: 11:4–7

Reader 2: 11:8–12

Reader 3: 11:13–16

Reader 4: 11:17–22

Reader 5: 11:23–28

Reader 6: 11:29–31

Reader 7: 11:32–40

All: 12:1–2

8. Give an Assignment

Ask participants to read unit 9, “Concluding Advice: Continue to Run the Race with Total Determination.” Ask that they set aside the list of faith heroes they made until the next session. Also ask them to read Genesis 4:1–16 (the story of Cain) and Genesis 27:1–40 (the story of Esau).

Concluding Advice: Continue to Run the Race with Total Determination (Hebrews 12:1–13:17)

Key Idea: Through images and metaphors that make sense to those of us living in the twenty-first century, we explore practical advice about keeping our faith strong and are encouraged to move beyond our secure zones to offer true sacrifices that are pleasing to God.

Advance Preparation

Note: This unit covers a lot of ground. Read over the suggested activities and decide if you can cover them all or if you need to choose to do a few.

- On newsprint, list the vocabulary unique to Hebrews from the first paragraph on page 56.
- Also get a large sheet of poster board or a length of mural paper. Lightly sketch the shape of a cloud on it. Print “Jesus” in the center, and attach it to a wall or bulletin board where participants can write on it easily, or lay it flat on a table.
- Head one additional sheet of newsprint “Mount Sinai” and another “Mount Zion.”
- Finally, print the following open-ended statement on another sheet: Through Christ, we will receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken by . . .

Opening (5 minutes)

As participants arrive, invite them to print names from their own list of faith heroes on the “cloud of witnesses” paper or poster board.

1. Hear Scripture

Read aloud Hebrews 12:1–2.

2. Sing a Hymn

Sing “Guide My Feet.”

Presentation/Exploration (20 minutes)

3. Picture the Church as an Ongoing Organism

Call the attention of the group to the list of words found only in Hebrews in the New Testament. Also invite them to recall the key terms you considered in studying unit 1 (found on page 9). Say that this vocabulary is used to develop some metaphors that still carry meaning for us today. The first is the image of the church as an ongoing organism, the image in 12:1–2.

Look together at the “cloud of witnesses” poster. Ask: who are pioneers of the faith from past centuries whom we might add? Discuss question 1 on page 63.

4. Explore the Metaphor of the Race

Invite group members who are involved in some form of serious athletic endeavor to tell how they prepare for an athletic event. What kind of training is involved? What roles do perseverance and endurance play? Ask group members to locate and read the scriptures listed on page 58 that also use the metaphor of athletic competition.

Ask participants to compare the place athletic competition occupied in the ancient world with its place in our world. Discuss question 2 on page 63.

Teaching Tip: Don’t assume that all the adults in your group are familiar with the details of the story of Esau or of Cain (found in Gen. 4:1–16). Although the writer of the study book cites Genesis 27:18–40 for Esau’s story, participants should begin with verse 1. By reading these passages, those already familiar with the stories can refresh their memories; those who are not familiar with them will not be put on the spot.

5. Compare Family Life Then and Now

Ask: how does our concept of discipline and education in the family differ from that of the original audience for Hebrews? Ask for volunteers to briefly summarize the story of Esau and that of Cain. According to the writer of the study, why does the writer of Hebrews judge these characters so harshly?

6. Consider the “Beads on a Necklace”

Point out that the writer of the study says that in the first verses of chapter 13, “additional practical advice is given about several unrelated issues that are loosely strung together like beads on a necklace” (p. 62). Divide into smaller groups or pairs and assign one of the following to each:

Mutual love (13:1)

Hospitality (13:2)

Remembering prisoners (13:3)

Sharing and stewardship (13:4–5)

Support of church leaders (13:7, 17)

Manner of sacrifice for sin outmoded (13:9–16)

Ask each pair or group to summarize the points in a sentence or two. Then discuss questions 3 and 4 on page 63.

Response (15 minutes)

7. Remember Mount Sinai and Mount Zion

Ask participants to silently read Exodus 19–20 and Revelation 21:1–7. Then ask them to call out, popcorn style, words and phrases that describe first Mount Sinai and then Mount Zion. Record their responses on the appropriate sheet of paper.

Invite them to reflect on the world and circumstances in which we live. Ask them to respond to the following open-ended statement:

Through Christ, we will receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken by . . .

Print their responses under the statement.

Closing (5 minutes)

8. Pray a Litany of Affirmation

Invite participants to join in the following litany, taking turns reading the responses to the open-ended statement at the appropriate places:

Leader: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

All: **Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains should shake in the heart of the sea.**

Leader: Through Christ, we will receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken by . . . (Participants respond in turn with phrases from the newsprint.)

All: **Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Thanks be to God!**

9. Give an Assignment

Ask participants to read unit 10, “Final Greetings and Summation,” as well as the citations from other New Testament letters listed in the first paragraph on page 64.

Final Greetings and Summation (Hebrews 13:18–25)

Key Idea: As the book of Hebrews concludes, we affirm the need to remain grounded in the past while looking to the future, interpreting old beliefs in the light of contemporary culture and developing new metaphors of our faith in the Christ who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Advance Preparation

- Display the newsprint sheet from unit 1 on which you recorded participants' responses to the open-ended prompt, "In this uncertain and violent world, in this study I hope to . . ."
- Also display the sheet with the "Ten Key Passages in Hebrews" where the group can easily read it.
- Gather paper, pencils, and markers or crayons.

Opening (5 minutes)

1. Read the "Ten Key Passages in Hebrews"

From the newsprint sheet (or from page 3 in the study book), invite the group to read the "Ten Key Passages in Hebrews." You might ask volunteers to read the verses in turn, or the group might read them in unison, or you might read them aloud yourself.

Presentation/Exploration (20 minutes)

2. Explore Conduct and Conscience

Invite the group to respond to the following: What comes to mind when you hear the phrase "good conduct"? What comes to mind when you hear "a clear conscience"? Ask volunteers to read aloud Acts 23:1; 1 Peter 3:13–16, 21; and 1 Timothy 1:5. Point out that the writer of the study comments that in the New Testament conscience

“is informed by the action of the Holy Spirit in the inner person” (p. 65). Discuss questions 1 and 4 on page 68.

3. Explore the Metaphor of the Good Shepherd

Invite participants to spend about five minutes silently reading over the information on page 65 about the image of Jesus as shepherd of the sheep, as well as reading the scripture citations listed in the text. Then ask:

- Jesus is referred to not only as the shepherd of God’s flock but also as the lamb of God. How do you reconcile these two metaphors? Are the images compatible, or are they merely separate images? Which image is more meaningful to you?
- The writer comments that in later Christian art, the image of Jesus carrying a lamb becomes a primary symbol of faith. What does this communicate to you?

Discuss question 2 on page 68.

4. Ask: Why Timothy?

Call the attention of the group to what the writer has to say on page 66 about the mention of Timothy and the mention of “those from Italy.” Ask: If you were presenting a sermon and wanted to claim authority, whose names would you invoke? If you wanted to communicate to your hearers that possible persecutions were in store, what names or situations would you include?

Response (10 minutes)

5. Create New Metaphors of Faith

Invite someone to summarize what the writer has to say in the conclusion (p. 67) about the need for new metaphors of faith. On a chalkboard or whiteboard, print the phrase “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.” Distribute the art and writing materials. Invite participants to use the materials to create a new metaphor for the understanding that Jesus is superior to everything else. Encour-

age them to think of images that are grounded in contemporary culture that will communicate this idea.

Allow time when everyone is finished for those who would like to do so to share their metaphors.

Closing (10 minutes)

6. Review the Study

Point out the newsprint sheet from the first session about participants' hopes in an uncertain and violent world. Ask the group to also read over the "Ten Key Passages from Hebrews." Ask: In what ways do the insights of the book of Hebrews provide hope or peace of mind, even in the face of the times in which we live? What aspects of this book deserve further study?

7. Offer a Benediction

Invite the group to read together the benediction in 13:20–21.