

A Common-Sense Guide to Studying the Book of Hebrews

As you study this book, remember:

1. *Context is still king in this book.* Just reading the chapter through again and again will help you untangle any knots you may find.
2. If you are still struggling after following the above suggestion, then remember the audience to whom the author of Hebrews is writing. If you remember his purpose in writing to them then you may find the difficulties untangling.
3. Take note of the examples, word pictures, and Old Testament Scripture references since the author uses them in the most obvious and simple ways to clarify the doctrinal points he makes. There is always a connection in his thinking, even if it is not readily apparent. Keep looking, reading, and praying for understanding.
4. Most often the simplest interpretation is the correct one when it comes to this author. He is trying to make things clear and understandable for his audience, not harder.
5. Commentaries are a welcome and wonderful blessing, and I encourage you to make use of the knowledge and insight of these Bible scholars. However, reading a commentary *before* you have studied the passage yourself can lead to confusion.
6. As students of the Bible we want to understand what the author intended his original audience to know. And this process of pulling truth from the passage is called “exegesis.” Some people are tempted to do something called “eisogesis,” which is to read information *into* the text. That is when we take something we know and try to put it back into the text to derive the text’s meaning, though the original audience would never have arrived at that conclusion. One way to guard against this is to ask, “What would the original audience have understood this statement to mean?”

Hebrews Commentary Recommendations

If you are interested in building your Bible study library the following works may be helpful.

Recommended Hebrews Commentaries

- Bruce, F. F. *The Epistles to the Hebrews*. NICNT, rev. ed.; Eerdmans, 1990.
- Hughes, Philip Edgcumbe. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Eerdmans, 1977.
- Kent, Homer A. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Baker, 1972.
- Pink, Arthur W. *An Exposition of Hebrews*. Baker, 2006 – 21st printing.
- Westcott, Brooke Foss. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Eerdmans, 1970
- Hughes, R. Kent, *Hebrews 1-9; Hebrews 10-13*. Crossway, 1993
- MacArthur, John. *Hebrews: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Moody Press, 1996.
- Walvoord, John F. and Roy B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Victor Books, 1985.

Recommended Word Study Helps

- Jamieson, Robert and A. R. Fausset. *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments, 3 Vols*. Hendrickson Publishers, 1974.
- Vincent, Marvin R. *Word Studies in the New Testament, 4 Vols*. Hendrickson Publishers, 1886.
- Wuest, Kenneth. *Wuest's Word Studies in the Greek New Testament, 4 Vols*. Eerdmans, 1961.

A Hopefully Helpful Hebrews Timeline

- ❖ [About 2000 BC] God makes promise to Abraham.
- ❖ Abraham meets Melchizedek. Melchizedek blesses Abraham. Abraham gives a tenth of the spoil to Melchizedek.
 - Melchizedek, functioning as king and priest of Salem, appears out of nowhere in the Bible record and then vanishes again from the pages of Scripture. We do not hear anything about him until David, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, prophesies about the One to come who is of the priesthood of Melchizedek (Ps. 2; Ps. 110).
- ❖ Isaac born.
- ❖ Jacob and Esau born.
- ❖ Jacob's twelve sons born: Reuben and Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher, Issachar and Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin.
- ❖ Jacob's family moves to Egypt and lives there for 400 years.
- ❖ Aaron born of the tribe of Levi.
- ❖ [About 1525 BC] Moses born, also of the tribe of Levi.
- ❖ Moses called to lead the Israelites, made up of the twelve tribes, out of Egypt.
 - Note the differences from the list of the sons above. The twelve tribes were all the sons above except that the tribe of Levi did not receive a land inheritance since the Lord was their inheritance. There is no tribe of Joseph. God instead blessed Joseph with a double blessing through his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Because Joseph and Levi do not receive the land inheritances we are down to 10 tribes, but because God blessed Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, then we are back to 12 tribes.
- ❖ [Around 1445 BC] Israelites leave Egypt. Receive the 10 Commandments at Sinai. The Law is instituted.
- ❖ The priesthood is inaugurated at Sinai. The Levites take care of God's tabernacle. Aaron and his sons are taken from the tribe of Levi and then their family is made into priests to serve the Lord.
- ❖ The wilderness rebellion of Hebrews 3 happens during the desert wanderings.

- ❖ 40 years after they left Egypt, Joshua prepares the nation to enter the land that God intends to give them—the land of rest. See Hebrews 4 to see what the author of Hebrews has to say about this.
- ❖ [Born around 1011 BC] David, of the tribe of Judah, is born. David writes Psalms 2, 8, 16, 22, 102, 104, and 110, which are quoted in the book of Hebrews.
 - David writes about one who is a priest forever like Melchizedek. David is the first one to connect Melchizedek to the idea of a new and different priesthood. This is when the oath is made as referred to in 7:28 “the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.”
- ❖ [Born 4 BC] The long-awaited Messiah, Jesus, is born.
- ❖ The Levitical priesthood is still in effect.
- ❖ [Died 29-30 AD] At Jesus’ death on the cross He takes on the role of high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. He remains a priest forever having conquered sin and death.
- ❖ With the institution of the new priesthood of Melchizedek there is no longer a need for the Levitical priesthood.
- ❖ With the change in the priesthood there is also a change in the law. The Law of Christ is now instituted. Also known as the New Covenant, the law of the Spirit.
- ❖ [Written before 70 AD] The writer of Hebrews shows the similarities between Melchizedek and Christ and then proceeds to show that Christ is superior to even Melchizedek since Christ will never die and does not need to keep offering sacrifice for sins. Hence, Jesus Christ is the only means of salvation. Those who trust in the perfect and holy Lamb of God to take away their sins know forgiveness of sin, fellowship with God, and look forward to that heavenly kingdom.