

TEACHER'S GUIDE

# Something Better

*A verse-by-verse adult Bible study of Hebrews · fourteen sessions*

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SESSION 1

# God Has Spoken

*Hebrews 1:1-4*

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

*A free companion to the Bible study  
Something Better: A Study of Hebrews*

## **A Note to the Teacher**

Welcome to the first session of *Something Better*. You are beginning the fourth and final volume of a pastoral curriculum on New Testament letters, and if your class has been with you through James, 1 Peter, and 1–3 John, they come to Hebrews already trained in the pastoral and confessional voice of the series. If Hebrews is their first volume — as will be the case for some teachers — welcome them in without apology. Hebrews stands on its own.

A few things to know at the outset. Hebrews is the most theologically dense of the four volumes. The session manuscripts will run slightly longer than in the earlier volumes, and the teaching register will feel a half step more serious. This is not because the letter is less pastoral — Hebrews may be the most pastoral letter in the New Testament — but because its pastoral care works through a sustained argument about Christ as priest. Do not be afraid of the argument. It is your friend. The people in your class need the argument even if they do not yet know they need it.

Session 1 introduces the whole volume. Your main task is twofold: to let your class meet the opening of Hebrews with appropriate awe, and to lay down the two theological foundations that will carry the whole study — that God has spoken, finally, in His Son, and that the Son has already made purification for sins. If your class leaves the first session believing these two things more firmly than when they came in, you have done your work.

The passage is short — four verses — but they are four verses in which a single Greek sentence does more theological work than most paragraphs manage. Resist the temptation to rush. Resist the temptation to start the argument of chapter 1 (the comparison with angels) — that is next session. Stay with these four verses. Let them press on your class.



## **Preparing to Teach This Session**

## Before you teach:

- Read Hebrews 1:1–4 aloud at least twice in your own preparation, once slowly enough to hear it as a single sentence.
- Read the student manuscript for Session 1 in full.
- If you have not taught Hebrews before, skim the letter as a whole — half an hour with Bible open — so that you can feel how 1:1–4 sets up what is coming.
- Consider what, for your particular class, the most likely entry point will be. Rural congregations often respond well to the “God speaks” emphasis; congregations carrying spiritual anxiety often respond well to the “He sat down” emphasis.

## Key theological points for this session:

- **God has spoken.** Revelation is God’s act, not ours. The Christian life begins as listening.
- **The Son is fully God.** Seven Christological descriptions in verses 2–3 establish this before any argument is made. The Son is the heir, the creator, the radiance of glory, the exact imprint, the sustainer, the purifier, and the enthroned one.
- **The work of Christ is finished.** “He sat down.” This is the Lutheran anchor of the whole letter. The priestly work is complete.
- **Christ is the substance.** The old covenant is not discarded but fulfilled. Hebrews honors the prophets and the Old Testament while showing Christ as the One to whom all of it pointed.



## Suggested Time Plan

For a 60-minute class period. Adjust to your own context. A forty-five-minute fallback is given below.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and reading of Hebrews 1:1–4 aloud
0:05–0:15	Framing the volume: what Hebrews is, why we are studying it
0:15–0:30	The opening sentence: God has spoken; the seven descriptions
0:30–0:45	“He sat down”: the finished priestly work
0:45–0:55	Discussion: three or four of the six questions
0:55–1:00	Looking ahead; closing prayer



## Teaching Notes, Part by Part

### Opening (5 minutes)

Begin with prayer — this is not incidental, because the letter itself begins by insisting that God speaks and we listen. Let the prayer be short and directed at opening the class to the Word. Then read Hebrews 1:1–4 aloud, slowly, either yourself or with the class reading along in their own Bibles. Do not yet comment. Let the words hang in the room.

### Framing the Volume (10 minutes)

Your class needs some orientation to the letter before you can work the text. Keep this short. Three points will do:

- Hebrews is anonymous. Do not dwell on authorship debates. The Church has received the letter as apostolic without knowing the human author. Luther thought it might have been Apollos; we don't know. Move on.
- Hebrews was written to Christians — probably Jewish Christians — who were under pressure and thinking about going back to a less costly faith. The letter is a pastoral call back from drift.

- Hebrews is, above all, about Christ — and specifically about Christ as the great high priest. The word “better” appears thirteen times. The whole letter is an argument that Christ is the substance of which the old covenant was the shadow.

Then, before moving into verse 1, say something like: “What we are about to read is one of the great openings of the Bible. In Greek, verses 1–4 are a single sentence. In English we cannot quite hear the grandeur of it. But it introduces the whole letter in miniature. Everything Hebrews is going to say is here, in seed form.”

### **Verses 1-2a — God Has Spoken (5 minutes)**

The first move of the sentence. “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”

Key point: the sentence begins with God as the speaker, not the human as the seeker. This is an important note for our cultural moment, where spirituality is often framed as humans reaching upward. The Bible’s framing is the opposite: God has spoken, and we listen. The Christian is fundamentally an addressed person.

Key point: the old covenant is honored, not dismissed. “At many times and in many ways” is appreciative, not condescending. The prophets were real prophets. The writer will quote the Old Testament more than almost any other New Testament writer. Make sure your class does not hear Hebrews as anti-Old Testament. Hebrews is thoroughly pro-Old Testament; it simply argues that the Old Testament has come to its fulfillment in Christ.

#### **Luther on God's Speaking**

Luther often reminded his hearers that the Church is founded on the living voice of the Gospel (*viva vox evangelii*). Hebrews 1:1 is one of the key places in Scripture where God’s speaking is framed as the fundamental act. Consider noting that our Lutheran emphasis on the Word is not an emphasis on a book as such, but on God’s act of addressing His people through the book, through preaching, and supremely through His Son. The book matters because through it God speaks. The preaching matters because in it God speaks. The Son matters — ultimately — because He is what God has said.

## Verses 2b–3a — The Seven Descriptions (15 minutes)

This is the heart of the session. Walk your class through the seven descriptions of the Son:

- **Heir of all things** — the Son is the true firstborn; the universe is His inheritance.
- **Creator** — the universe was made through Him; He is not created.
- **Radiance of God's glory** — not reflection, but streaming forth; He is God shining outward.
- **Exact imprint of God's nature** — the Greek characterēs, the die's stamp on the coin; nothing of the Father is missing from the Son.
- **Sustainer of all things** — upholds the universe by the word of His power; not deism but present, active sustenance.
- **Purifier of sins** — the pivot; the priestly work accomplished.
- **Enthroned at God's right hand** — the session's climax; the work is done.

Do not try to explain all seven with equal depth. If your class has a strong theological background, you can linger on “radiance” and “exact imprint”, which are technical terms of some importance in Christological history. If your class is less trained, focus on the arc: the Son is everything God is, and He became the One who purified our sins.

The critical pastoral move is to stop, at the sixth description, and let the weight of it land. The One through whom the universe was made — this same One — made purification for sins. The hands that held the galaxies in existence were the hands that were pierced. Let the class feel the magnitude before you go on to “he sat down.”

## Verses 3b–4 — He Sat Down (10 minutes)

This is the Lutheran anchor of the session. In the old covenant, the priests stood because the work was never finished. The Son sat down because it is. The finished nature of Christ's priestly work is one of the great gospel truths in the whole Bible, and Hebrews will return to it again and again. Plant it deep in this first session.

Make the connection to ordinary Christian experience: we do not come to God trying to finish what Christ started. We come to God receiving what Christ finished. This is why, when we gather on Sunday, we are not working our way up to God; we are receiving what God has already given us. The Word preached, the font, the table — these are all means by which the finished work of Christ is distributed to us.

### **Pastoral Anchor**

Some in your class will be carrying spiritual anxiety. They may not describe it in those terms. It may show up as weariness, or as a sense that they are not Christian enough, or as an inability to believe that God really is for them. The phrase “he sat down” is medicine for such hearts. Christ is not still doing the work. He has done it. He is seated. What your class needs from you in this session, more than theological precision, is the pastoral certainty that the priestly work is finished — and that therefore they can rest.

The mention of angels in verse 4 is a transition to next session’s argument. Do not develop it here. Simply note that the writer will spend the next part of the letter showing how much greater the Son is than any created being.

### **Gathering the Threads (5 minutes)**

Draw the session to a close by returning to the three summary points the manuscript names: Hebrews begins with the Word of God; the Son who addresses us is the Son who has purified us; all of this is already accomplished. These three points will orient your class to the whole letter. Plant them here.



## **Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses**

### ***“Why don’t we know who wrote Hebrews?”***

A fair question. The honest answer: the letter does not say, the early church did not know with certainty, and we do not know now. The most common ancient guess was Paul, but the style and structure of Hebrews is clearly different from Paul’s letters, and Luther himself concluded it could not be Pauline. What matters for us is that the Church has received the letter as apostolic — that is, as bearing the

authority of the apostolic age and the voice of the Spirit. The human author's name is not essential to that reception. We do not read the Psalms less confidently because many of them are anonymous.

***“If the Son made the universe, why does the Bible say the Father made the universe?”***

Both are true. Creation is attributed in Scripture to the Father (Genesis 1, Psalm 33), to the Son (John 1, Colossians 1, Hebrews 1), and to the Spirit (Genesis 1:2, Psalm 104:30). The classical Christian formulation is that the external works of the Trinity are undivided: the Father creates through the Son in the power of the Spirit. It is not three creators but one God creating, with each Person of the Trinity acting in the one creating work in a way appropriate to Him. You do not need to go much deeper than this with a class unless someone presses it.

***“What does ‘these last days’ mean? Does it mean the end of the world is near?”***

A helpful question to address briefly. “The last days” in New Testament usage does not mean “the days just before the end of the world.” It means the age inaugurated by the coming of Christ — the last chapter of God's saving work, the age that began at the first Advent and will end at the second. We have been living in the last days for two thousand years. The Christian era, from the incarnation to the return of Christ, is the last days. Hebrews is not making a prediction about how soon the end will come. It is making a claim about what time we are in: the time of fulfillment, the time in which God's final Word has been spoken.

***“If Christ's work is finished, why do we still have to do anything?”***

One of the most important questions in this whole study, and it will come up in different forms throughout Hebrews. The Lutheran answer is that Christian works are not our contribution to a salvation still being finished; they are the fruit of a salvation already accomplished. We do not do good works to be saved. We do good works because we are saved. The good works are the response of the new life in Christ, not the construction of that new life. Hebrews 13 will speak of the fruits that flow from this finished work, but it does so only after twelve chapters have established the work's completeness. Order matters: the finished work comes first, and the life of response follows.

***“What does it mean that the Son is ‘the exact imprint’ of God’s nature? Are they the same or different?”***

A classic question that occupied the Church for several centuries. The Christian answer: the Father and the Son are the same God but different Persons. Same substance, different relation. The Son is not another god. The Son is not a lesser god. The Son is not a created being who eventually became divine. The Son is God — the same God as the Father, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, as the Nicene Creed puts it. The image of the die and the coin is not perfect (no image of the Trinity ever is), but it helps: what the Father is, the Son exactly displays. Everything true of the Father’s nature is true of the Son’s. They are not the same Person — that would be the error called modalism — but they are the same God.

***“If we have the finished Word in Christ, why do we still study the prophets and the Old Testament?”***

Because the Old Testament is still the Word of God. Hebrews itself will quote the Old Testament more densely than almost any other New Testament book. The point of Hebrews 1:1–2 is not that the Old Testament has been replaced; it is that the Old Testament has been fulfilled. The prophets spoke truly, but partially. Christ is the full and final speaking. We read the Old Testament still because Christ is in it — shadowed, promised, anticipated — and because we cannot understand Christ without the story that prepared for Him. Luther called the Old Testament the cradle that holds the Christ child. The cradle is not the child, but we do not throw away the cradle.



## **Leading the Discussion**

Notes on each of the six discussion questions at the close of the student manuscript. You will probably not have time to work all six. Choose three or four that fit your class.

***Question 1 — On being people to whom God has spoken***

This question aims at a posture: the Christian as the addressed person. Listen for people who find it easy to remember this — those who have a strong sense of God's voice in preaching, or in Scripture read daily. Listen also for those who find it difficult — those who carry a sense that God is distant or silent. Do not force resolution. Let the class hear that being addressed by God is not always a felt experience; it is a given reality to which our feelings gradually learn to correspond.

### **Question 2 — On the prophets and Christ**

This is a theologically important question and worth some time. The right answer is not either/or. Honor the prophets as real prophets speaking real revelation, and honor Christ as the fulfillment to which the prophets pointed. The error on one side is to treat the Old Testament as inferior or obsolete; the error on the other side is to flatten Christ into one prophet among many. Hold both.

### **Question 3 — On the seven descriptions of the Son**

This is the question most likely to surface theological unfamiliarity. Some in your class may never have thought carefully about Christ as creator, or as sustainer, or as the radiance of God's glory. Let them say so. It is not embarrassing to find the Bible's teaching about Christ bigger than you had previously seen. That is the point of Bible study.

### **Question 4 — On the finished priestly work**

The most important question in the set for Lutheran pastoral purposes. The finished work of Christ protects us from works-righteousness, from spiritual anxiety, from perfectionism, and from the idea that the Christian life is a long and uncertain effort to become good enough. Let your class name what "he sat down" protects them from. Their answers will often be personal and sometimes moving. Receive them gently.

### **Question 5 — On the anonymous authorship of Hebrews**

A lighter question, but genuinely interesting. Some will find the anonymity unsettling ("how do we know it's trustworthy?"); others will find it freeing ("the message is about Christ, not about the writer"). Both responses are thoughtful. Use the question to reinforce that our confidence in Scripture is ultimately in God's

Spirit bearing witness through the Church's reception, not in our ability to identify every human author.

### **Question 6 — On hopes for the study**

A warm closing question that invites the class to name their expectations. You may want to jot down the answers — discreetly — and revisit them at the end of the study. People often say things like “I want to understand how Jesus is a priest” or “I want to see how the Old Testament fits together.” Hebrews will, in fact, give them those things.



## **If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes**

Sunday school classes often run short. If you have only forty-five minutes, here is a keep/cut plan.

### **Keep:**

- The reading of Hebrews 1:1–4 aloud
- The brief framing of the volume (two or three minutes, not ten)
- The seven descriptions of the Son, with focus on descriptions 6 and 7 (purifier and enthroned)
- The “He sat down” material, with the Lutheran pastoral anchor
- Discussion questions 3 and 4
- Looking Ahead and closing prayer

### **Cut or Abbreviate:**

- Most of the authorship and dating discussion
- The fuller treatment of “radiance” and “exact imprint”; simply name them and move on
- Discussion questions 1, 2, 5, 6; or pick one of these if time permits



## For Further Study

### Biblical cross-references:

- John 1:1–18 — the parallel prologue with many of the same Christological affirmations
- Colossians 1:15–20 — the “hymn of Christ” with creator and sustainer language
- Philippians 2:5–11 — the Son’s humiliation and exaltation
- Psalm 110:1 — “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand” — cited throughout Hebrews
- Psalm 2:7–8 — the Son as heir; appears in Hebrews 1:5

### From the Lutheran tradition:

- Small Catechism, the Second Article of the Creed — Luther’s explanation of who Christ is and what He has done
- Augsburg Confession, Article III (Of the Son of God) — the Lutheran confession of the two natures and the finished work
- Luther’s preface to Hebrews (from his 1522 New Testament) — brief, pointed, and worth reading

### Commentaries:

- Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans) — older, Reformed, but theologically rich
- R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews* — Lutheran, pastoral, verse-by-verse
- Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Pillar) — careful exegesis with theological sensitivity
- The Lutheran Study Bible (Concordia, ESV edition) — the introduction and notes on Hebrews are worth reading before teaching



## **A Final Word**

You are beginning a substantial book. Do not be anxious about it. The pastoral work of Hebrews is not a matter of getting every theological detail precisely right — it is a matter of helping your class see Christ as He is presented in the letter: high above all, and drawing near to us as our merciful and faithful high priest. If your class leaves this first session with a clearer sense that God has spoken, and that what He has spoken is His Son, and that the Son has already done the priestly work — you have given them what they need. Everything else Hebrews says is an unfolding of those first four verses.

You will notice, as the volume progresses, that Hebrews keeps returning to the same handful of themes: the superiority of Christ, the finality of His priestly work, the call to draw near, and the pastoral warning against drift. These are not different themes; they are one pastoral proclamation, turned and turned and turned again so that its weight lands on every part of the Christian life. Your teaching, session by session, will do the same work. Let it. Do not be afraid of returning to the same gospel note. The note is what your class needs.

Go into this study with gladness. You are teaching about our great high priest. You are handling the Word of God. You are, by the Spirit, serving souls that Christ has purchased. The work is sacred and the work is glad. May God bless you as you teach.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

SESSION 2

# Superior to Angels

*Hebrews 1:5–2:4*

TEACHER'S GUIDE

*A free companion to the Bible study  
Something Better: A Study of Hebrews*

## **A Note to the Teacher**

Session 2 covers the first of Hebrews' four major warning passages, along with the argument that sets it up. Two pastoral tasks frame the session. The first is to help your class take seriously a passage that might feel irrelevant at first glance — fifteen verses on the Son's superiority to angels. The second is to introduce, in a lasting way, how Lutheran Christians read biblical warnings.

The second task matters for the whole volume. If you get the Lutheran handling of warnings right here, in Session 2, you will have laid the groundwork for Sessions 4, 6, and 11. If you fumble it, you will spend the rest of the volume either reassuring tender consciences who have been unduly alarmed, or else hardening complacent ones who have taken your reassurance as permission. Get it right now. The pattern repeats.

The class will have questions about angels, about the “begotten” language of verse 5, and about what “drift” means in practice. The Teaching Notes below walk through the key pastoral moves. The Anticipated Questions section addresses the most likely points of confusion.



## **Preparing to Teach This Session**

### **Before you teach:**

- Read Hebrews 1:5–2:4 in one sitting, ideally aloud, so the flow from argument to warning is felt.
- Look up each of the seven Old Testament citations in its original context (Psalm 2:7; 2 Samuel 7:14; Deuteronomy 32:43 LXX; Psalm 104:4; Psalm 45:6–7; Psalm 102:25–27; Psalm 110:1). You do not need to teach on the original contexts in depth, but knowing them will deepen your teaching.

- Review Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration XI (on election) if you have access to a Book of Concord. The section on “how God’s election is revealed to us” gives the framework Lutherans bring to biblical warnings.
- Think about your specific class. Who among them is complacent? Who is tender? You may not know perfectly, but the session’s pastoral work requires you to have both types in view.

### Key theological points for this session:

- **The Son is not an angel and cannot be demoted to one.** The seven citations press this from every angle: He is begotten, worshiped, enthroned as God, creator, unchanging, seated. Angels are ministering spirits sent to serve us.
- **The warning passages of Hebrews are real.** Drift is a genuine danger. Lutherans do not soften this or explain it away.
- **The warnings do different work in different hearts.** The complacent need to be shaken; the tender need to be comforted. A faithful teacher distinguishes and applies accordingly.
- **The magnitude of the Son grounds the magnitude of the warning.** Drift is dangerous because what we drift away from is the only salvation there is.



### Suggested Time Plan

For a 60-minute class period. A forty-five-minute fallback is given below.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer; read Hebrews 1:5–2:4 aloud
0:05–0:15	Why angels? The historical, theological, and pastoral framing

0:15–0:30	Walk through the seven Old Testament citations
0:30–0:40	The warning of 2:1–4 — “drift” and its nautical image
0:40–0:50	How Lutherans read a biblical warning
0:50–1:00	Discussion (two or three questions); Looking Ahead; closing prayer



## Teaching Notes, Part by Part

### Why Angels? (10 minutes)

This is your orientation to the session, and it is important. Your class will open the Bible, see fifteen verses about angels, and reasonably wonder why. Answer the question directly and briefly. The writer is not interested in angels for their own sake; he is interested in keeping his readers from drifting back into a faith in which Christ is demoted and the old covenant apparatus is sufficient.

Then broaden the application. The specific figures change — saints, ancestors, charismatic leaders, self-help gurus, our own inner voice — but the structure is the same: something intermediate gets placed between God and us, and Christ gets relativized. The class should hear that this passage is not about ancient superstition but about a recurring human temptation.

### The Seven Citations (15 minutes)

You have a choice here about how to teach the seven quotations. Option one is to walk each one separately; option two is to group them thematically. For most classes, the thematic grouping will work better:

- **Son vs. servant (citations 1–3):** Psalm 2, 2 Samuel 7, Deuteronomy 32. God calls the Son “Son”; the angels worship Him. No angel has ever been addressed this way.

- **Enthroned vs. serving (citations 4–5):** Psalm 104 and Psalm 45. Angels are winds and fire; the Son's throne is forever. The Father calls the Son "God."
- **Creator and unchanging (citation 6):** Psalm 102. The Son made the heavens; they will perish, but He remains.
- **The right hand (citation 7):** Psalm 110:1. The fixed point of Hebrews, quoted more often than any other Old Testament verse in the New Testament.

If time is short, spend the bulk of your attention on citation 5 (Psalm 45, "Your throne, O God") and citation 7 (Psalm 110:1, the right hand). These two carry the most theological freight.

### **On the word "begotten"**

Your class may stumble on "today I have begotten you" in Hebrews 1:5. The key point: "begotten" does not mean "created." A father begets a son of the same nature; a carpenter makes a chair of a different nature. The Son is begotten of the Father — same nature, same substance, God from God. The eternal begetting of the Son is what the Nicene Creed is guarding when it says "begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father." You do not need to teach the Nicene controversies in depth, but the distinction between begetting and creating is worth making clearly.

### **The Warning (10 minutes)**

Move now to 2:1–4. Read it aloud again, slowly, so the shift in tone registers. The writer has been teaching; now he is warning. The image of "drifting away" is nautical — a ship easing past its moorings on a slack tide. The image is precise: drift does not look like rebellion. It looks like inattention.

Give your class concrete examples of drift. Skipping worship "just this once" and then again. Letting prayer become briefer and less frequent until it barely exists. Allowing the Bible to become a book one used to read. Replacing the hard work of listening to sermons with the easier entertainment of Christian influencers. None of these are dramatic. They are simply what happens when no one is paying attention.

Then give the writer's argument: the Law, given through angels, was serious, and disobedience received judgment. The Son's message is infinitely more serious because the Son is infinitely greater than the angels. Neglect of so great a salvation is not a small thing.

### **How Lutherans Read a Warning (10 minutes)**

This may be the most important segment of the session. You are not just teaching this warning; you are training your class in how to hear all four of the warnings to come. Take the time. Say the two things plainly:

- The warnings are real. Lutherans do not soften them, explain them away, or reduce them to hypothetical dangers. Drift is genuinely dangerous. Rejection of Christ genuinely carries judgment.
- The warnings do different work in different hearts. The complacent need to be shaken. The tender need to be comforted. A person worried about whether she is drifting is showing signs of genuine faith, not evidence against it. The person the warning is aimed at is not the one who is asking the question.

#### **Pastoral Anchor — the Tender Conscience**

Some people in your class are going to receive this warning with fear. They will hear “lest you drift away” and immediately wonder whether they are drifting. For such hearts, add this plainly: “If your first response to this warning is ‘What if that is me?’ — that very question is evidence that you are paying attention, not that you are drifting. The warning is aimed at people who have stopped asking the question, not at people who are still asking it.” If you can deliver that one pastoral word clearly, some people in your class will go home with a weight lifted that they have carried for years.

You might also connect this to *Simul iustus et peccator* — the Lutheran teaching that the Christian is at the same time righteous and a sinner. The righteous half in every Christian needs gospel. The sinful half needs law. A sermon that delivers law to the righteous half or gospel to the sinful half is out of order. This is why the distinction matters pastorally.



## **Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses**

***“Why was there a debate about angels in the first place? Were people really worshipping angels?”***

Probably not in the crude sense of offering sacrifices to angels. But there were real currents in the Judaism of the first century that gave angels a large role — as mediators, as revealers, as figures through whom God’s presence was experienced. Some strands of Jewish apocalyptic thought elevated certain angels to quasi-divine status. The Dead Sea Scrolls show interest in angelic hierarchies. Later in the New Testament, Paul has to warn the Colossians against “worship of angels” (Colossians 2:18). The temptation was real, and Hebrews is addressing it. The broader point, for us, is that the human heart tends to invent intermediaries between itself and God. The writer is saying: no. The Son is the only mediator.

***“What is the Nicene teaching that Christ is ‘begotten, not made’? Why does that matter?”***

In the fourth century, a priest named Arius taught that the Son was the highest of God’s creatures — begotten in the sense of having been produced by the Father before all other things, but still a creature, not truly God. The Council of Nicea (AD 325) rejected this and confessed that the Son is “begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father” — eternally generated from the Father, sharing the same divine nature. This is the teaching Hebrews 1 assumes. If the Son were a creature, He could not be God’s final Word. He could only be a messenger like the angels. The begotten-not-made distinction is what makes Hebrews’ whole argument work. It matters enormously.

***“If the Son is superior to angels, why do angels appear so often in the Bible? Do they still act today?”***

Angels appear throughout Scripture as God’s messengers and servants. The writer of Hebrews does not deny their reality or diminish their role; he simply puts them in their proper place. Hebrews 1:14 says explicitly that they are “sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation.” They are real, they are active, and they are working for us — but under the Son, not as rivals to Him. Whether they are at work today is a question Scripture does not clearly answer in specifics, but the Lutheran tradition is comfortable affirming that God still sends His angels

to minister to His people, even when we do not perceive them. We simply do not seek angelic experiences or build our piety around them. We seek Christ.

***“What is the difference between ‘drift’ and ‘falling away’? Am I in danger of losing my salvation?”***

A common and important question. Drift, in the sense the writer uses, is a gradual inattention to Christ and the gospel. Left unchecked, it can culminate in full rejection — which is what the later warning passages (especially Hebrews 6 and 10) describe. The Lutheran position is that a genuine believer can indeed fall from faith through willful unbelief, but this is not something that happens accidentally or that hangs over every anxious Christian. The person who worries about losing her salvation is not the person losing it. The Holy Spirit’s witness to the gospel in your heart, however weak it may feel, is evidence of God’s work in you. We do not trust our trust; we trust Christ. And Christ is strong enough to hold us.

***“What does it mean that the message was ‘attested by signs and wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit’?”***

The writer is referring to the apostolic age — the decades after Christ’s resurrection when the gospel was being spread by those who had heard Him, and God confirmed their preaching with miracles (see Acts). The writer’s point is not that we should expect the same kind of confirmation today; it is that the original preaching of the gospel came with as much divine attestation as any human message could possibly have. To neglect it, after all that attestation, is to ignore something that God went to extraordinary lengths to confirm. The witness of the early Church, preserved in the New Testament, is part of what Hebrews is pointing to.

***“How do I know if I am complacent or tender? What if I’m both?”***

Most of us are both, in different areas. A believer might be tender about her salvation but complacent about a particular sin she has stopped fighting. Or complacent about worship attendance but tender about whether God loves her. This is why the Lutheran tradition insists that both law and gospel must be preached in every sermon: some parts of us need one, other parts need the other. A faithful pastor — and a faithful Christian reading Scripture for herself — learns to

let law address the complacent parts and gospel address the tender parts, rather than flattening both.



## **Leading the Discussion**

Notes on each of the six discussion questions. Choose two or three that fit your class; do not try to work all six.

### ***Question 1 — Why begin with angels?***

An opening question that lets your class name the modern parallels. Listen for creative answers. Common ones: “inner voice,” “celebrity pastors,” “my own experience,” “science,” “my family’s traditions.” The point is not to condemn these things — some of them can be good in their proper place — but to notice when they start to function as rivals to Christ.

### ***Question 2 — Which citation strikes you most?***

A question that lets the class interact with Scripture directly. Different answers will come from different people. Listen especially for those who name Psalm 110:1 (the right hand) or Psalm 45:6 (the throne), since these carry the deepest theological weight. But any answer is useful; the class is training its attention.

### ***Question 3 — Drift in ordinary life***

This is often the richest discussion of the session. Invite concrete, personal answers, but do not let it become a confessional session. The goal is to help the class recognize drift patterns, not to produce public accounts of private struggles. Keep it generic unless someone volunteers specific testimony.

### ***Question 4 — Lutheran reading of warnings***

This is where you can reinforce the key pastoral lesson of the session. Listen for examples of warnings being misused. Some in your class may have received warnings as weapons — by a parent, a former pastor, a camp speaker — and may want to name that. Receive such testimony carefully. Let them see that the Lutheran handling is not a softening of the text but a faithful reading of it.

### **Question 5 — On being well-attested**

A less-common emphasis but worth the time. The class can reflect on how the Church's long witness strengthens their own. We are not alone with our Bibles; we are reading with two thousand years of believers behind us. This is a specifically Lutheran instinct — the communion of saints, the catholic Church — and it is pastorally stabilizing.

### **Question 6 — On the ordering of Christian teaching**

A good closing question. Hebrews establishes who Christ is before it issues any commands. This teaches us that Christian ethics always follow Christian doctrine, and Christian living always flows from Christ's person and work. When we invert the order — commands before Christ — we produce moralism. The class can name examples in their own experience.



## **If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes**

Keep/cut plan for a shorter class period.

### **Keep:**

- The “why angels?” framing, abbreviated to three minutes
- A walk through two or three of the seven citations, focusing on Psalm 45 and Psalm 110:1
- The warning and the nautical image of drift
- The Lutheran reading of warnings — both halves: warnings are real, warnings do different work in different hearts
- Discussion questions 3 and 4
- Looking Ahead and closing prayer

### **Cut or Abbreviate:**

- Most of the detailed walk-through of all seven citations

- The technical material on “begotten, not made”; name the distinction and move on
- Discussion questions 1, 2, 5, 6; pick one only if time permits



## For Further Study

### Biblical cross-references:

- Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 in their entirety — the two royal psalms most frequently quoted in Hebrews
- Colossians 2:16–19 — Paul on the worship of angels and other intermediaries
- Revelation 19:10 and 22:8–9 — the angel refuses John’s worship, directing it to God
- Galatians 3:19 — the Law ordained through angels, a background assumption of Hebrews 2:2

### From the Lutheran tradition:

- Nicene Creed — the classic confession of “begotten, not made”
- Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration XI — on election and the proper use of biblical warnings
- Small Catechism, the First Article explanation — God as creator of “things visible and invisible,” which includes angels
- Luther’s “A Mighty Fortress” — “the Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him” — captures the Lutheran posture toward spiritual powers

### Commentaries:

- R. C. H. Lenski on Hebrews 1–2 — careful Lutheran verse-by-verse treatment
- Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews (Pillar)* — thorough treatment of the seven citations

- The Lutheran Study Bible (Concordia) — notes on Hebrews 1:5–2:4 with confessional references



## **A Final Word**

Session 2 is a pivotal session for the whole volume. You have established that the Son is not to be demoted, and you have trained your class in how to hear a biblical warning. The three warning passages still to come — in chapters 3, 6, and 10 — will rest on what you have done here. If the Lutheran pastoral pattern has been planted clearly in this session, the difficult passages later will land as they should: sobering for the complacent, strengthening for the tender, pastoral for both.

A temptation in teaching this passage is to spend too much time on the angels and too little on the warning, or the reverse. Balance matters. The argument about the angels is the foundation that makes the warning weighty; the warning is the pastoral point the argument was serving. Hold them together, as the writer does. Teach them as one thing, because they are.

And do not be afraid of the warning yourself. You may feel, as some teachers do, a certain hesitation to preach warning passages — as though a warning were somehow less gospel than a comfort. It is not. A shepherd who fails to warn his sheep of the cliff is not being kind; he is being negligent. The writer of Hebrews warns because he loves his readers. You teach the warning because you love your class. Both are the same pastoral act.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

SESSION 3

# Made Like His Brothers

*Hebrews 2:5-18*

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

*A free companion to the Bible study  
Something Better: A Study of Hebrews*

## **A Note to the Teacher**

Session 3 is the warm pastoral heart of the opening of Hebrews. If Session 2 pushed your class upward — contemplating the Son's height above the angels — Session 3 brings them back down, with Christ, to the human ground He chose to share. The passage introduces, for the first time in the letter, the language of Christ as high priest. Everything Hebrews will say in the coming chapters about the priesthood depends on what is established here: that the priest who represents us has become one of us.

Two pastoral emphases carry this session. The first is the deliverance from lifelong slavery to the fear of death (2:14–15), which will land with particular weight on anyone in your class carrying grief, illness, or the quiet fear of mortality. The second is the ability of the tempted Christ to help those who are tempted (2:17–18), which will land on anyone wrestling with ongoing struggles. Teach both. They are the pastoral gifts of this passage.

The theological anchor of the session is the Chalcedonian confession: Christ is truly God and truly human, two natures in one person, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation. You do not need to teach the Council of Chalcedon by name, but the theology it protected is the theology Hebrews 2 assumes. Let the class see both natures clearly, and do not let either dissolve into the other.



## **Preparing to Teach This Session**

### **Before you teach:**

- Read Hebrews 2:5–18 aloud twice in preparation.
- Read Psalm 8 in its entirety. It will help you see what the writer is doing with verses 6–8.

- Read Luther's explanation of the Second Article of the Creed from the Small Catechism. The phrase "who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil" echoes Hebrews 2 directly.
- Think about whether there is anyone in your class currently carrying grief, serious illness, or bereavement. The death-deliverance section may need to be taught with particular pastoral care for them.

### Key theological points for this session:

- **The incarnation was purposeful.** Christ took on flesh in order to die, in order to break death's power, in order to become our merciful and faithful high priest.
- **Christ is truly human.** "In every respect" is a phrase that matters theologically. Tempted, tired, weeping, dying. Fully one of us, except for sin.
- **Death's power is broken.** Through death Christ destroyed the devil's grip on death and delivered us from lifelong slavery to the fear of it. This is Easter theology, central to Lutheran hymnody.
- **Christ is able to help the tempted.** Because He was truly tempted and did not sin, His help is the help of one who understands from the inside.



### Suggested Time Plan

For a 60-minute class period.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer; read Hebrews 2:5–18 aloud
0:05–0:15	The turn: from height to humility; Psalm 8 applied to Christ

0:15–0:25	The pioneer perfected through suffering (2:10)
0:25–0:35	Christ as brother: flesh and blood, the death of death (2:11–15)
0:35–0:50	A merciful and faithful high priest; Christ able to help (2:17–18)
0:50–1:00	Discussion; Looking Ahead; closing prayer



## Teaching Notes, Part by Part

### The Turn from Height to Humility (10 minutes)

Open by helping the class feel the pivot. In chapter 1 Hebrews pushed them upward; now it brings them down. Some teachers find it helpful to name this openly: “If chapter 1 was vertigo from looking up, chapter 2 is shock from looking down.” The Son who is above the angels has been made, for a little while, lower than them.

Work briefly through Psalm 8. In its original setting, the psalm is about humanity made a little lower than the angels and crowned with dominion. The writer admits that we do not see this dominion in the world as it is. We see chaos, sin, failure. But we see Jesus — the true human — crowned with glory. What was lost in Adam has been recovered in Christ. The class should see that Hebrews is making an “Adam and new Adam” argument, even though it does not use Paul’s exact language.

### The Pioneer Perfected Through Suffering (10 minutes)

Verse 10 is theologically dense. The most important move to make: “perfect” here does not mean morally perfected (Christ was never imperfect). The Greek *teleioo* means “brought to the goal” or “made fit for purpose.” Christ was brought, in His human experience, through the full range of what suffering is, so that He might be fit as the pioneer of our salvation.

The image of Christ as pioneer — or trailblazer, or founder — is worth some time. A pioneer goes ahead. He clears the trail. Others follow him along the path he has opened. Christ is that pioneer for us. He has walked the road of human suffering, and He has walked it to its destination in glory. Those who follow Him walk a path He has already traveled. Let the class feel how pastorally strengthening this is. Our suffering is not random and not solitary.

### **Luther on Christ's suffering**

Luther was emphatic that Christ did not merely appear to suffer but truly suffered, in body and in soul. The medieval tradition sometimes spoke as though the divine nature protected Christ from the real experience of pain and forsakenness. Luther pushed back sharply: Christ really felt God-forsaken on the cross. He really bore the weight of our sin. He really experienced the terror of death. This is not a speculative matter; it is what makes Christ our pioneer. A Christ who only appeared to suffer could not lead us through real suffering. Luther's theology of the cross — *theologia crucis* — is the Lutheran instinct to find Christ precisely in the suffering, not above it.

### **Christ as Brother — The Death of Death (15 minutes)**

The heart of the session. Walk the class through verses 11–15 carefully.

“He is not ashamed to call them brothers.” This sentence deserves to land heavily. Many in your class may quietly believe that the risen Christ finds them an embarrassment. The writer of Hebrews insists otherwise. Christ claims us. Christ introduces us to the Father as His own. Let that be said plainly.

“Through death he destroyed the one who had the power of death, that is, the devil.” The class may not be accustomed to this *Christus Victor* language — Christ as victor over the devil and the powers of death — but it is ancient and Lutheran. Luther sang it: “It was a strange and dreadful strife, when life and death contended; the victory remained with life, the reign of death was ended.” Help the class see that Christ's work includes this victorious dimension. He did not only pay a debt; He defeated an enemy.

“Lifelong slavery to the fear of death.” Teach this slowly. Fear of death shapes human life in ways most people do not consciously recognize. It drives achievement, acquisition, anxiety, and the avoidance of meaningful risk. It makes

people grasping and small. Christ has broken this slavery. Not by removing death from human experience, but by removing death's power to dominate the one who trusts in Him.

### **Pastoral Anchor — Those Carrying Grief or Illness**

If anyone in your class is currently grieving a loss, facing a serious diagnosis, or watching a loved one near death, the text in front of you is for them in a particular way. Christ has entered death. He has broken its power. He has not promised we will avoid dying, but He has promised we will not die alone and we will not die without a destination. Speak this plainly. Do not try to solve their grief or their fear — simply name that Hebrews 2:14–15 is a promise meant for exactly such moments. Sometimes the most pastoral thing a teacher can say is, “This verse is for you.”

### **A Merciful and Faithful High Priest (15 minutes)**

The climax of the passage and the first full introduction of Hebrews' signature theme. Walk the class through the two adjectives: merciful toward us, faithful toward God. A priest stands between two parties and belongs to both; Christ does this perfectly because He is both God and man.

The word “propitiation” deserves a clear treatment. It means a sacrifice that turns away wrath. Some modern translations soften it to “atonement” or “reconciliation”; the Lutheran tradition has not been embarrassed by the stronger word. The problem of human sin before a holy God is real, and Christ's death really addresses it. Do not let the class think that wrath-language is something that we need to apologize for. It is part of the gospel. God's wrath against sin is not the opposite of His love; it is the form His love takes when sin threatens what He loves. Christ's propitiation is not God's love solving God's wrath; it is God's love accomplishing what God's justice required.

Verse 18 — “he is able to help those who are being tempted” — is the pastoral punchline of the session. Two things to hold together, as the manuscript notes: Christ was truly tempted, and Christ did not sin. Both are necessary. A Christ who had not been tempted could not understand us; a Christ who had yielded could not help us. The Christ who was tempted and did not yield is the Christ whose help reaches us.



## Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

***“How could Jesus be truly tempted if He was God? Wouldn't He always have known He would not sin?”***

One of the hardest questions in Christian theology, and the Church has wrestled with it for centuries. The best answer: Christ's two natures are united in one person, but the experience of temptation belongs to His human nature. As true man, He felt the real pull of temptation — in Gethsemane, in the wilderness, and presumably throughout His ministry. He did not float above the struggle. He endured it. He resisted temptation not by magically knowing He could not fail, but by actively, humanly trusting His Father. This is what the writer means by His being “perfected through suffering” — not moral improvement, but the real human experience of faithful endurance. If this feels difficult to wrap our minds around, that is because the incarnation is difficult to wrap our minds around. The Church has confessed it without claiming to understand it exhaustively.

***“If Christ destroyed the devil's power over death, why do we still die?”***

Because the final victory is already won but not yet fully revealed. The language theologians use is “already” and “not yet.” The decisive victory happened at the cross and resurrection — Christ has already broken death's power. But we still live in the time between Christ's first coming and His second, when death continues to operate even though its final defeat is certain. For the Christian, death is no longer the feared enemy; it is a defeated enemy who has not yet been finally put away. We die, but in dying we are with Christ, who has passed through death ahead of us. The resurrection of the body at the last day will complete what was begun at Easter.

***“Is ‘propitiation’ the same as ‘appeasement’? It sounds like God is angry and needs to be calmed down.”***

A fair question, and one that needs a careful answer. Propitiation is not the pagan concept of appeasing a capricious deity who needs to be bribed into good humor. In the Bible, propitiation is God's own provision — God Himself sends the sacrifice, God Himself is the one offering the offering. God's wrath is not irrational

divine moodiness; it is the settled opposition of a holy God to real evil. Sin is a real problem in the world and in our hearts, and a God who did not oppose it would not be loving. Propitiation is God's love doing what His holiness requires — dealing with sin at the cost of His own Son. "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). Propitiation is love's act, not love's opposite.

***"What does 'made perfect through suffering' mean? Wasn't Christ already perfect?"***

The Greek word for "make perfect" (*teleioo*) does not mean "improve morally." It means "bring to completion" or "make fit for a purpose." Christ was always morally perfect, always sinless, always fully God. But to be our high priest, He had to be brought, in His human experience, through the full depth of what suffering is. A high priest who had never suffered could not sympathize with those he represents. By going through suffering and emerging on the other side, Christ was "completed" as our pioneer — brought to the goal as the one who leads many sons to glory.

***"Does 'offspring of Abraham' in verse 16 mean Christ only helps Jewish people?"***

No. In the New Testament, "offspring of Abraham" comes to include all who share Abraham's faith — Jew and Gentile alike. Paul makes this explicit in Galatians 3 ("those of faith are the sons of Abraham") and Romans 4. The writer of Hebrews assumes this inclusive sense. His point is that Christ came to help humans, not angels — and in His plan, the people of God includes all who trust in Him, from every nation.

***"What is the difference between 'merciful' and 'faithful' in describing Christ as high priest?"***

The two adjectives describe the two directions of a priest's work. A priest stands between God and the people. He must be faithful to God in the offering of the proper sacrifice according to God's will. He must be merciful to the people in representing them gently and sympathetically before God. Christ is perfectly both. He is faithful to the Father in offering Himself as the acceptable sacrifice. He is merciful to us in bearing our weakness without contempt. A priest who is faithful

but not merciful produces terror. A priest who is merciful but not faithful produces false comfort. Christ is both, in perfect proportion.



## **Leading the Discussion**

Notes on each of the six discussion questions. Pick two or three that fit your class.

### ***Question 1 — Holding height and humility together***

An important theological question. Too much emphasis on Christ's divinity alone can produce a Christ who feels distant, unapproachable, incapable of sympathy. Too much emphasis on His humanity alone can produce a Christ who is merely a good teacher or moral example, incapable of actually saving. Hebrews holds both. Invite the class to name the pastoral distortions that can result when either is neglected.

### ***Question 2 — Christ as pioneer through suffering***

This may be the richest question of the set. Some in your class may be suffering right now. Receive their reflections gently. Do not press anyone to share what they do not want to share. The point is to let the class see that suffering in Christ is different from suffering without Him — not less painful in its moment, but not alone, and not without destination.

### ***Question 3 — "Not ashamed"***

An intimate question. Many believers quietly feel that Christ must be ashamed of them — of their failures, their ongoing sins, their weakness, their spiritual unimpressiveness. The writer's insistence that Christ is not ashamed is good news. Let the class sit with it. You may have people in the room who have never quite let themselves believe this. Let them hear it said.

### ***Question 4 — Fear of death***

A question that invites reflection on how pervasively fear of death shapes ordinary life — through anxiety, through acquisitiveness, through frantic busyness, through avoidance of risk. For older members of your class, this may connect to their own mortality. For younger members, it may connect to the loss of loved ones or to

existential anxiety. Receive whatever they bring. The pastoral point is that Christ's victory over death frees us to live without that fear governing us.

### **Question 5 — “In every respect”**

A theological question that can become pastoral. Christ was hungry, tired, tempted, grieved, betrayed, and killed. He chose this. Why? So that He might truly be one of us and truly help us. There is no human experience — except sin itself — that is foreign to Him. Let the class name experiences they had assumed Christ might not understand.

### **Question 6 — Christ's help in temptation**

A testimony question. Some in the class may have stories of Christ's help in moments of struggle. Receive such testimonies gratefully. The point of the question is not to collect impressive stories but to let the class notice that Christ's help is real, present, and different in kind from the help of someone who has never struggled. Close with the assurance that His help is available to all who ask.



## **If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes**

Keep/cut plan for a shorter class period.

### **Keep:**

- The turn from chapter 1 to chapter 2; the Psalm 8 argument (briefly)
- The pioneer perfected through suffering
- Christ as brother; the death of death (2:14–15)
- Merciful and faithful high priest; able to help (2:17–18)
- Discussion questions 3 and 4 or 6

### **Cut or Abbreviate:**

- Detailed treatment of all three Old Testament quotations in 2:12–13
- The technical explanation of “perfected” — name that it does not mean moral improvement and move on

- Discussion questions 1, 2, 5



## **For Further Study**

### **Biblical cross-references:**

- Psalm 8 — the passage Hebrews 2 quotes and applies to Christ
- Romans 5:12–21 — Paul on Adam and the new Adam
- Philippians 2:5–11 — the descent and ascent of the Son
- John 1:14 — “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”
- 2 Corinthians 5:21 — “he who knew no sin”
- Colossians 2:14–15 — Christ’s triumph over the powers

### **From the Lutheran tradition:**

- Small Catechism, Second Article of the Creed — Luther’s summary of what Christ has done
- Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VIII — on the person of Christ and the two natures
- Luther’s hymn “Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands” (Christ lag in Todesbanden) — a sung meditation on Hebrews 2:14–15
- The Chalcedonian Definition (AD 451) — for the theological framing of Christ’s two natures

### **Commentaries:**

- Lenski on Hebrews 2 — especially on the two natures
- Philip Hughes, Commentary on Hebrews, on the phrase “made perfect through suffering”
- Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor* — classic Swedish Lutheran treatment of the victory motif of Hebrews 2:14



## **A Final Word**

You have been given one of the warmer passages of Hebrews to teach. Do not rush past its pastoral gifts. Your class may, in this session, hear for the first time — or hear again with new force — that Christ is not ashamed of them, that death's power is broken, and that the One who was tempted is able to help them in their temptation. These are not small gifts. They are gospel.

A temptation is to teach this passage as a theological exhibition — look how sophisticated Hebrews' Christology is, look at the two natures, look at the atonement categories. The theology is indeed sophisticated and deserves careful handling. But the pastoral weight is the point. The reason the theology is in the Bible is that humans need a Christ who is truly God (because only God can save) and truly human (because only one of us can represent us). When you teach the theology, always show the pastoral reason. That is how Hebrews itself teaches.

Close your class with a sense of warmth. The Christ of Hebrews 2 is a warm Christ. He shares our flesh. He has tasted our death. He is not ashamed of us. He is able to help. These are the notes on which the session should end.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

SESSION 4

# Greater Than Moses

*Hebrews 3:1-4:13*

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

*A free companion to the Bible study  
Something Better: A Study of Hebrews*

## **A Note to the Teacher**

Session 4 covers the longest single passage in the volume — a full two chapters held together as a single pastoral unit. The passage contains the second of Hebrews' four warning passages, and it is the warning that is most often misread by well-meaning teachers who have not been trained in the Lutheran handling of such texts. Your work here will be especially important.

Three teaching challenges to anticipate. First, the length: two full chapters is more than most classes can absorb in detail, so you will need to be selective. Second, the warning: the language of Psalm 95 and the writer's application of it is strong, and will frighten some of your class. Third, the rest theme: "rest" functions in two distinct but related senses in Hebrews 4 (the rest of faith entered now and the rest of glory entered finally), and if you blur the two you will either produce antinomianism or works-righteousness.

The pastoral goal of the session is simple. Your class should leave sobered but not despairing. They should hear the warning as addressed to the whole people of God, including them, without concluding that the warning is evidence against their standing in Christ. They should feel the urgency of today. And they should see that the pastoral pattern Hebrews uses — warning, then gospel — does not leave us with the warning. The gospel of 4:14–16 is on the way in next session, and they need to know it is coming.



## **Preparing to Teach This Session**

### **Before you teach:**

- Read Hebrews 3:1–4:13 aloud in one sitting. The length matters. Feel the argument as a single sweep.
- Read Numbers 13–14 for the historical background — the spies, the failure, the wilderness sentence.

- Read Psalm 95 in its entirety, ideally aloud. The psalm begins as a call to worship and ends as a warning; the two belong together.
- Review the Lutheran handling of warnings from Session 2. You will be leaning on that pastoral pattern heavily here.
- Consider who in your class may be vulnerable to a warning passage — the newly grieving, the chronically anxious, those carrying hidden struggles. Prepare to address them gently within the whole class teaching.

### Key theological points for this session:

- **Christ is greater than Moses as the builder is greater than the house.** The comparison honors Moses while locating him rightly.
- **Psalm 95 is still speaking “today.”** The warning against hardening is not an Old Testament footnote; it is a present word to every generation of the people of God.
- **The antidote to hardening is communal.** “Exhort one another every day.” Christians do not guard their hearts alone.
- **God’s rest is both present and future.** The rest of faith is entered now, as we cease trying to save ourselves. The rest of glory is entered at the last. Both are gifts; both are held by faith.
- **The warning leads into the gospel, not away from it.** The passage ends at 4:13, but the writer’s argument continues immediately into 4:14–16. Keep the destination in view.



## Suggested Time Plan

For a 60-minute class period. This is a long passage; a 75-minute class period is better if you can arrange one.

Time	Segment
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0:00–0:05	Opening prayer; read Hebrews 3:1–6 and 4:11–13 aloud
0:05–0:15	Christ greater than Moses; “we are his house”
0:15–0:25	Psalm 95 and the wilderness generation
0:25–0:35	A rest that remains; the two senses of rest
0:35–0:45	How this warning works: pastoral landing
0:45–0:55	Discussion (two or three questions)
0:55–1:00	Looking Ahead; closing prayer



## Teaching Notes, Part by Part

### Greater Than Moses (10 minutes)

Open by honoring Moses. For Jewish readers of Hebrews, Moses was as great a figure as could be named. To say that Christ is greater than Moses is not casual; it is momentous. But the writer does not diminish Moses — he calls Moses faithful. Christ is greater not because Moses was less, but because Christ is more than a servant. Christ is the builder.

The verse to linger on is 3:6: “And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.” Make sure the class hears “if” rightly. It is not a threat against the tender heart. It is a description of what it looks like to be part of God’s house in the time between Christ’s first and second comings. Those who are part of Christ’s house are those who hold fast. Holding fast is what faith does. A person who has stopped holding fast — who has given up on Christ entirely — shows by that ceasing that she was not, in the end, part of the house. But the person who is still holding, however tired or weak the grip, is part of the house.

### Psalm 95 and the Wilderness Generation (10 minutes)

Set the historical scene briefly. The generation that came out of Egypt saw God’s works for forty years and still failed to believe He would bring them into the

promised land. At Kadesh Barnea, the spies reported giants; the people refused to trust God; God turned them back into the wilderness; that generation died there. Only Joshua and Caleb, who had believed, entered.

Then show what the writer does with Psalm 95. The psalm, written long after Joshua, is still saying “today” — still urging its hearers not to harden their hearts, still warning against the failure of the wilderness generation. The writer’s point: the warning is always current. Each generation hears “today” addressed to itself. The wilderness failure is not a one-time event; it is a recurring danger.

Spend a moment on verse 13: “Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today.’” The antidote to hardening is communal encouragement. Let the class feel how unusual this is in our individualistic moment. Most advice for guarding against drift assumes private effort — better quiet times, stronger discipline, more self-examination. The writer points away from the private to the communal. Christians keep each other soft. This is one of the real reasons the local congregation exists.

#### **On the Mixed Nature of the Visible Church**

The warnings of Hebrews are addressed to the whole Christian community, which always includes wholehearted believers, those who are genuinely drifting, and everything in between. The writer does not sort his hearers before addressing them; he addresses them all and trusts the Word to do its proper work in each heart. This is a deeply Lutheran instinct. Augustine spoke of the church as a mixed body (*corpus permixtum*), and the Reformers continued this understanding: the visible church contains true believers and nominal ones together, and we cannot sort them perfectly. The warnings of Scripture work in this mixed body by the Spirit, convicting the complacent and comforting the tender. Teachers who try to sort the class in advance — determining who the warning is ‘really’ for — do the work God reserves for Himself.

#### **A Rest That Remains (10 minutes)**

Move now to chapter 4. The writer’s argument is that Joshua did not, finally, give the rest God had in mind. If he had, the psalmist would not still have been urging

his hearers to enter rest. Therefore a rest remains — a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

Teach the two senses of this rest clearly. First, the rest of faith, entered now. The Christian enters God's rest when she ceases trying to save herself and receives salvation as gift. "Whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his" (4:10) is the gospel in a single verse — ceasing from works-righteousness as we enter by faith into what Christ has finished. Second, the rest of glory, entered at the last. The pilgrim road ends at the Sabbath of the world to come, where God's people rest fully and finally in what He has accomplished.

These two rests are not separate; they are the same rest in its two modes. The rest of faith is the present tasting of the rest of glory. The rest of glory is the full flowering of the rest of faith. Christians are people who rest by faith now and who will rest in glory then. The pilgrim road is, in that sense, a road of rest — strange as that sounds — because the One we are following has already finished the work we are resting in.

### **How This Warning Works (10 minutes)**

This is the pastoral heart of the session. Say plainly, to the whole class, what the warning is and is not. Use the manuscript's framing or your own variation of it. The warning is for the whole people of God, including the complacent who need shaking and the tender who need to know the warning is not pointed specifically at them.

The most common pastoral mistake with this passage is to leave the class in anxiety. Do not do this. The writer himself does not do this. Notice how 4:13 immediately gives way to 4:14–16. The exposure of the living Word leads to the invitation to the throne of grace. You must preserve this pattern in your teaching. If your class leaves with 4:13 ringing in their ears but not 4:14–16, you have taught less than Hebrews taught.

#### **Pastoral Anchor — the Anxious Christian**

Some in your class will hear this warning and conclude that they must be the ones the warning is aimed at. For such hearts, say plainly: "If the first response of your heart to this warning is fear that it applies to you — that fear itself is evidence that you are not in the condition the warning is aimed at. The

wilderness generation was not afraid of hardening; they had hardened. You are afraid. The Spirit is still at work in you, producing the very attention the writer is calling for. Receive the warning as the Lord's care for you, not as evidence against you. And when next session's text comes — 'let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace' — know that that invitation is for you."

### The Living Word (brief)

Close the teaching segment with a brief treatment of 4:12–13 — the living and active Word, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, exposing us to the eyes of the One to whom we must give account. This is a favorite Lutheran passage because it shows how God addresses us in Scripture — not as mere information but as searching, exposing, life-giving speech. The Word of God is not passive. It works on us. It shows us ourselves. And it is the same Word that also delivers the gospel that covers what it has exposed.



## Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

### *"Can a true Christian fall away from faith?"*

The Lutheran tradition answers yes, in the sense that a person who has genuinely believed can, through willful unbelief and persistent resistance to the Spirit, turn away from faith. This is what the warnings of Hebrews are warning against. But two important clarifications. First, this is not something that happens accidentally, nor is it something that hangs over every anxious Christian. A believer worried about falling away is not falling away. Second, the question of whether a particular person who has turned away was ever truly regenerate in the first place is not a question Scripture gives us clear tools to answer. The Lutheran tradition holds that we know we are God's by trusting the promises attached to Baptism, the Word, and the Supper. We do not know it by introspecting our past to determine whether our original faith was real.

### *"What does 'rest' really mean? Is it heaven, or something we have now?"*

Both, and they are connected. The rest has two aspects. The rest of faith is entered now, when by faith we cease striving to earn God's favor and receive it as gift. This is the Lutheran evangelical rest — ceasing from works-righteousness. The rest of glory is entered finally, at the last day, when God's people enter the Sabbath of the world to come. These are not two different rests; they are the same rest in its present and future modes. The Christian rests now by faith in what Christ has accomplished, and she will rest finally in glory when His accomplishment is fully revealed.

***“If we are already in God's rest, why does the writer tell us to strive to enter it?”***

A good question. The Christian life involves a continuing tension between the “already” of what God has given and the “not yet” of its full realization. We have entered God's rest by faith, and we are still striving to enter it finally. The striving is not the work of earning the rest; it is the work of holding onto the rest against all that would pull us away. Faith is not passive in Scripture. Faith clings, holds fast, endures. The rest is gift; clinging to the rest is the striving. Lutheran theology has always distinguished between the monergism of salvation (God alone saves) and the active life of faith that flows from salvation. Both are present in this passage.

***“Why does the writer quote Psalm 95 instead of quoting the Exodus narrative directly?”***

Because the psalm itself has already done the theological work of turning the wilderness story into a present-tense warning. Psalm 95 is not just recounting history; it is applying history. The psalmist has already said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts — as in the wilderness generation.” By quoting the psalm, the writer picks up the psalm's hermeneutic and extends it to his own readers: if the psalm is addressed to its “today,” then when we read the psalm today, we are the “today” it is addressed to. The writer of Hebrews is, in effect, preaching from the psalm just as the psalmist preached from Exodus.

***“Does the ‘Word of God’ in 4:12 refer to Scripture or to Christ?”***

In context, it refers primarily to God's speech — the Word through which God has addressed His people. Scripture is one of the primary forms this Word takes for us. Some Christian readers, following John 1, have also seen a reference to Christ

Himself as the living Word. The two readings are not in conflict, because Christ is the Word that Scripture finally points to. But the immediate referent in Hebrews 4:12 is God's speaking — which, for us, comes to us primarily in Scripture and in the preached Word that opens Scripture.

***“How does this passage fit with the Lutheran insistence that salvation is by grace alone?”***

Easily, once the pastoral pattern is clear. Salvation is entirely by grace alone; the Christian life of faith requires the whole person. These are not competing claims. We are saved by grace, through faith, not by works; and that faith, once given, strives and endures and holds fast. The striving does not earn the rest; it holds the rest. The Lutheran Confessions are careful about this: faith is not an act of human willpower that merits salvation, but genuine faith is never idle. It works through love. It endures. It holds fast. Hebrews 3–4 is perfectly consistent with *sola gratia* when it is read in the tradition's broader frame.



## **Leading the Discussion**

Notes on each of the six discussion questions.

### ***Question 1 — Honoring Moses rightly***

A theological question that can become practical. The Church has sometimes overexalted Old Testament figures (making them virtual co-saviors) or underexalted them (treating the Old Testament as expendable). Hebrews models the right relation: Moses was faithful, Christ is the builder. We honor Moses as the servant and Christ as the Master. The class may name other figures — saints, pastors, teachers — whom we similarly need to honor without elevating to Christ's place.

### ***Question 2 — Hearing God's voice today***

A specifically Lutheran answer is available here: God addresses His people today through the Word preached, the Scripture read, the Sacraments administered, and through the mutual consolation of the brethren. These are the ordinary means. Do

not let the class wander into subjective experiences of hearing God's voice, which can lead to confusion. The ordinary means are where God has promised to speak.

### **Question 3 — Communal exhortation**

A rich question. Many in your class will have stories of being encouraged by others at critical moments. Receive those stories. The pastoral point is that the Christian life is not a private project; we are kept soft by the daily encouragement of one another. Congregations that practice this well — where members regularly check in on one another, share Scripture with one another, pray for one another — are congregations where drift is harder.

### **Question 4 — Striving for rest**

The theological paradox at the heart of the passage. Striving is not earning; striving is holding on. Let the class name what it looks like in practice: showing up to worship when it would be easier not to, opening the Bible when it feels dry, going to Communion when you feel unworthy, praying when you do not feel like praying. These are forms of striving that hold onto the gift of rest.

### **Question 5 — The living Word**

An introspective question. Invite members of the class to share experiences of the Word doing its living and active work on them — convicting them, comforting them, revealing something they had hidden even from themselves. This is a question best answered slowly, and some of the answers may be moving.

### **Question 6 — Warning and gospel**

A question that lets the class articulate the pastoral pattern of Hebrews itself. Warnings without gospel produce despair or hardness. Gospel without warning produces cheap grace. The writer pairs them relentlessly, and a healthy Christian teaching pairs them too. The class may name examples — perhaps from their own experience — of preaching that got this wrong in either direction.



## **If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes**

This is a long passage. A forty-five-minute treatment will be tight.

### **Keep:**

- Christ greater than Moses, with verse 3:6 (“we are his house”) as the anchor
- The warning of Psalm 95 with particular emphasis on “today” and on communal exhortation
- The two senses of rest, taught briefly
- The pastoral landing — how this warning works and does not work
- Discussion questions 3 and 6

### **Cut or Abbreviate:**

- Detailed historical reconstruction of the wilderness narrative
- Extended treatment of the “living and active Word” (4:12–13); summarize rather than expound
- Discussion questions 1, 2, 4, 5



## **For Further Study**

### **Biblical cross-references:**

- Numbers 13–14 — the spies and the wilderness sentence
- Psalm 95 in its entirety — call to worship becoming warning
- Exodus 17:1–7 — Massah and Meribah, where the people tested the Lord
- Deuteronomy 1:19–46 — Moses’ own retelling of the Kadesh Barnea failure
- Matthew 11:28–30 — “Come to me... I will give you rest”

### **From the Lutheran tradition:**

- Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration II (on free will) and XI (on election) — both bear on how Lutherans read warnings against falling away

- Luther's Preface to Galatians — on law, gospel, and the rest of faith
- Small Catechism, Third Commandment — on Sabbath and the Word

### **Commentaries:**

- Lenski on Hebrews 3–4 — careful verse-by-verse treatment with pastoral sensitivity
- Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* — strong on the rest theme and its two senses
- F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT, older edition) — classic and still valuable



## **A Final Word**

You have taught one of the harder passages in Hebrews, and you have done it in the Lutheran tradition that knows how to let warnings be warnings while also letting gospel be gospel. Do not second-guess the seriousness of the passage. The writer was serious. He was not hedging, and he was not playing. His readers faced real pressures and real temptations, and he wrote to keep them in Christ.

Your class is no different. Some of them are tempted to drift and do not recognize it. Some of them are tender and afraid. Some of them are in between. The Word you have taught is the Word that does its proper work in all of them. You are not the Spirit; you do not have to sort them. You only have to teach the Word faithfully — with the warning clear, with the gospel clearer, and with the whole set inside the pastoral framework that Hebrews itself gives us: the great high priest at the throne of grace is waiting in the next session.

Close your class with a word of expectation. Next time we will meet Melchizedek. We will meet the great invitation of 4:16. We will meet the sympathetic priest. The rest the writer has been urging us toward is entered through the One who is seated, and His throne is a throne of grace. Teach this session with the next one in view, because the next one is the comfort this one is building toward.

## **Soli Deo Gloria**

SESSION 5

# **Our Great High Priest**

*Hebrews 4:14–5:10*

**TEACHER'S GUIDE**

*A free companion to the Bible study  
Something Better: A Study of Hebrews*

## A Note to the Teacher

Session 5 is the pastoral resolution of Session 4. Your class has just been through the longest and most demanding warning passage in Hebrews. They have heard the writer's stern language about the wilderness generation, about the deceitfulness of sin, about the Word that pierces to the division of soul and spirit. Some of them came out of that session shaken — which was the point. Now the writer turns, and the whole pastoral weight of the letter leans forward to the throne of grace. Your task is to let them feel that turn.

The passage pairs two things that can look like different topics but are actually one. It pairs the invitation to draw near with the beginning of Hebrews' sustained treatment of Christ as high priest. These are not separate subjects. We draw near because there is a priest. The priest's qualifications — chosen from among men, able to sympathize, called by God rather than self-appointed — are exactly the qualifications that make the invitation to the throne real.

One pedagogical decision you will face. Melchizedek appears in this passage for the first time (5:6, 10), and the writer then drops the name and moves on. Your class will ask about him. Hold the full explanation for Session 7, where Hebrews itself develops it. In this session, say just enough about Melchizedek to keep the appetite whetted. The fuller treatment is coming.



## Preparing to Teach This Session

### Before you teach:

- Read Hebrews 4:14–5:10 aloud in preparation, preferably right after re-reading 4:12–13. The pastoral pivot from warning to invitation is felt best when the two are read together.
- Read Matthew 26:36–46 and Luke 22:39–46 — the Gethsemane accounts — as background for Hebrews 5:7.

- Read Leviticus 16 briefly for a sense of how the Day of Atonement priesthood worked, which is the background for Hebrews 5:1–4.
- Review Luther’s Small Catechism on prayer — the Introduction to the Lord’s Prayer (“God would thereby tenderly invite us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children...”) is essentially a short exposition of Hebrews 4:16.

### Key theological points for this session:

- **The throne of God is, for Christians, a throne of grace.** We come to receive mercy (for what is past) and grace to help (for what is ahead).
- **Christ sympathizes with our weakness.** The double negative matters: we do not have a priest who is unable to sympathize. He has been tempted in every respect, yet without sin.
- **Priesthood has qualifications.** Chosen from among men, appointed for others, sympathetic, called by God. Christ meets them all, but without the earthly priest’s need to offer sacrifice for his own sins.
- **Christ’s priesthood was formed in suffering.** Gethsemane is not incidental. The priest who invites us to the throne of grace prayed with loud cries and tears; He learned obedience through what He suffered.
- **Melchizedek is coming.** Named here in passing; developed in full in Session 7. Do not get distracted.



### Suggested Time Plan

For a 60-minute class period.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer; read Hebrews 4:12–5:10 aloud (so the pivot is felt)

0:05–0:20	The invitation: 4:14–16, the throne of grace, sympathetic priest
0:20–0:30	Coming to the throne: the pastoral reality of access
0:30–0:40	What a high priest is: the qualifications in 5:1–4
0:40–0:50	Christ appointed; the loud cries and tears of 5:7–9
0:50–1:00	Discussion (two questions); Looking Ahead; closing prayer



## Teaching Notes, Part by Part

### The Invitation (15 minutes)

Begin by naming the pivot. In one sentence: “Last session ended with us exposed before the living Word. This session begins with the invitation to the throne of grace.” Let the class feel the pastoral intention. The same writer who warned in 4:11–13 is inviting in 4:14–16. The warning served the invitation; it did not replace it.

Walk through the phrase structure of 4:14–16 slowly. “Great high priest” — not just a priest, the great one. “Passed through the heavens” — into the true sanctuary, not just behind an earthly curtain. “Jesus, the Son of God” — both names together, the incarnate Son. “Hold fast our confession” — echoes the call of Session 4. “Not... unable to sympathize” — notice the careful double negative. “In every respect tempted as we are, yet without sin” — the theologically dense claim at the heart of the verse.

Then verse 16. Dwell on it. “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” This is the pastoral center of the passage. Mercy for what is past; grace for what is ahead. The throne is available. The priest is welcoming. The invitation is now.

**The Throne of Grace and the Lord's Prayer**

Luther's explanation of the Introduction to the Lord's Prayer — "that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that we may ask Him confidently with all assurance, as dear children ask their dear father" — is essentially a pastoral application of Hebrews 4:16. The confidence is not presumption. It is the confidence of a child with a parent who has already promised welcome. Consider drawing the connection for your class. Many will have prayed the Lord's Prayer a thousand times without realizing it rests on the priestly work Hebrews is unfolding.

### **Coming to the Throne (10 minutes)**

This is the pastoral heart of the session. Say plainly what the manuscript says: the instinct of most Christians, when they have actually sinned, is to pull back from God, not to draw near. They want to wait until they have "done better" before approaching the throne again. Hebrews says the opposite. The time of need is not the obstacle to access; it is the occasion for access.

Let this land. It is one of the key pastoral moves of the Lutheran tradition, and many in your class may never have heard it said plainly. The gospel is not for the times when we are doing well; the gospel is for the times when we are not. The throne of grace is not reserved for polished saints. It is open for the tempted and the failing, which is to say, for us. Draw out the practical implications for prayer, for confession, for the Supper — all the ordinary means by which Christians come to the throne.

### **What a High Priest Is (10 minutes)**

Turn now to 5:1–4, where the writer describes the priesthood in general before applying it to Christ. The four features to name: (1) chosen from among men, sharing their nature; (2) appointed for others, to act on their behalf in relation to God; (3) able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward because he is himself weak; (4) called by God, not self-appointed.

Pause briefly on the detail that the earthly priest had to offer sacrifice for his own sins first. This is how the old covenant priest was sympathetic — because he was a sinner himself. Christ's sympathy works differently. He sympathizes not by sharing our sin, but by having been truly tempted without yielding. A priest who

shares our sin cannot finally save us; he needs saving too. A priest who has been tempted and has not sinned can both sympathize and save. This is one of the key differences between the old priesthood and the new — a difference the writer will develop more in coming chapters but is setting up here.

### **Christ Appointed; Loud Cries and Tears (10 minutes)**

Walk through 5:5–6. Christ did not exalt Himself to the priesthood; the Father appointed Him, with Psalm 2 (sonship) and Psalm 110 (the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek). Both psalms are quoted. Mention Melchizedek by name and then — this is the key pedagogical move — park the question. Say something like, “The writer drops the name here and moves on. He will come back to it in full in chapter 7. For now, just notice that Christ’s priesthood has Scriptural warrant and is not a Levitical priesthood.”

Then turn to 5:7–9, the Gethsemane allusion. Walk your class carefully through what this passage is saying. The Son of God prayed with loud cries and tears. The incarnation was real. The suffering was real. The prayer was real. And the Father heard Him — not by preventing the death, but by delivering Him through it in resurrection.

#### **On “He Learned Obedience”**

Verse 8 — “though he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered” — sometimes troubles careful readers. The concern: does this imply Christ was previously disobedient, or previously ignorant of obedience? The answer is no. The learning here is experiential. Christ, in His humanity, experienced obedience by doing it — by submitting His will to the Father’s in specific acts of faithful submission, most fully in Gethsemane and at the cross. He did not learn that obedience exists; He learned obedience by practicing it. This is parallel to the “perfected through suffering” language in Hebrews 2:10. Christ was never morally imperfect; He was brought through the human experience of faithful obedience so that He might be fit as our pioneer and priest.

Close this teaching segment with the pastoral point. The priest who invites us to the throne is the priest who has knelt in Gethsemane. The One who says “come” is the One who prayed “not my will but Yours.” Our access to the throne is

purchased by His own suffering obedience. The invitation is not cheap; it is free, but it is not cheap. And the One who issues it is the One who paid for it.



## **Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses**

### ***“What exactly is ‘the throne of grace’? Is it a literal place?”***

The throne is a scriptural image for God’s sovereign rule. In Hebrews, “the throne of grace” is the same throne from which God rules the universe — but approached by Christians through Christ, it is experienced as gracious rather than as purely judicial. Whether we should imagine it as a literal object in a literal heavenly location is less important than the theological reality: the God who governs all things is, for those who come through Christ, the God who receives them graciously. We do not come to a different God than the God who sits on the throne of judgment; we come to the same God, through His Son, who has made that throne gracious toward us.

### ***“If Christ sympathizes with us, does that mean He experienced every possible temptation?”***

Not every specific circumstance, but every kind of temptation. Christ did not face, for example, the temptation to misuse social media — because it did not exist in His day. But He faced the underlying temptations that social media now presents: the temptation to vanity, to pride, to impatience, to avoidance of uncomfortable truth. There is no kind of temptation the human condition produces that is foreign to Him. The writer’s claim is not that Christ experienced every particular trial a human has ever faced, but that every category of human struggle has been known by Him from the inside.

### ***“If Christ was tempted, could He have sinned? And if He could not have sinned, was the temptation real?”***

One of the most deeply debated questions in Christology. The classical Christian position, and the one the Lutheran tradition has held, is that Christ’s temptations were real — He truly felt the pull — but that He could not sin, because His human nature was inseparably united to the divine Person of the Son. The divine Person

of the Son cannot sin. Yet the human nature of Christ, in which the temptations were experienced, was truly stretched by them. This is a mystery we confess more than we explain. What we do not say is that the temptations were merely play-acting. They were real, and they were resisted, and Christ was faithful.

***“What does it mean that Christ ‘was heard because of his reverence’ in Gethsemane?”***

A question with some ambiguity. The most common and most likely reading is that the Father heard Christ's prayers — not by removing the cross, but by delivering Him through death in resurrection. Christ's prayer in Gethsemane was not, “failing for lack of faith.” It was heard. The Father's answer came through the suffering, not around it. His reverence — His posture of submission even in the depth of His anguish — was the posture in which the prayer was offered, and it was the prayer the Father received. This is a pattern for our own prayer: we may pray with loud cries and tears; the Father may not take the suffering from us; but the Father hears, and the Father answers — sometimes by bringing us through what we cannot bypass.

***“How can we draw near with confidence when I know how sinful I still am?”***

The most pastoral question this passage raises. The short answer: our confidence is not in ourselves but in the priest who invites us. Hebrews does not say, “Draw near with confidence because you are worthy.” It says, “Draw near with confidence because the priest is sympathetic and the throne is gracious.” The confidence is located in Christ, not in our own spiritual condition. This is why the invitation is not canceled on our bad days. Grace is not an award for doing well. It is the gift that meets us where we are. The person who draws near most confidently is often not the person who feels most worthy, but the person who has most clearly seen how unworthy she is and therefore how necessary grace is. That person comes, because she knows she must.

***“Who is Melchizedek, and why is he being mentioned now?”***

A question you should briefly acknowledge and then defer. Melchizedek is the priest-king of Genesis 14 who blessed Abraham after Abraham's military victory. Psalm 110 invokes him as the pattern for the coming Messiah's priesthood. The writer of Hebrews is going to develop Melchizedek at length in chapter 7. For now,

the point is simply that Christ's priesthood has Old Testament warrant and is not a Levitical priesthood — it is an older, deeper, permanent priesthood. If a member of the class is particularly curious, point them to Genesis 14:17–20 and Psalm 110 for background reading and promise that Session 7 will take him up in full.



## **Leading the Discussion**

Notes on each of the six discussion questions. Pick two or three that fit your class.

### ***Question 1 — Warning and invitation paired***

The theological point of the session. Warning without invitation produces despair or hardening. Invitation without warning produces cheap grace. The writer pairs them deliberately, and faithful Christian teaching must do the same. Let the class reflect on teaching they have received that got this wrong in one direction or the other.

### ***Question 2 — Where confidence is easy and difficult***

A personal question that invites self-examination. Most Christians find confidence easy in certain areas (gratitude prayers, family intercession) and harder in others (confession of ongoing sin, asking for help with specific struggles). The pastoral point is that the same priest welcomes us in all areas. He is not more sympathetic about some kinds of need and less about others.

### ***Question 3 — Understanding help***

A testimony question. Some in the class will have experienced help from Christ that felt like the help of One who understands. Receive such testimonies gently. The point is not to collect impressive stories but to let the class notice the difference between cold help and understanding help, and to see that Christ offers the latter.

### ***Question 4 — The priest without sin***

A theologically important discussion. The old priest was sympathetic because he was a sinner like the people; Christ is sympathetic because He was tempted like them without sinning. The first kind of sympathy cannot finally save; the priest himself needs saving. The second kind of sympathy can save, because the priest is

not himself in need of propitiation. Let the class see why Christ's sinlessness is not distancing but actually necessary for real priesthood.

### **Question 5 — Loud cries and tears**

A pastorally rich question. The Son of God prayed this way. So may we. Some members of the class may have known times of prayer from the depths — grief, desperation, crisis — where ordinary composed prayer was impossible. Such prayer is not a failure; it is scriptural. Christ Himself prayed this way. This is permission, for anyone who needs it, to bring the whole of themselves to the throne.

### **Question 6 — Melchizedek**

A setup question for Session 7. Take it briefly. Most in the class will know little about Melchizedek beyond that he is mentioned in Genesis 14. Let them say what they know, name the main questions they have, and promise that the passage will take him up fully. Do not try to pre-empt Session 7's teaching here.



## **If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes**

Keep/cut plan for a shorter class period.

### **Keep:**

- Brief re-read of 4:12–13 and the full 4:14–16 invitation
- The throne of grace: mercy for the past, grace for what is ahead
- The sympathetic priest: tempted in every respect, yet without sin
- The pastoral coming-to-the-throne segment — do not skip this
- Brief Gethsemane teaching from 5:7; the priest who prayed
- Discussion question 2 or 5

### **Cut or Abbreviate:**

- Detailed walk through 5:1–4 on priestly qualifications; summarize

- Full treatment of “learned obedience”; note the key distinction and move on
- Any substantial treatment of Melchizedek; one sentence is enough



## For Further Study

### Biblical cross-references:

- Matthew 26:36–46 and Luke 22:39–46 — the Gethsemane accounts behind Hebrews 5:7
- Leviticus 16 — the Day of Atonement, background for the priestly qualifications
- Psalm 110 in its entirety — the psalm that prophesies Christ’s Melchizedek priesthood
- Romans 5:1–2 — “we have peace with God... access by faith into this grace”
- Ephesians 3:12 — “in whom we have boldness and access with confidence”

### From the Lutheran tradition:

- Small Catechism, Introduction to the Lord’s Prayer — Luther’s short exposition of confident access
- Large Catechism, Third Part, First Petition — on praying with the confidence of children to a father
- Augsburg Confession, Article III — the two natures and Christ’s priestly work
- Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV — on the exclusive mediatorship of Christ

### Commentaries:

- Lenski on Hebrews 4:14–5:10 — careful Lutheran exposition

- Philip Hughes on Hebrews — particularly good on the loud-cries-and-tears passage
- Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* — helpful on the priestly qualifications and their fulfillment in Christ



## **A Final Word**

You have taught the pastoral center of the first half of Hebrews. If your class leaves this session with one clear image in their heads, let it be this: the throne of God is, for them, a throne of grace. The Priest who stands there knows them, has been tempted as they are, is ready to give mercy for what is past and grace for what is ahead. Whatever else they forget, let them remember this. It will feed their prayer lives, their Communion practice, their handling of failure, and their approach to God for the rest of their Christian pilgrimage.

Do not rush past the invitation in order to get to the priestly qualifications that follow. The qualifications are important, but they serve the invitation. The writer himself does not move on from 4:16 quickly. He develops, from verse to verse, the nature of the priest whose invitation has just been issued. You should do the same in your teaching. Let 4:16 breathe. Let 4:16 land. Let your class feel that they have been personally invited by the risen Son of God to come, confidently, with their weakness, to a throne that is gracious to them.

Melchizedek is coming. The more dramatic warning of Hebrews 6 is coming. But the heart of the letter — the pastoral heart — is here. The Priest. The Throne. The Invitation. The Mercy. The Grace. Teach these. The rest of the volume rests on them.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

SESSION 6

# The Danger of Falling Away

*Hebrews 5:11–6:20*

TEACHER'S GUIDE

*A free companion to the Bible study  
Something Better: A Study of Hebrews*

## **A Note to the Teacher**

This is the hardest session you will teach in this volume. Hebrews 6:4–6 is the most pastorally-dangerous passage in the letter — not because it is untrue, but because it is so often mis-taught. If you get this session right, you will free some in your class from fears they have carried for years. If you get it wrong, you will plant fears that will take years to remove. Prepare carefully.

The pastoral strategy of the session rests on three commitments, all developed earlier in the volume. First, the Lutheran pattern from Session 2: warnings are real, and warnings do different work in different hearts. Second, the corpus permixtum pattern from Session 4: the writer addresses the whole mixed Christian community and trusts the Word to do its proper work in each heart. Third — new in this session but crucial — the recognition that the writer himself immediately pivots from warning to reassurance in 6:9. He does not leave his readers under the warning. He immediately tells them he is confident of better things concerning them. Your teaching must follow his lead.

Two specific pastoral scenarios to anticipate. First, someone in your class has been told, at some point in their life, that Hebrews 6:4–6 describes them — that they have fallen away and cannot be restored. They may not say this out loud; they may have carried it quietly for years. For such a person, this session may be the first time they hear the passage read rightly. Teach accordingly. Second, someone in your class may ask whether a particular loved one has apostatized — a child, a spouse, a sibling who has walked away. Do not try to answer that question. Scripture does not give us tools to adjudicate the spiritual state of another person from outside. Pray for them, love them, do not pre-emptively consign them. Leave the judgment to God, and keep inviting them back.



## **Preparing to Teach This Session**

**Before you teach:**

- Read Hebrews 5:11–6:20 in one sitting. The flow from rebuke to warning to reassurance to anchor must be felt as one movement.
- Read Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration XI, especially paragraphs 42–75, on the proper use of warnings in Christian preaching. This is one of the most mature pastoral statements the Lutheran tradition has produced on this topic.
- Review Session 2 and Session 4 for the Lutheran warning-reading pattern. You will be leaning on that pattern heavily.
- Read Genesis 22 briefly, where God swears by Himself to Abraham. This is the oath the writer refers to in 6:13–18.
- Consider who in your class may be especially vulnerable to a mishandling of 6:4–6. Prepare to address them gently and directly within the whole class teaching.

### Key theological points for this session:

- **Spiritual dullness is real and addressable.** The rebuke opens the passage and it is aimed at believers who have grown sluggish. The condition is serious but not fatal.
- **Hebrews 6:4–6 describes willful apostasy, not ordinary struggle.** The passage is aimed at the person who has known Christ, deliberately departed, and sided with those who crucify Him. This is not the condition of a struggling believer.
- **The anxious believer is not the person warned.** Apostasy is settled; anxiety is not. The person asking “am I apostate?” is demonstrating, by the question itself, that she is not.
- **The warning is followed immediately by reassurance.** The writer does not leave his readers under the warning. 6:9 pivots directly to “in your case, beloved, we are sure of better things.”
- **The anchor is Christ the forerunner.** Our hope reaches into the inner sanctuary because Jesus has gone there on our behalf. The storm does not reach the anchor.

## Suggested Time Plan

For a 60-minute class period. This session especially benefits from extra time if you can arrange it; the pastoral landings cannot be rushed.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer; read Hebrews 5:11–6:20 aloud in full
0:05–0:15	The rebuke (5:11–6:3): dull of hearing, still on milk
0:15–0:30	The hard word (6:4–6): what the passage describes and does not describe
0:30–0:40	The turn (6:9–12): “we are sure of better things”
0:40–0:50	The oath and the anchor (6:13–20)
0:50–1:00	Discussion (one or two questions); Looking Ahead; closing prayer



## Teaching Notes, Part by Part

### The Rebuke (10 minutes)

Open by normalizing the condition the writer describes. “Dull of hearing” is not the exclusive property of some other Christian, some bad Christian, somewhere else. It is a recurring condition in the normal Christian life. The sharpness of our hearing fades as we grow familiar with the Word. This is true for pastors, for long-time members, for Sunday school teachers — for all of us. The writer is not attacking his readers; he is naming what has happened to them, and what can happen to any of us.

The rebuke functions as medicine, not diagnosis of terminal illness. It is meant to shake the class awake. So let it shake your own class — gently but honestly. Ask them (rhetorically, not for responses) where their own hearing has dulled.

Where has the Word become routine? Where have familiar passages stopped pressing on them? Let the rebuke do its work.

The six elementary principles in 6:1–2 are worth a brief mention but do not require deep teaching. The writer's point is not that these doctrines are unimportant; it is that a mature believer should have them as settled foundation. Do not get sidetracked into teaching each of the six; the session has harder work ahead.

### **The Hard Word (15 minutes)**

This is the pastoral center of the session. Plan for fifteen minutes; do not rush it. Your task is to help your class hear 6:4–6 rightly, without softening its seriousness and without letting it terrify anyone who is not in the condition it describes.

Start with the structure of what the writer says. He names five experiences of the apostate: once enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, tasted the goodness of the Word, tasted the powers of the age to come. These are strong phrases. The writer is not describing someone who was merely around Christianity. He is describing someone who has known Christianity from the inside.

Then the verb: “have fallen away” (parapiptō). This is not drift. Drift was the image of Session 2 — the ship easing past its moorings unnoticed. Apostasy is deliberate. It is turning and walking away with clear eyes. It is crucifying Christ afresh and holding Him up to contempt. It is siding with those who rejected Him.

#### **On Why Apostasy Cannot Be Restored**

The writer says it is impossible to restore such a person to repentance, not because God is unwilling but because the apostate has closed himself against the means of repentance. If a person has known Christ and deliberately turned away, what is left to preach to him? He has heard the gospel and rejected it. He has known its power and repudiated it. The tools of the Spirit's ordinary work on the human heart have already been used, and used, and refused. This does not mean God could not produce a miracle of restoration; it means the ordinary means of grace are no longer operative, because the apostate has stopped receiving them. Luther and the Confessions are careful here: we do not set limits on God's power, but we describe what the ordinary means of

grace can do, and apostasy is the deliberate closing of oneself against those means.

### **Pastoral Anchor — For Anyone Afraid This Passage Describes Them**

If someone in your class is afraid this passage describes them — especially anyone carrying long-term anxiety about whether they have “crossed a line” with God — say this plainly: “If you are asking whether this passage applies to you, that question itself is the strongest evidence that it does not. Apostates, in the sense the writer means, are not anxious about their condition; they are settled in it. They do not wonder whether they should return to Christ; they have already refused to return. The fact that you are here, reading this, asking this question — means you are not the person the writer is describing. The writer’s next sentence is for you: ‘In your case, beloved, we are sure of better things.’” This one word, said plainly, may be the most pastoral thing you do all volume.

### **The Turn (10 minutes)**

Verse 9 is the pivot. The writer, immediately after the severe warning, says, “But in your case, beloved, we are sure of better things.” Let the class feel this turn. The writer himself does not believe his readers are apostates. He is confident of them. He names what is true of them — their work, their love, their service to the saints — and he does so as evidence of what is already present in them by the Spirit’s work.

The pastoral shape matters. Warning is followed by reassurance. Rebuke is followed by encouragement. The writer does not leave his readers under the warning. Neither should you leave your class under it. Spend real time in 6:9–12. These verses are part of the passage too. They are not a footnote or a consolation prize; they are how the passage actually concludes its treatment of the warning before moving into the oath and the anchor.

### **The Oath and the Anchor (10 minutes)**

The passage climaxes in 6:13–20 with two images: the oath sworn by God Himself, and the anchor of the soul. Teach both.

The oath: God added an oath to His promise, not because His promise was unreliable, but to show “more convincingly” the unchangeable character of His purpose. Two unchangeable things now stand together — the promise and the oath — and in both of them it is impossible for God to lie. We who have “fled for refuge” have strong encouragement. Note the language: we have fled. Christians are not strollers who wandered in; we are refugees who ran from the world to Christ. The writer honors this in us.

The anchor: our hope is an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, that enters the inner place behind the curtain. The image of the anchor is perfect for the Christian life: the anchor does not calm the storm; it holds the ship fast against the storm. And the anchor of the Christian soul is tethered not to something nearby but to the presence of God itself — because Jesus has gone in as our forerunner, a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. The passage ends by naming Melchizedek for the third time, and the class is now fully primed for Session 7’s development of him.



## **Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses**

### ***“Is this passage saying a Christian can lose salvation?”***

The Lutheran position holds that a genuine believer can, through willful and persistent unbelief, turn away from faith and be lost. But this is what the warnings of Hebrews are warning against; they are not predictions that it is about to happen. Two things need to be held together. First, Scripture does warn genuinely against this possibility — it is not merely hypothetical. Second, God preserves His people through the means of grace, and the person who is worried about losing salvation is the person through whom the Spirit is doing exactly the preserving work the means of grace are meant to do. So yes, the warning is real; and yes, the warning itself is part of how God keeps His people from the danger it warns of.

### ***“How is this passage compatible with the assurance of salvation Lutherans teach?”***

The Lutheran assurance of salvation is not grounded in our own confidence in our perseverance. It is grounded in Christ’s promises attached to the means of grace

— Baptism, the Word, the Supper. We have assurance because we have the promises. The warnings of Scripture do not undermine this assurance; they protect it. They warn us against the one thing that would destroy the means by which assurance comes — namely, willful rejection of Christ. The Christian who clings to Christ in Baptism, receives the Word, and comes to the Supper has all the assurance she needs. The warnings are for the Christian who is tempted to turn away from those means. They are not for the Christian who is still using them.

***“Can you explain what ‘enlightened’ and ‘tasted’ mean? How do you know if you have truly experienced these things?”***

The writer uses these phrases to describe the full experience of the gospel’s impact — the illumination of understanding Christ, the participation in the gifts that flow from His work, the sharing in the Spirit’s presence. These are experiences of being genuinely in the Christian community and receiving genuinely what Christ offers. But the Lutheran pastoral note is important: you do not need to introspect into whether your experience of these things was “real enough” to qualify for the passage’s warning. The warning is aimed at those who have known the reality and deliberately rejected it. A person who is asking, “have I truly tasted?” is not the person in view. The tasting and rejecting are both clear in the apostate; the condition is not a matter of anxious uncertainty.

***“What about a loved one who has walked away from the faith? Have they committed the sin described here?”***

A question pastors are asked often, and it calls for care. The honest answer: we cannot know. Scripture does not give us the ability to read another person’s spiritual state from outside. Someone who appears to have walked away may in fact be in a long and painful wandering that will eventually come home. Someone who is still nominally Christian may be in more serious spiritual danger than the person who has publicly left. We do not adjudicate. We pray. We love. We leave the door open. We keep the gospel available. And we leave judgment to God, who alone sees the heart. The warning of Hebrews 6 is addressed to readers about themselves, to make them vigilant. It is not given to us as a tool for diagnosing others.

***“What does it mean that God swore an oath to Himself?”***

Humans take oaths to guarantee their word — they swear by something greater than themselves (by God, by their own lives, by something sacred) because mere speech can be doubted. God, the writer says, had no one greater by whom to swear, so He swore by Himself. The purpose was not to make God's word more trustworthy than it already was — God's word is already unchangeable. The purpose was to provide to us, in our weakness, a stronger reassurance. God accommodated our need for certainty by giving us two unchangeable things — promise and oath — so that we might have strong encouragement. It is a gift for our sake, not a requirement of His.

***“Where is the anchor? What does it mean that it enters the inner place behind the curtain?”***

The imagery combines two things. The curtain is the barrier in the tabernacle that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, where God's presence dwelt. The anchor is the nautical image. The writer puts them together to say that our hope reaches into the very presence of God — not a hope tethered to something near, something we can see, something this-worldly, but a hope tethered to the living Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. Wherever He is, our hope is. Whatever access He has, our hope claims. The storms of this life rage on the surface, but the anchor is in bedrock beyond the waves, because Jesus is there as our forerunner.



## **Leading the Discussion**

Notes on each of the six discussion questions. Be selective; this session's teaching may leave less time for discussion than usual.

### ***Question 1 — Signs of dull hearing***

An opening question that lets the class normalize the condition of dullness. Common signs: the same Bible passages stop moving us, prayer becomes routine, worship becomes attendance, specific sins become accepted rather than fought. What sharpens: time in Scripture with new attention, a hard providence that wakes us up, gathering with other Christians, the Supper received in faith. Let the class name what has worked for them.

### **Question 2 — Reading 6:4-6 rightly**

The central question of the session. Let the class articulate what you taught. The passage describes settled willful apostasy, not ordinary struggle or anxiety. The anxious believer is not in the condition described. This question is worth the time; it helps the pastoral teaching sink in.

### **Question 3 — Warning and reassurance together**

A question that lets the class articulate the pastoral pattern of Hebrews itself. Warnings paired with reassurance produce faithful endurance. Warnings alone produce despair or hardness. Reassurance alone produces cheap grace. Examples from the class may include preaching that got this wrong in either direction.

### **Question 4 — The oath**

A theologically rich question. God adds an oath not because His word needs strengthening but because we do. This is pastoral accommodation — God giving us in our weakness what His own word, strictly speaking, did not need. Let the class feel the tenderness of this.

### **Question 5 — Fleeing for refuge**

A personal question. Most Christians have a story of fleeing — from a crisis, from a long-held pattern of sin, from despair, from a life that was not working. The fleeing to Christ may have happened dramatically or quietly, but it happened. Let the class name their own version of this, if they wish.

### **Question 6 — The anchor at work**

A testimony question that may produce moving answers. Where is the anchor of Christian hope doing its work right now? This is the pastoral close of the session — the class reflecting on Christ's hold on them, not their hold on Christ. Receive such reflections gently.



## **If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes**

Keep/cut plan. This session particularly suffers if it is rushed.

### **Keep:**

- The opening rebuke, briefly — five minutes at most
- The hard word of 6:4–6 — do not skip or abbreviate this
- The pastoral anchor callout — addressed aloud, to the whole class
- The turn in 6:9 — “in your case, beloved, we are sure of better things”
- The anchor of 6:19–20, briefly
- Discussion question 2 or 6

### **Cut or Abbreviate:**

- The six elementary principles of 6:1–2; name them and move on
- Extended treatment of the Abraham oath
- Most discussion questions



## **For Further Study**

### **Biblical cross-references:**

- Genesis 22 — God swears by Himself after the binding of Isaac
- Numbers 14 — the wilderness generation's refusal; background for Hebrews' warning theology
- Matthew 12:31–32 — the unforgivable sin, which has historically been read in parallel with Hebrews 6:4–6
- 1 John 5:16–17 — the sin that leads to death
- 2 Peter 2:20–22 — the New Testament's other severe warning passage

### **From the Lutheran tradition:**

- Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration XI (paragraphs 42–75) — the most mature Lutheran statement on the proper use of warnings
- Luther's preface to Hebrews — short, honest, and instructive on how to read this letter pastorally

- Small Catechism on Confession — the continual access to Christ's forgiveness
- Chemnitz, Examination of the Council of Trent, on perseverance — thorough Lutheran treatment

### **Commentaries:**

- Lenski on Hebrews 6 — careful, pastoral, thoroughly Lutheran
- Philip Hughes on Hebrews 6 — excellent historical survey of the passage's interpretation
- Peter O'Brien, The Letter to the Hebrews — strong on the passage's pastoral function



## **A Final Word**

You have taught one of the hardest passages in the New Testament. Do not second-guess yourself afterward. The passage is hard not because the writer was unkind, but because the matter is serious. A faithful pastor does not flinch from the hard word when the hard word is needed. You did not flinch. That was right.

But a faithful pastor also does not leave his people under the hard word when the hard word has done its work. You did not leave them there. You followed the writer through the pivot at 6:9, through the oath, into the anchor. That was also right. The class should have left sobered but secure — the warning having done its work, the anchor having taken its hold.

Session 7 is around the corner: the full development of Christ's priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. After the heaviness of this session, Session 7 will feel like a long, deep breath. The priest is permanent. The priest is sufficient. The priest is ours forever. Let your class carry that expectation home with them. The anchor you have named for them is held by the priest they will meet, in full, next time.

## **Soli Deo Gloria**

SESSION 7

# After the Order of Melchizedek

*Hebrews 7*

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

*A free companion to the Bible study  
Something Better: A Study of Hebrews*

## **A Note to the Teacher**

Session 7 is, in one sense, the densest chapter of Hebrews. In another sense, it is one of the most pastorally rich. Your job is to bridge the density to the richness. The chapter has the structure of a sustained argument — Melchizedek greater than Abraham, Christ's priesthood after that order, the change of priesthood requiring a change of law, and so on — and the temptation is to teach it as an argument. Teach it, instead, as Hebrews itself teaches it: as a long buildup to 7:25 — “he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” That is where the whole chapter is going. Keep it in view from the start.

This session pairs naturally with Session 5's throne-of-grace pastoral work and Session 6's anchor imagery. The Session 5 invitation rested on the sympathetic priest; Session 6's anchor rested on the forerunner; Session 7's argument now grounds both in the permanent, Melchizedekian character of Christ's priesthood. The chapter is the theological foundation for everything these earlier pastoral claims have asserted. If any of your class has wondered why Hebrews is so focused on Christ as priest, this chapter answers the question.

A teaching decision to think through in advance: how much time to spend on the Melchizedek material itself versus the practical payoff. A common mistake is to spend forty minutes on the Melchizedek argument and only ten on the pastoral conclusion. Reverse that ratio. Fifteen minutes on Melchizedek and the argument about Levi is enough for most classes; spend the rest of the time on the permanence of Christ's priesthood, His intercession, and His sufficiency. That is what your class needs to take home.



## **Preparing to Teach This Session**

**Before you teach:**

- Read Hebrews 7 aloud in full, preferably twice, so that the argument's flow from Melchizedek to 7:25 is felt as one movement.
- Read Genesis 14:17–20 — the Old Testament account of Melchizedek — so you can reproduce it from memory for your class.
- Read Psalm 110 in its entirety. This is the psalm Hebrews keeps coming back to, and it will repay attention.
- Review how the Lutheran tradition handles Law and Gospel. Hebrews 7:18–19 is a key confessional Lutheran text on what the Law can and cannot do.
- Think about which part of the chapter will hit hardest for your particular class. Some classes will be most struck by the permanent priesthood; others by Christ's intercession; others by "saves to the uttermost." Plan your emphasis accordingly.

### Key theological points for this session:

- **Christ's priesthood is older and deeper than Aaron's.** The Melchizedek order reaches back before Levi and supersedes him. This is not a branch of the old priesthood but a different order altogether.
- **The Law could not make perfect.** Verse 19 is one of the clearest New Testament statements of what the Law does and does not do. Essential for Lutheran Law-Gospel thinking.
- **Christ's priesthood is permanent.** Levitical priests died; Christ lives forever. His office has no succession, no handover, no vulnerability to mortality.
- **Christ intercedes continually.** 7:25 is the pastoral heart of the chapter. Christ always lives to make intercession. Our salvation does not depend on our prayer strength but on His prayer.
- **The sacrifice is once-for-all.** 7:27 anticipates the major argument of chapters 9 and 10. One offering, one moment, one priest — and the work is done.



## Suggested Time Plan

For a 60-minute class period.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer; read Hebrews 7 aloud (or key verses if time is tight)
0:05–0:15	Who Melchizedek was; the typological reading of Genesis 14
0:15–0:25	The argument: Melchizedek greater than Abraham; the change of priesthood
0:25–0:35	The Law could not make perfect (7:18–19); Law and Gospel
0:35–0:50	Permanent priesthood; saves to the uttermost; always lives to intercede
0:50–1:00	Discussion (one or two questions); Looking Ahead; closing prayer



## Teaching Notes, Part by Part

### Who Melchizedek Was (10 minutes)

Open by quickly telling the Genesis 14 story from memory, so the class has the narrative in mind. Abraham rescues Lot from the coalition of kings; on his return, Melchizedek king of Salem, priest of God Most High, meets him with bread and wine, blesses him, and receives a tithe. Three verses. That is all Genesis gives us.

Then explain the writer's typological reading. Melchizedek's name means "king of righteousness." Salem means "peace." These are not accidents in the text; they are features of the text that the writer is inviting us to notice. And the conspicuous absence of a genealogy — in a Hebrew text where priestly

genealogies were the standard credentialing — means Melchizedek appears on the page as a priest without the usual credentials.

### **On “Without Father, Without Mother”**

Your class may stumble on 7:3: “he is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life.” Make clear that the writer is not claiming Melchizedek was an eternal being, or a pre-incarnate Christ, or an angel. The writer is making a typological observation about how Melchizedek is presented in the text of Genesis — without recorded father, without recorded mother, without recorded birth or death. The text, in its silence, makes Melchizedek stand as a type of the priest who would come. Do not let your class get distracted into speculation about Melchizedek’s actual biography. The writer is not teaching Melchizedek’s biography. He is teaching Melchizedek’s textual function.

### **The Argument (10 minutes)**

Walk the class through the logic. Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe; Melchizedek blessed Abraham. The tithing priesthood is greater than the priesthood that pays tithes. The one who blesses is greater than the one blessed. Therefore Melchizedek was greater than Abraham — and by extension, greater than Levi, who was still in Abraham’s loins.

Then make the turn to Psalm 110. The very existence of Psalm 110 — a psalm written long after Moses, prophesying a priest after the order of Melchizedek — is the Old Testament’s own confession that the Levitical priesthood was not the final priesthood God had in mind. God, speaking through the psalmist, was pointing beyond the Levitical system to a priest who would belong to a different order.

The implication: a change in priesthood means a change in law. The old covenant was an integrated system — Law and priesthood together — and the introduction of Christ’s Melchizedekian priesthood is not a patch on the old system but the inauguration of a new one.

### **The Law Could Not Make Perfect (10 minutes)**

Verse 19 is a key Lutheran text and deserves careful treatment. “The law made nothing perfect; but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.”

Teach both halves. The Law did real work. It showed Israel God’s holiness. It exposed human sin. It organized the life of a covenant people. It prepared the world for the Messiah. But for the task of bringing human beings — actually, completely — into the holy presence of God, the Law was weak and useless. This is Law-Gospel distinction at its purest. The Law condemns; the Law cannot save. The Law exposes the problem; the Law cannot solve it. And the better hope that has now been introduced is the way by which we actually draw near.

### **Law and Gospel in Hebrews 7**

Lutheran readers sometimes miss how thoroughly Law-Gospel the argument of Hebrews 7 is. The writer is not denigrating the Old Testament; he is showing what it could and could not do. The Law taught, organized, convicted, and prepared — all proper uses of the Law. What it could not do was justify. It could not make anything perfect. It could not actually draw the sinner near to God. That work required a new priest, a new sacrifice, a new covenant. This is the same distinction Luther recovered in the sixteenth century, and it is already operating in Hebrews. The Law accuses and convicts; the Gospel forgives and restores. One without the other is distortion. Both together, in the order Scripture gives them, produce the Christian life.

### **Permanent Priesthood and Saving to the Uttermost (15 minutes)**

This is where the session lands. Do not rush it. Walk the class through verses 23–25. Former priests were many because they died. Christ holds His priesthood permanently because He lives forever. Consequently — and the word matters — He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him.

Teach “save to the uttermost” carefully. The phrase means completely, forever, to the farthest extent. Not partial salvation. Not conditional salvation that depends on our holding out. Not salvation that will need to be supplemented later. Complete, final, total salvation, for those who draw near to God through Christ. This is the pastoral weight the chapter has been building.

And then teach the intercession. Christ always lives to make intercession for us. Always. Continuously. Without pause. This changes the way Christians should think about their own prayer lives. When your prayer is weak, Christ's intercession is not. When you forget to pray, Christ is still praying for you. When you are in a season of spiritual dryness where prayer feels impossible, the Son of God is at the right hand of the Father, interceding for you on the basis of His own finished work. Your prayer matters, but it is not the load-bearing thing in your relationship to God. His prayer is.

### **Pastoral Anchor — The Weak Prayer Life**

Many Christians carry secret shame about their prayer lives. They pray inadequately. They forget to pray. They cannot concentrate when they do pray. They say the same handful of things and feel the dryness of repetition. For all such Christians, Hebrews 7:25 is the word they need: "He always lives to make intercession for them." Your prayer life is not what stands between you and God. Christ's prayer life does. His intercession is the ground of your access, not your intercession. This is not an invitation to stop praying — Christ's intercession is precisely what makes our prayer possible and effective. But it relocates the confidence. The confidence is in Him, not in us. Say this plainly to anyone who needs to hear it, and they will.

Close the teaching by naming the five adjectives of 7:26 — holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens. And the final note: once for all. Christ sacrificed Himself once, and the sacrifice needs no repetition. This is anticipating the argument of Hebrews 9 and 10, where the once-for-all sacrifice will be developed in full. For this session, just let it land: once for all, not again and again, not partial, not provisional. Once, and forever.



## **Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses**

### ***"Was Melchizedek an angel? Or a pre-incarnate Christ?"***

A common question, and the honest answer is: probably neither. The writer of Hebrews is making a typological argument based on how Melchizedek appears in the text of Genesis, not a metaphysical claim about Melchizedek's actual nature.

Melchizedek was a historical king-priest in the Canaanite world of Abraham's day. Whatever his actual origins — and Genesis does not tell us — the text presents him without genealogy, without recorded birth or death, as a priest who simply appears, does his priestly work, and disappears. This textual silence is what the writer uses. He is not saying Melchizedek was eternal in himself; he is saying that the text presents him as a type of the eternal priest to come. Some ancient Jewish and Christian speculation about Melchizedek went further than this, but the writer of Hebrews does not.

***“What does it mean that the Law ‘made nothing perfect’? Isn't that a harsh thing to say about God's Law?”***

It sounds harsh if we assume the Law was supposed to make something perfect. It was not. The Law was given to expose sin, to teach God's holiness, to organize the life of Israel, and to prepare the world for the Messiah — all of which it did. What it was never designed to do was to actually justify the sinner or bring her fully into God's presence. The Lutheran tradition distinguishes uses of the Law precisely for this reason: the Law functions to restrain evil, to convict the conscience, and (in a limited way) to guide the Christian life. None of these are “making perfect.” The Law does what the Law was designed to do, and Paul and Hebrews both confess that what the Law was not designed to do was justify the sinner. For that, we need a priest and a sacrifice — which is what Christ provides.

***“If Christ's intercession is continuous, do my prayers even matter?”***

Yes — and the question has it exactly backward. Christ's intercession is what makes your prayers matter. Without His intercession, our prayers would have no standing at all; we would be sinners approaching a holy God without a mediator. Because of His intercession, our prayers are carried to the Father by the One whose prayer is always heard. So our prayers matter enormously — but they matter not because of our strength in praying but because of His priestly work. This means we can pray confidently even when we pray weakly, because the confidence is not in the prayer's quality but in the Priest's mediation. It also means we should pray — Scripture calls us to prayer constantly. What it does not mean is that the effectiveness of our prayer rises and falls with our spiritual condition on any given day. The Priest is constant.

***“What does ‘separated from sinners’ mean? It sounds like Christ is distant from us.”***

The phrase can sound aloof, but in context it means something different. “Separated from sinners” does not mean that Christ has withdrawn from sinners or that He is unapproachable. It means that He is in a different category — He is not Himself a sinner, as every Levitical priest was. He does not need to offer sacrifice for His own sins. He is holy, innocent, unstained. This separation is a theological distinction, not a relational distance. In fact, this is the very thing that allows Christ to draw near to us — because He is separated from sinners in nature, He can be one with us in sympathy and one with God in offering. The earthly priest was a sinner like us; his sympathy was the sympathy of shared weakness. Christ’s sympathy is the sympathy of one who was tempted as we are, yet without sin. It is a more intimate sympathy, not a more distant one, because it is free of the distraction of the priest’s own need.

***“Why does the writer make such a big deal about Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek?”***

Because in the Levitical system, the priests receive tithes from the people — the priest is in the superior position, the tither in the inferior. When Abraham tithed to Melchizedek, Abraham placed himself in the inferior position relative to Melchizedek. And because Levi was in Abraham’s loins — his descendant still to be born — Levi, in a certain sense, also tithed to Melchizedek through his ancestor. The point is that the priesthood of Melchizedek, already in Genesis 14, is shown to be greater than the priesthood of Levi that would come centuries later. The Old Testament itself, read carefully, establishes the superiority of the priesthood Christ would hold.

***“Why did God bother giving the Law at all if it could not make anything perfect?”***

Because the Law does important work that nothing else can do. It exposes sin — without the Law, we would not fully know the depth of our rebellion against God. It organizes the life of a people — Israel under the Law was the community through which the Messiah would come. It teaches us God’s holiness — what pleases Him, what displeases Him. It convicts the conscience and drives us to Christ. Paul calls the Law a tutor that leads us to Christ. None of this is small work. The Law is not

a failed attempt at salvation; it is a successful tool for the preparatory work God intended it for. What it could not do — by design — was accomplish the salvation it pointed toward. That work was reserved for Christ, and only Christ could do it.



## **Leading the Discussion**

Notes on each of the six discussion questions. Pick two or three that fit your class.

### ***Question 1 — Why Christ's priesthood matters***

A framing question that lets the class articulate what they have learned. If Christ were just another priest in the Levitical pattern — mortal, in need of sacrifice for His own sins, to be succeeded by other priests — His work would be partial and provisional. Because His priesthood is older, different, and permanent, His work is final and sufficient. Let the class name what this means for their confidence in their salvation.

### ***Question 2 — Reading small details***

A question about biblical interpretation. The writer finds theological meaning in the details of Genesis 14 — tithing, blessing, lack of genealogy. This models a careful reading of Scripture that assumes the Holy Spirit was at work in the text's details. Lutheran readers are sometimes uncomfortable with typological readings; this question invites the class to see that the New Testament itself reads the Old typologically and that we follow its lead.

### ***Question 3 — Law and Gospel***

A theologically rich question that is central to Lutheran identity. The Law does real work but cannot save. Legalism confuses the Law's convicting work with saving work. Antinomianism denies the Law's convicting work altogether. Both are errors. The Lutheran handling, which Hebrews 7 models, holds both in their proper place. Give the class time to think through this carefully.

### ***Question 4 — Christ's intercession***

The pastoral heart of the chapter. Invite the class to reflect on what it means that Christ's prayer, not theirs, is the foundation of their access to God. This may be a

new thought for some; let them sit with it. For those who carry shame about their prayer lives, this question may be genuinely freeing.

### **Question 5 — Separated from sinners**

A theological clarification. Christ's holiness does not create distance from us; it creates the capacity to save us. If He were not holy, He would need saving Himself. Because He is holy, He can be our Savior. Let the class name what they have sometimes feared about Christ's holiness, and let the distinction here ease that fear.

### **Question 6 — Save to the uttermost**

A pastoral invitation. Where in your life does this promise speak? Many will name specific anxieties: past failures they cannot stop replaying, present struggles where they feel they are barely holding on, future concerns about their own perseverance. To all of these, Hebrews 7:25 says the same thing: He saves to the uttermost. Receive whatever the class brings, and point them back to the Priest.



## **If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes**

Keep/cut plan for a shorter class period.

### **Keep:**

- Brief Genesis 14 narrative and the typological reading (5 minutes)
- The key summary: Christ's priesthood is older, different, and permanent (5 minutes)
- Verse 19 and the Law's limits (5 minutes)
- Verses 23–25: permanent priesthood, saves to the uttermost, always lives to intercede
- Pastoral anchor on the weak prayer life
- Discussion question 4 or 6

### **Cut or Abbreviate:**

- Detailed treatment of the tithe-and-blessing argument

- Extended treatment of the five adjectives of 7:26
- The once-for-all sacrifice theme — preview briefly, it is coming in Sessions 9–10



## For Further Study

### Biblical cross-references:

- Genesis 14:17–20 — the original Melchizedek narrative
- Psalm 110 — the psalm behind the Melchizedek priesthood theme
- Romans 8:34 — Christ at the right hand of God, interceding for us
- 1 Timothy 2:5 — “one mediator between God and men”
- Galatians 3:19–25 — Paul on the Law’s purpose and limits

### From the Lutheran tradition:

- Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV — on the sole mediatorship of Christ
- Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration V — on Law and Gospel
- Luther’s Galatians commentary (1535), especially the exposition of chapter 3 — on the Law’s proper use
- Chemnitz, The Two Natures in Christ — thorough treatment of Christ’s priesthood and sacrifice

### Commentaries:

- Lenski on Hebrews 7 — careful verse-by-verse treatment, strong on the Law-Gospel distinctions
- Philip Hughes on Hebrews 7 — particularly good on Melchizedek typology
- Peter O’Brien, The Letter to the Hebrews — helpful on the structure of the argument

- F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* — classic treatment of the chapter's exegetical details



## **A Final Word**

You have taught one of the densest chapters in Hebrews. If the class left with a clear sense that Christ's priesthood is permanent, that He saves to the uttermost, and that He always lives to intercede for them — you have done your work. The Melchizedek argument is scaffolding for those three pastoral truths. Do not feel bad if some of the argument's details remain hazy for some of your class. What matters is that the pastoral payload lands.

If you have time at the end of the session, consider reading Hebrews 7:25–26 aloud once more to close. Let the chapter's key pastoral sentence be the last thing they hear before the closing prayer. "He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." Twenty-five words that carry the weight of the whole chapter, and that, rightly heard, will feed the class's prayer lives and pastoral confidence for the rest of their days.

Session 8 is coming. The new covenant. The Law written on hearts. The full forgiveness of sins. The climax Hebrews has been building toward from the opening verses. Teach this session as the ground on which Session 8 will stand, because that is what it is.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

SESSION 8

**A Better Covenant**

*Hebrews 8*

TEACHER'S GUIDE

*A free companion to the Bible study  
Something Better: A Study of Hebrews*

## **A Note to the Teacher**

Session 8 is the climactic statement of the first half of Hebrews and the structural hinge of the whole letter. The writer himself pauses in verse 1 to name “the point” of what he has been saying, and your teaching must respect that pause. If Sessions 1–7 built up the identity of Christ and the nature of His priesthood, Session 8 declares what the whole buildup was for: we have a better ministry, a better covenant, and better promises.

The chapter is short, which may tempt you to blend it with either Session 7 before it or Session 9 after it. Do not. It deserves its own session. Pastorally, it is carrying one of the most important gospel declarations in all of Scripture — the three new-covenant promises of Jeremiah 31, especially the last one: “I will remember their sins no more.” For many Christians, this is the verse that will finally free them from years of rehearsing their own past failures. Give it the time it needs.

The pastoral strategy of the session rests on two commitments. First, take the Jeremiah 31 quotation seriously as the longest Old Testament citation in the New Testament. The writer meant it to carry weight. Read it aloud in class. Walk the three promises one by one. Do not rush past it. Second, land the forgetting of sins with full pastoral force. This is not a theological abstraction; it is a covenant word that Christians need to hear as addressed to them personally. Many in your class have been carrying sins God has already forgotten, and they need to hear it said.



## **Preparing to Teach This Session**

### **Before you teach:**

- Read Hebrews 8 aloud in one sitting. The chapter is short; feel its compactness.

- Read Jeremiah 31:27–40 in its original context. The surrounding prophecy gives the new-covenant promise its setting in the middle of Israel's devastation and hope of restoration.
- Review Exodus 25:8–9 and 25:40 — God's instructions to Moses to build the tabernacle “according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.”
- Revisit Luther's Small Catechism on Confession and absolution. The covenant promise that God will remember our sins no more is what gives absolution its actual force.
- Think about your own congregation's confession-and-absolution practice. Whether your class receives corporate absolution regularly, private absolution occasionally, or neither, this session's teaching on God's forgetting of sins will shape how they receive that practice.

### **Key theological points for this session:**

- **The true tabernacle is heavenly.** Christ serves in the sanctuary God Himself set up, not in a sanctuary made by human hands. The earthly tabernacle was the shadow; the heavenly one is the reality.
- **The old covenant was not faultless.** Its fault was not in God's design but in the people's inability to keep it. A new covenant was therefore necessary.
- **The new covenant was prophesied in Jeremiah 31.** Six hundred years before Christ, with the old covenant in obvious collapse, God promised through the prophet exactly what Christ would accomplish.
- **The three promises of the new covenant.** The Law written on hearts (inward transformation), universal knowledge of God (priesthood of all believers), and the forgetting of sins (full forgiveness).
- **God remembers our sins no more.** This is the climactic promise. Covenantal forgetting means covenantal setting-aside — sins gone, not on file, not to be raised again. This is the ground of assurance.
- **The old covenant is obsolete.** This does not mean the Old Testament is discarded, only that the ceremonial system has been fulfilled and rendered inoperative by what Christ has done.



## Suggested Time Plan

For a 60-minute class period.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer; read Hebrews 8 aloud
0:05–0:15	“The point”: Christ seated; the true tabernacle
0:15–0:25	A more excellent ministry; the old covenant’s weakness
0:25–0:45	Jeremiah 31: three new-covenant promises, with emphasis on forgetting sins
0:45–0:52	What is becoming obsolete; how Christians read the Old Testament
0:52–1:00	Discussion (one question, likely Q5); Looking Ahead; closing prayer



## Teaching Notes, Part by Part

### The Point and the True Tabernacle (10 minutes)

Open by naming what the writer names: “the point in what we are saying.” This is the moment in the letter where the main claim is put into a single sentence. Read 8:1–2 aloud slowly. Christ is seated at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. He serves in the true tent, the sanctuary God Himself set up.

Teach the pattern-shadow logic. Moses built the tabernacle “according to the pattern shown you on the mountain” (Exodus 25:40). The earthly tabernacle was a deliberate scale model of a heavenly reality. This is not a dismissal of the earthly tabernacle — it was God-given, carefully designed, genuinely used in worship —

but it was a model, not the original. The original is the sanctuary in heaven, where Christ is now serving.

This framework is important for how Christians think about the Old Testament worship system. The old worship was not a false attempt at something else, nor was it mere preparation to be discarded. It was the shadow cast by the coming reality. The reality has now arrived. The shadow's purpose is fulfilled.

### **The More Excellent Ministry (10 minutes)**

Work through verses 6–8a. Three comparatives stacked in one verse: more excellent ministry, better covenant, better promises. Help the class feel how decisive this language is. The writer is not saying Christ's work is a slight improvement on what came before. He is saying it is more excellent by as much as the new covenant is better than the old.

Then teach the fault. The old covenant was not faultless, but the fault was not in God's design. The fault, the writer specifies, was with the people. The Law was good; the people could not keep it. The sacrificial system was God-given; it could only point toward forgiveness, not deliver it finally. The old covenant was honest about what it could and could not do. The new covenant would do what the old could not.

#### **On "Faultless" and "Found Fault"**

Verse 7 says "if that first covenant had been faultless." Verse 8 says "he finds fault with them." Your class may wonder which it is — was the fault with the covenant, or with the people? The Lutheran reading: the covenant was not faultless because it could not accomplish what only the new covenant would accomplish. But this was not because God designed it badly; it was because the people, under the sinful condition of the fall, could not keep it. So the fault, in the strict sense, is with the people. The covenant was good but limited. It required what the people could not give. A better covenant was necessary precisely because of the human condition the old covenant exposed but could not fix. Paul makes a similar argument in Romans 7 and 8.

### **Jeremiah 31 — The Three Promises (20 minutes)**

This is the long, central segment of the session. Spend the time. Read the prophecy aloud from verses 8–12, in full, slowly. Then teach the three promises one at a time.

Promise one: the Law written on hearts and minds. Contrast the two writings — Moses' stone tablets versus the new covenant's inward inscription. This is not anti-Law; it is the Law internalized through the Spirit's regenerating work. Romans 8:4 is a useful cross-reference: the righteous requirement of the Law is fulfilled in us who walk according to the Spirit. The Lutheran tradition calls this the third use of the Law — the guide it provides for the regenerate — and the promise of Jeremiah 31 is precisely that God will work in His people so they want to do what the Law requires, not merely have to be told to do it.

Promise two: universal knowledge of God, from the least to the greatest. Under the old covenant, knowledge of God was heavily mediated — priests taught the Law, prophets delivered God's word, the people often heard at a distance. Under the new covenant, every believer has direct access through the Spirit. This is the biblical ground for what the Reformation recovered as the priesthood of all believers. Be careful here: Lutherans do not deny the pastoral office — we need pastors, and Scripture itself establishes the office. What changes is that the pastoral office is now understood as service, not mediation. Pastors do not stand between God and the people; they hand over to the people what God has already made available to them directly in Christ.

Promise three: “I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” The climactic promise. Spend the most time here. This is the segment of the session that may land with the most pastoral force for your class.

### **On Covenantal Forgetting**

Your class needs to hear clearly what “I will remember their sins no more” means and does not mean. It does not mean that God, in some philosophical sense, lacks knowledge of our sins — God knows all things. The language of remembering and forgetting here is covenantal. In the biblical idiom, God “remembers” sin when He holds it against the sinner; He “forgets” sin when He sets it aside, refuses to let it define the relationship. Under the new covenant, sins are set aside. God does not hold them against you. He does not bring them up again. They are not on file. The Lutheran doctrine of absolution

is built on exactly this promise. When the pastor says, “I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” he is speaking the new covenant word. The sins are gone. They are forgotten. Receive it.

### **Pastoral Anchor — The Christian Who Keeps Rehearsing Old Sins**

Many Christians carry decades of old sin around with them. They have confessed these sins. They have heard absolution. They know, in theory, that they are forgiven. And yet the sins come back — in quiet moments, in the night, in times of difficulty — as evidence against themselves before God. For every such Christian in your class, say this plainly: “If God has forgotten your sins, your ongoing rehearsal of them is not humility. It is a quiet refusal to take the covenant at its word. The God you are rehearsing them to has set them aside. He is not holding them against you. He is not waiting for you to feel bad enough about them one more time. He has moved on. Let yourself move on with Him.” This may be the most directly freeing sentence anyone in your class hears all year.

### **Obsolete and Growing Old (5 minutes)**

Close with verse 13. The old covenant is obsolete. Growing old. Ready to vanish. Hebrews was written before AD 70; within a few years, the temple was destroyed, and the outward structure of the old covenant ceased to operate. The writer saw it coming because he understood what Christ’s work had already accomplished.

Then address the question your class will silently be asking: so what do we do with the Old Testament? Answer briefly. The Old Testament is not discarded. The ceremonial Law is fulfilled in Christ and is no longer binding. The moral Law remains binding (we still do not murder, steal, bear false witness). The narratives teach us about God’s character and the pattern of His saving work. The prophecies point to Christ. The psalms feed Christian prayer. The wisdom books form Christian life. What has vanished is the sacrificial and priestly apparatus that Christ fulfilled. What remains is the whole of Scripture, read now in light of what Christ has done.



## **Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses**

### ***“Is the ‘new covenant’ the same thing as the ‘New Testament’?”***

Related but not identical. The new covenant is the covenant relationship God establishes with His people through Christ’s blood, characterized by the three Jeremiah 31 promises. The New Testament is the collection of books — the Gospels, Acts, the Letters, Revelation — that document and explain this covenant. The new covenant is the reality; the New Testament is the inspired witness to it. The same Greek word (*diathēkē*) lies behind both. When Jesus says at the Last Supper, “This is my blood of the new covenant” (or “New Testament” in older translations), He is instituting the covenant itself, not the twenty-seven-book collection that would later be written.

### ***“If God has ‘forgotten’ our sins, does that mean He does not know them anymore?”***

No. God, being God, knows all things — past, present, and future. The biblical language of remembering and forgetting is covenantal, not psychological. To “remember” sin in this idiom means to hold it against the sinner, to count it as part of the relational standing, to let it define how God deals with the person. To “forget” sin means to set it aside, to refuse to count it, to treat it as no longer part of the relationship. God has not lost information. He has made a covenant commitment. Those sins, from His side of the relationship, are gone. That is the promise.

### ***“If the Law is written on our hearts, why do we still struggle with sin?”***

This question takes us to the heart of Lutheran anthropology. The Law being written on hearts is a promise of the new covenant, but its full realization is still in progress. The Christian, in this life, is simultaneously righteous and sinner — the Lutheran phrase is *simul iustus et peccator*. The Holy Spirit is at work, producing delight in God’s will where before there was only resistance. But the old nature is not yet gone. The Law written on the heart is real; it is also not yet complete. We live in the tension of the already and the not-yet. The full and final perfection of this work awaits the resurrection. In the meantime, the Law continues to convict the old nature and the gospel continues to renew the new.

***“What about the Ten Commandments? Are they part of the old covenant that is obsolete?”***

The Lutheran position distinguishes three uses or dimensions of the Law. The ceremonial Law (sacrifices, dietary rules, feast days) was fulfilled in Christ and is no longer binding on Christians. The civil Law of ancient Israel (the judicial code governing Israel as a nation) was binding on that specific nation and is not binding on other nations or on the Church. The moral Law — captured in the Ten Commandments — reflects God’s unchanging will for human life and remains binding on all people in all times. The new covenant does not abolish the moral Law; it writes it on hearts. So Christians still do not murder, steal, bear false witness, and so on — but now we do these things because the Spirit has renewed us to want God’s will, not merely because we are commanded to obey.

***“Does the Old Testament still speak to Christians?”***

Absolutely. Paul tells Timothy that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable” (2 Timothy 3:16), and by “Scripture” he means primarily the Old Testament, since much of the New Testament was not yet written. The Old Testament teaches us about God’s character, His mighty acts, His promises, His expectations, and the pattern of His saving work. The prophets point to Christ. The psalms feed Christian prayer. The narratives show us how God dealt with His people. What is no longer operative is the ceremonial and sacrificial system that Christ fulfilled. What remains is the whole of the Old Testament, read now in light of Christ and in the context of the new covenant.

***“Why does the writer quote such a long Old Testament passage here?”***

Because he wants his readers — Jewish Christians tempted to return to the old covenant — to see that the new covenant was itself promised in the Old Testament. He is not abandoning the Hebrew Scriptures; he is showing that the Hebrew Scriptures themselves prophesied what Christ has now fulfilled. The argument is: if you love the Old Testament, this is what the Old Testament promised. The new covenant is not an abandonment of your heritage but its fulfillment. This is the longest direct Old Testament quotation in the New Testament, and its length is doing theological work. The writer wants Jeremiah’s full prophecy sitting in front of the reader, so that the connection cannot be missed.



## **Leading the Discussion**

Notes on each of the six discussion questions. If time is tight, question 5 is the priority.

### ***Question 1 — The point of the letter***

A structural question. The class can articulate what the letter has been building. The answer: we have such a high priest, seated in heaven, serving in the true tabernacle, mediating a better covenant. All of the prior chapters have been establishing the identity of this priest and the nature of His priesthood so that this claim can now land.

### ***Question 2 — Reading the Old Testament***

A question about hermeneutics. The Old Testament is not a failed attempt or discarded literature. It is the shadow cast by Christ. We read it knowing that its structures — tabernacle, sacrifices, priesthood, festivals — were deliberate patterns pointing forward. This protects us from both dismissing the Old Testament and treating it as though it is still operative in its ceremonial forms.

### ***Question 3 — God's faithfulness across centuries***

A question about God's character. He promised the new covenant six hundred years before He delivered it. The long delay between promise and fulfillment is part of the testimony. God keeps His word on His timeline. If He was faithful across six centuries to bring the new covenant, He is faithful across our lifetimes to bring what He has promised us.

### ***Question 4 — The Law written on hearts***

A personal question that invites honest reflection. Where do we experience the inward delight in God's will? Where do we still feel the externality of commands we are failing to keep? Both are real in the Christian life. Receive what the class brings. The pastoral point is that the inward work of the Spirit is real even when it is not complete.

### ***Question 5 — Sins God has forgotten***

The most important discussion question of the session. Receive the class's reflections carefully. Many will have stories of old sins they cannot let go of. The pastoral goal is not to hand them a technique but to restate the promise: God has forgotten. You may; you should. The ongoing rehearsal of forgotten sin is not piety; it is unbelief, and the remedy is to take the covenant at its word.

### **Question 6 — Obsolete and remaining**

A practical hermeneutical question. The class can work through the distinction: ceremonial Law fulfilled, civil Law of Israel no longer operative as national code, moral Law still binding. Narratives, psalms, and prophets all continue to feed Christian faith and life. The Old Testament is indispensable; the old covenant is obsolete. Both are true.



## **If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes**

Keep/cut plan for a shorter class period.

### **Keep:**

- Brief statement of “the point” and the true tabernacle (5 minutes)
- The old covenant's weakness — not in God's design, but in the people's inability (3 minutes)
- The Jeremiah 31 prophecy read in full and taught, with particular weight on the third promise (20 minutes)
- The pastoral anchor on old sins God has forgotten — do not cut this
- Brief note on obsolescence and how to read the Old Testament (3 minutes)
- Discussion question 5

### **Cut or Abbreviate:**

- Detailed treatment of the pattern-shadow relationship
- Extended development of the first two Jeremiah promises
- Most discussion questions



## **For Further Study**

### **Biblical cross-references:**

- Jeremiah 31:27–40 — the full context of the new-covenant prophecy
- Exodus 25–31 — God's instructions for the tabernacle, the pattern shown on the mountain
- Ezekiel 36:26–27 — a parallel new-covenant prophecy, promising a new heart and new spirit
- 2 Corinthians 3 — Paul on the glory of the new covenant versus the old
- Luke 22:20 and 1 Corinthians 11:25 — Christ institutes the new covenant in His blood at the Last Supper
- Romans 7–8 — Paul on the Law's limits and the Spirit's work in the believer

### **From the Lutheran tradition:**

- Small Catechism on Confession — the covenantal promise of forgiveness applied pastorally
- Large Catechism on Confession — Luther's extended teaching on absolution as the new-covenant word
- Augsburg Confession, Articles XI and XII — on Confession and repentance
- Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VI — on the third use of the Law, which connects directly to the "Law written on hearts" promise

### **Commentaries:**

- Lenski on Hebrews 8 — careful Lutheran treatment of the covenant distinctions
- Philip Hughes on Hebrews 8 — strong on the Jeremiah quotation and its context

- Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* — helpful on the “obsolete” language and its historical setting
- F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* — excellent treatment of the shadow-substance framework



## **A Final Word**

You have taught the structural hinge of the letter. If your class leaves with two things settled in their hearts, you have done your work. First: we have a better covenant, prophesied six hundred years before Christ and delivered in His blood. Second: God has promised to remember our sins no more, and that promise is to be believed. Nothing else in the session is as important as these two.

Do not worry if the Old Testament hermeneutical material feels thin. The class does not need a complete theology of Scripture from this session. They need to know that the Old Testament is not discarded, that its ceremonial system is fulfilled in Christ, and that the new covenant they live under was promised long ago. Anything more is a gift, but not required.

Sessions 9 and 10 will develop at length the sanctuary in which Christ serves and the once-for-all sacrifice He has offered. Those two sessions — together with this one — form the theological climax of the letter. What you have taught here grounds both. The better covenant you have declared in this session is the covenant whose sanctuary and sacrifice will be described in the next two. Carry your class into Session 9 with the new-covenant promises still ringing in their ears. The whole rest of Hebrews is an unfolding of what those promises secure.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

SESSION 9

# Earthly and Heavenly Sanctuary

*Hebrews 9*

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

*A free companion to the Bible study  
Something Better: A Study of Hebrews*

## **A Note to the Teacher**

Session 9 is the theologically densest session in the volume. The chapter works through the old-covenant tabernacle, its rituals, the Day of Atonement, and then Christ's entry into the heavenly sanctuary — all in a single sustained argument about what the death of Christ accomplished. Your task is to keep the class moving with the argument rather than getting stuck on the architectural details.

The chapter's pastoral weight is the doctrine of the once-for-all sacrifice. This is one of the most liberating teachings in Scripture, and it has particular importance in Lutheran-Reformed dialogue with Catholic and Orthodox Christians, whose sacramental theology has sometimes been accused of implying a continuing sacrifice in the Mass. The Lutheran Confessions push back firmly on this point — the sacrifice was offered once, is complete, cannot be repeated — and Hebrews 9 (with chapter 10) is the biblical ground for that confession. Be ready to discuss this if it comes up, but do not go looking for the controversy if your class does not raise it.

Two pedagogical strategies will help. First, do not get lost in the tabernacle description. Your class does not need to be able to name the furniture of the Holy Place in order. They need to grasp the theological point the architecture made: the inner room was closed, full access had not yet been opened, and this was itself a teaching from the Holy Spirit. Second, keep the contrast in view. Every paragraph of chapter 9 is built on a this-versus-that structure: Holy Place versus Most Holy Place, animal blood versus Christ's blood, annual entry versus once-for-all, copy versus reality. The contrasts carry the argument.



## **Preparing to Teach This Session**

### **Before you teach:**

- Read Hebrews 9 aloud in one sitting. The chapter is dense; hearing it read helps the argument's flow.

- Read Leviticus 16 for the Day of Atonement ritual in its original context. The writer assumes familiarity with this.
- Read Exodus 25–30 or at least skim them for the tabernacle's construction and furnishings.
- Read Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV (on the Mass). The Lutheran response to medieval misunderstanding of the Supper as a “repeated sacrifice” rests heavily on Hebrews 9–10.
- Consider whether to offer a simple diagram of the tabernacle. A rough sketch on a whiteboard helps many visual learners without getting bogged down in detail.

### Key theological points for this session:

- **The architecture of the tabernacle was itself a teaching.** The closed inner room was the Holy Spirit's way of indicating that full access had not yet been opened.
- **Old sacrifices could not perfect the conscience.** They dealt with outward ritual uncleanness but could not reach the inner reality of sin.
- **Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary with His own blood.** Not by means of animal blood but by His own blood, Christ secured an eternal redemption.
- **The once-for-all sacrifice is final and complete.** Not to be repeated, not partial, not provisional. It secures eternal redemption — past, present, and future — for those in Christ.
- **Christ's death put the new covenant into force.** As the death of a testator activates a will, Christ's death activated the covenant whose benefits we now receive.
- **Christ will appear a second time, not to deal with sin.** That work is done. The second coming brings the already-secured salvation to its full revelation.



## Suggested Time Plan

For a 60-minute class period. This is a dense chapter; a 75-minute class is better if you can arrange one.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer; read Hebrews 9:11–15 aloud (the heart of the chapter)
0:05–0:15	The earthly tabernacle and its limits (9:1–10)
0:15–0:20	The Day of Atonement
0:20–0:35	Christ's entry — once for all, securing eternal redemption (9:11–15)
0:35–0:45	The death of the testator; covenant and blood (9:16–22)
0:45–0:55	Not made with hands; He will appear a second time (9:23–28)
0:55–1:00	Discussion (one question); Looking Ahead; closing prayer



## Teaching Notes, Part by Part

### The Earthly Tabernacle (10 minutes)

Open by painting the picture of the tabernacle. Two rooms separated by a heavy curtain. The Holy Place with lampstand, table of showbread, and altar of incense. The Most Holy Place with the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat. Describe it briefly; do not dwell.

The theologically important point is the architecture's meaning. The Holy Spirit, the writer says, was teaching through the very design of the space. As long as the outer room was standing — as long as there was an outer room, requiring passage through it — the way into the inner room was not yet open. The worshiper

approached, but did not enter. The old covenant was a covenant of approach, not of entry.

Then teach the conscience limit. The old sacrifices “dealt only with food and drink and various washings,” regulations for the body. They could address outward ritual uncleanness but could not perfect the conscience. Your class may not have thought of the difference between outward cleansing and inward cleansing. Name it. The old covenant could handle the outside of a person; it could not reach the inside. For that, something else was needed.

### **The Day of Atonement (5 minutes)**

Briefly describe the ritual from Leviticus 16. Once a year, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place with blood — first a bull for himself, then a goat for the people. Two sprinklings before the mercy seat. This was the old covenant’s highest moment. And it was limited: once a year, with repetition required, never reaching the conscience.

#### **On the Frequency of Repetition**

Your class may not appreciate how much the repetition of the old sacrifices communicated. Imagine being a first-century Jewish worshiper: every morning and evening, daily sacrifices. Every Sabbath, additional offerings. Every new moon, feast days, Day of Atonement — year after year, the same rituals, the same blood, the same cycles. The repetition was itself a kind of announcement: the work is not done. Tomorrow another offering. Next year another atonement. This is part of what made the once-for-all of Christ so radical. A sacrifice that was so complete it could not be repeated — because it needed nothing to complete it — was unprecedented in the old covenant’s experience.

### **Christ’s Entry (15 minutes)**

The center of the session. Spend the time. Read verses 11–15 aloud again if you did not read them at the start. Then unpack the key phrases.

“When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come.” Not “which are to come.” The benefits have arrived. They are not still pending.

“Through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands.” Christ serves in a sanctuary not made by human construction. The heavenly sanctuary is the reality of which the earthly was a copy.

“He entered once for all into the holy places.” Once for all. The Greek phrase *ephapax* appears here and again in 10:10. The sacrifice’s non-repeatability is theologically crucial.

“Not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood.” The decisive contrast. Christ did not bring another’s blood into the sanctuary; He brought His own. He was both the priest and the offering.

“Thus securing an eternal redemption.” Securing — not merely offering, not merely making possible. Locking it in. The redemption is eternal — not annual, not provisional, not pending renewal.

### **On “Once for All” and the Supper**

Lutheran Christians have sometimes worried about whether the Sacrament of the Altar “repeats” Christ’s sacrifice. It does not. This is the clear teaching of the Lutheran Confessions and follows directly from Hebrews 9–10. In the Supper, we receive the body and blood of Christ — truly — but the sacrifice that was offered on Calvary was offered once and cannot be offered again. What we receive in the Supper is the benefits of that one sacrifice, applied to us through the elements. The Supper is a receiving, not a re-offering. This distinction is important both for our own theological clarity and for faithful conversation with our Catholic and Orthodox neighbors, whose language can sometimes suggest otherwise. The once-for-all-ness of Christ’s sacrifice is non-negotiable.

### **The Testator and the Covenant (10 minutes)**

Walk through verses 15–22. The key move: the Greek word *diathēkē* means both covenant and will. The writer takes advantage of the double meaning. Christ’s death put the new covenant into force the way a testator’s death puts a will into force. The death is not incidental; it is the mechanism.

Then teach the principle from verse 22: “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” This is not a sentimental claim or a merely cultural one. It reflects the biblical doctrine of sin. The wages of sin is death. For sin to be

forgiven, death must occur — the sinner's own, or a substitute's. The old covenant's sacrifices were God's merciful provision of substitutes, pointing forward to the one true substitute who would come.

This is worth naming clearly because some modern Christians, made uncomfortable by “blood theology,” try to downplay it. Do not. The cross is an atoning sacrifice. The blood of Christ is not a symbol or a metaphor for something else; it is the price of our redemption. Hebrews is emphatic about this, and the Lutheran tradition has been emphatic alongside it.

### **Second Appearing (10 minutes)**

Close with verses 24–28. Two movements. First, Christ has entered heaven itself, appearing in the presence of God on our behalf. His one sacrifice is not repeatable; one suffering, one offering, and the work is done. Second, Christ will appear a second time — and here your class may need to pause and notice — “not to deal with sin.” That work is already done. The second coming is for the gathering of those who wait for Him, not for another round of sin-dealing.

The pastoral framing of “eagerly waiting” is worth developing. The Christian life is oriented toward Christ's return. Not as a panic about what we have failed to accomplish, but as the expectation of the one whose work is complete. We wait eagerly not because there is still uncertainty about the outcome, but because the outcome is certain and the appearing is imminent. This is the opposite of the anxious waiting that plagues some Christian traditions. We do not wait to see if we will be saved; we wait to see the face of the one who has saved us.

#### **Pastoral Anchor — Living Between the Two Appearings**

Some in your class may struggle with the tension of living between Christ's first coming and His second. The sin around them and within them is real. The world is not healed. Their own bodies are failing. And yet Hebrews says the work is done. How can both be true? Say this: we live in the “already” of Christ's completed work and the “not yet” of its full revelation. The sin you fight is real, but its final outcome is not in doubt. The world you live in is broken, but its redemption is secured. Your dying body is genuinely dying, but its resurrection is guaranteed. The waiting is not anxious waiting; it is expectant waiting. What you wait for is already yours — you are simply

waiting for it to be revealed. This is the posture of Christian hope.



## Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

### *“How is Christ’s sacrifice ‘once for all’ if we keep celebrating it in the Supper?”*

A very important question, and one that touches the heart of Lutheran sacramental theology. The Supper does not repeat Christ’s sacrifice; it distributes its benefits. The sacrifice was offered once, on Calvary. It is complete. It cannot and does not need to be repeated. What happens in the Supper is that Christ — who was sacrificed once — gives us His body and blood in the bread and wine, applying to us personally the benefits of that one sacrifice. The Supper is a means of grace, not a re-sacrifice. The Lutheran Confessions are clear about this, and so is Hebrews. We receive the once-for-all Christ; we do not repeat His offering.

### *“If the blood of animals was never going to save anyone, why did God institute it?”*

Because the old sacrifices did real, if limited, work. They maintained the covenant relationship at the level of outward observance. They taught Israel the gravity of sin (sin costs blood). They established the pattern of substitutionary atonement that Christ would fulfill. They gave Israel an ongoing, visible relationship with God centered on the tabernacle and temple. And they pointed forward to Christ, so that when He came, the framework for understanding His death was already in place. The old sacrifices were not a mistake or a failed attempt; they were a preparation, accomplishing what preparation can accomplish. What they could not do was perfect the conscience or remove sin finally. That work was reserved for Christ.

### *“What does ‘purify our conscience from dead works’ mean practically?”*

“Dead works” in Hebrews most likely refers to works done in an attempt to earn God’s favor — the works of someone who has not yet received the gospel, whose religious activity is still bound up with trying to secure what only grace can give. These works are “dead” because they cannot produce life. Christ’s blood purifies the conscience from this kind of religious activity — frees us from the need to do

religious works to earn salvation — so that we can serve the living God out of gratitude rather than anxiety. This is the Reformation's discovery at its deepest level: Christian good works are the fruit of salvation, not its cause. The freed conscience serves God without the burden of trying to save itself by its service.

***“Can the once-for-all sacrifice really cover sins I have not yet committed?”***

Yes. The sacrifice of Christ was offered in time — at a specific moment in history — but its effects reach across the whole of time for those joined to Him. The writer says explicitly that Christ's blood reaches back to redeem transgressions committed under the first covenant; it obviously also reaches forward to cover the sins of those who come to Him in faith in any age. This does not mean future sin is trivial or that the Christian should sin freely; Hebrews itself warns against such abuse of grace. But it does mean that no sin committed after conversion can disqualify the Christian from the salvation Christ has secured. Every sin that will ever be committed by a child of God was covered at Calvary. This is one of the deepest assurances of Christian life.

***“What is the ‘second death’ judgment of 9:27 about?”***

The passage does not use the phrase “second death” (that is Revelation); it says humans are “appointed to die once, and after that comes judgment.” The writer is making a parallel between the singularity of human death (once, not multiple times) and the singularity of Christ's sacrifice (once, not repeated). The reality of judgment after death is assumed by the writer, but he is not teaching on it here. The Lutheran understanding is straightforward: all humans will face Christ as judge, and the basis of our standing will be whether we have received His finished work by faith. The Christian stands before the judge as one whose advocate is the judge Himself — which is why we do not fear the judgment as those who have no hope.

***“What does it mean that Christ will appear ‘not to deal with sin’?”***

It means the sin problem has already been dealt with at His first coming. His second coming is for different purposes — raising the dead, gathering His people, making all things new, executing final judgment on what remains of evil. But the specific work of atonement for sin is complete. He does not return to do it again. The

Christian waiting for His appearing is not waiting to see whether she will finally be saved; she is waiting to see the one who has already saved her.



## **Leading the Discussion**

Notes on each of the six discussion questions. Be selective; this session carries a lot of teaching.

### ***Question 1 — Physical space as teaching***

A reflection on how God teaches through embodied reality. The tabernacle's architecture taught. The sacrifices taught. The Supper still teaches. Lutheran sacramental theology takes this seriously: God uses material things to communicate with His people. The class may find other examples in Scripture: the twelve stones at the Jordan, the bronze serpent, the parted waters of the Red Sea. God is not afraid of physical signs.

### ***Question 2 — Outward versus inward cleansing***

A theologically important distinction. The old sacrifices could address outward uncleanness in a way that maintained covenant standing. They could not touch the conscience. This matters for how we understand what Christ's work does differently: not just maintenance of a relationship, but the actual cleansing of the inner person. The class may connect this to 1 John 1:9 or to their own experience of absolution.

### ***Question 3 — Once for all***

A chance for the class to articulate how the once-for-all teaching shapes Christian life. Invite them to name places where old-covenant-style thinking still creeps in: the tendency to re-confess old sins, the anxiety about whether our repentance was "enough," the sense that we have to keep working to stay saved. All of these are un-Hebrews, and the once-for-all doctrine corrects them.

### ***Question 4 — Old Testament salvation***

A doctrinally important discussion. Old Testament believers were saved by faith, looking forward to the Messiah, just as New Testament believers are saved by

faith, looking back to Him. The sacrifice of Christ reaches both directions. Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah — all were saved by trusting the God who would one day send His Son, even when they did not know the details. This is good Lutheran theology and biblical theology together.

### **Question 5 — The testament metaphor**

A reflection on inheritance. The new covenant is our inheritance from Christ's death. This framing changes the feel of the Christian life: we are not earning, we are inheriting. The heirs receive what the testator has assigned them. Christ has died; the will is in force; the benefits flow to us. This may help some in your class who still think of their relationship with God in transactional terms.

### **Question 6 — Eager waiting**

A question about Christian hope. Eager waiting is not anxious waiting. It is the posture of one who knows the outcome and is longing for its revelation. Invite the class to reflect on how they do — or do not — cultivate this posture. Many modern Christians have largely given up on thinking about the second coming; many others have become unhealthily fixated on prophetic speculation. The Lutheran middle path: eager expectation, without date-setting, living as those whose hope is secure and whose appearing is near.



## **If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes**

Keep/cut plan for a shorter class period.

### **Keep:**

- Brief orientation to the tabernacle and its message of closed access (5 minutes)
- The contrast between the old sacrifices and Christ's once-for-all offering (15 minutes) — this is the heart
- The testator/covenant argument and “without shedding of blood no forgiveness” (5 minutes)

- Christ's second appearing — not to deal with sin (5 minutes)
- Discussion question 3 or 6

### **Cut or Abbreviate:**

- Detailed description of tabernacle furniture
- Full walk-through of the Day of Atonement ritual
- Most discussion questions



## **For Further Study**

### **Biblical cross-references:**

- Leviticus 16 — the Day of Atonement ritual
- Exodus 25–30 — the construction of the tabernacle
- Matthew 27:50–51 — the temple curtain torn at Christ's death
- Romans 3:21–26 — Paul on Christ as propitiation
- 1 Peter 3:18 — “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous”
- Revelation 5 — the Lamb who was slain in the heavenly throne room

### **From the Lutheran tradition:**

- Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV — on the Mass and the once-for-all sacrifice
- Small Catechism on the Sacrament of the Altar — what we receive and why
- Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII — on the Lord's Supper
- Luther, “Babylonian Captivity of the Church” (1520) — the foundational Reformation argument that the Mass is not a sacrifice

### **Commentaries:**

- Lenski on Hebrews 9 — careful Lutheran treatment with strong once-for-all emphasis
- Philip Hughes on Hebrews 9 — particularly good on the Day of Atonement background
- Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* — helpful on the testament/covenant dual meaning
- F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* — classic treatment of the chapter's exegetical structure



## **A Final Word**

You have taught the theological center of Hebrews. If the class leaves with a firm grip on three things — once for all, the heavenly sanctuary, Christ will return — you have done your work. The details of the tabernacle, the Day of Atonement ritual, the testator metaphor, the blood theology — these are all serving the three central claims. Do not let them obscure the claims.

Do not worry if parts of the chapter remain hazy. This is the densest material in the letter, and absorbing it fully takes more than one session. The class needs to know that Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary with His own blood, that the sacrifice was offered once and cannot be repeated, and that He is coming again not to deal with sin but to save those who wait for Him. These three, secured in their hearts, will feed Christian hope for the rest of their lives.

Session 10 is the completion of this argument. The writer will return to Psalm 40, to the Jeremiah promise, and to the declaration that by a single offering Christ has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. The foundation laid in chapters 7 and 8, and developed in 9, will reach its triumphant conclusion in 10. Your teaching in this session prepares the ground for that conclusion. Teach chapter 9 as the penultimate chapter of the theological argument — one session's teaching away from its final payoff — and the class will be primed for Session 10's landing.

## **Soli Deo Gloria**

SESSION 10

**Once for All**

*Hebrews 10:1-18*

TEACHER'S GUIDE

*A free companion to the Bible study  
Something Better: A Study of Hebrews*

## **A Note to the Teacher**

Session 10 is the climactic session of the theological argument that has run since chapter 5. The writer draws everything together — the priesthood of Christ, the new covenant, the heavenly sanctuary, the once-for-all sacrifice — and lands it all in a single sentence: “by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” Your teaching should let that sentence stand as the center around which everything else orbits. If the class leaves this session with 10:14 burned into their consciousness, you have done your work.

Three pastoral strategies for this session. First, do not rush to the doctrine without letting the images do their work. The priest who sat down. The body prepared. The single offering. These are images that reach the affective heart, not just the intellect. Read them aloud, pause over them, let them breathe. Second, weave the Lutheran doctrine of justification explicitly through the teaching. “Perfected for all time” is justification language at its most vivid. The class should hear that this is the heart of the Reformation’s recovery. Third, land the pastoral implications personally. Your class includes Christians still carrying shame about past sins, still wondering whether they are doing enough, still suspecting that God might be disappointed with them. This session’s text answers all of that. Let it answer it explicitly, aloud, directed at anyone in the room who needs to hear it.

One structural note: this passage is tight — eighteen verses — but it is the densest theological passage Hebrews offers. You will not be able to teach every nuance. Pick the weight-bearing pieces: the repetition-as-insufficiency argument (10:1–4), the Psalm 40 quotation as Christ’s voice (10:5–10), the seated priest (10:11–14), and the triumphant return to Jeremiah (10:15–18). Teach those four; let the rest orbit around them.



## **Preparing to Teach This Session**

**Before you teach:**

- Read Hebrews 10:1–18 aloud. This passage especially rewards being heard — the rhythms of the once-for-all language carry the argument.
- Read Psalm 40:6–8 in its original context. The psalm is David's, but the writer hears Christ's voice in it. Notice how the Greek Old Testament (which Hebrews uses) reads “a body have you prepared for me” where the Hebrew has “ears you have opened for me.” This is not a contradiction; the Septuagint is giving a dynamic translation of the Hebrew idiom for willing obedience.
- Read Augsburg Confession, Article IV, on justification. This is the Lutheran doctrinal article Hebrews 10:14 supports as directly as any verse in Scripture.
- Review the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration III, on justification. Particularly helpful for the “has perfected / are being sanctified” distinction.
- Think about your own prayer life, your own handling of past sins, your own grip on justification. You will teach this passage better if you have let it do its work on you first.

### **Key theological points for this session:**

- **The old sacrifices could not perfect the conscience.** Their repetition was itself the proof. Each new sacrifice was an admission that the previous one had not finished the work.
- **Christ came voluntarily.** Psalm 40 as read in Hebrews puts the words of willing obedience in Christ's mouth at the moment of incarnation. The cross was not accidental but chosen.
- **The priest who sat down.** The image of the seated priest at the right hand of God is the image of finished atonement. The Levitical priest stood; Christ sat.
- **Perfect for all time.** Justification in its most decisive biblical expression. By one offering, the Christian is perfected — brought to completion, made fit to stand before God — for the whole of time.

- **Has perfected / are being sanctified.** The Lutheran distinction between justification (completed) and sanctification (progressive) is in the verse itself. Both rest on the single offering.
- **No more offering is needed.** The Spirit, through Jeremiah, confirms the covenant promise. Sins forgotten; no further sacrifice for sin possible or needed.



## Suggested Time Plan

For a 60-minute class period.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer; read Hebrews 10:1–18 aloud
0:05–0:15	Shadow not substance; repetition as admission of insufficiency (10:1–4)
0:15–0:25	Psalm 40: the voluntary obedience of the Son (10:5–10)
0:25–0:35	The priest who sat down (10:11–13)
0:35–0:45	Perfect for all time: justification and sanctification (10:14)
0:45–0:52	The Spirit's witness; no more offering needed (10:15–18)
0:52–1:00	Discussion (one question); Looking Ahead; closing prayer



## Teaching Notes, Part by Part

### Shadow and Repetition (10 minutes)

Open with the shadow-versus-reality image. The Law has a shadow; the true form has now come. Shadows tell us something real about what casts them, but they are not the substance. The old sacrifices were shadows. Christ is the substance.

Then teach the repetition argument. This is theologically important and often missed. If the old sacrifices had really, finally dealt with sin, they would not have needed to be repeated. The very fact that the Day of Atonement was observed year after year is the old covenant's own confession that the work was not finished. Every new offering was a reminder of sins, not a final removal of them.

Push this to its theological conclusion: "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Animal blood cannot pay for human sin. The sacrifices were preparation, teaching, pattern — but not the thing itself. The thing itself required Christ's blood, and nothing else would do.

### **Psalm 40: The Voluntary Son (10 minutes)**

This section deserves careful, slow teaching. The writer of Hebrews reads Psalm 40 as Christ's own voice at the moment of incarnation. When Christ came into the world, He said: sacrifices you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me. I have come to do your will.

Help your class grasp how radical this is. The incarnation is not just God becoming human. It is God's Son voluntarily entering the world to offer the one sacrifice that would accomplish what all the previous sacrifices could not. The cross was not accidental, not a defeat, not a surprise. It was the goal toward which the whole earthly life of Jesus was oriented from the beginning.

#### **On the "Body" Language**

Your class may wonder about the Hebrew-Greek discrepancy. The Hebrew of Psalm 40:6 reads "ears you have opened for me" (or "ears you have dug for me"). The Greek Septuagint, which Hebrews quotes, reads "a body have you prepared for me." This is not a translation error; it is a dynamic rendering. The Hebrew idiom "opening the ear" refers to readiness to hear and obey — the fully attentive servant whose whole self is oriented toward the master's will. The Septuagint translator captured the idiom's meaning: what God wanted was not just attentive ears but a whole body, a whole life, willingly offered. The writer of Hebrews uses the Greek version, which happens to fit the

incarnation beautifully — a body prepared. Scripture is not being twisted here; the Septuagint's rendering is reading the Hebrew rightly, and Hebrews is reading the Septuagint rightly.

Land the pastoral point. If Christ voluntarily came to offer His body, then the offering was fully willing from both sides — the Father's willing to send, and the Son's willing to be sent. The cross is not the Father punishing an unwilling Son. It is the Triune God, in full unity of will, accomplishing the redemption of humanity. There is no wedge between the Father and the Son at Calvary. There is, rather, the most profound coordination of love and will that Scripture anywhere records.

### **The Priest Who Sat Down (10 minutes)**

This is perhaps the most vivid image in Hebrews, and it deserves to be taught with full weight. The Levitical priest stood. There was no chair in the tabernacle. The priest stood because his work was never done — one sacrifice, another, another, day after day, year after year. Standing was the posture of unfinished work.

Christ sat down. Having offered the single sacrifice, He sat at the right hand of God. The image is deliberate. Sitting is the posture of completed work. Kings sit on thrones; priests sit when their service is finished. Christ's seating is the visible confession that the atonement is complete. There is nothing more to offer, because what needed to be offered has been offered. There is no more blood to shed, because the blood that was required has been shed. The priest sat down, and His sitting preaches the gospel every moment of every day.

#### **Pastoral Anchor — The Seated Priest and Your Anxious Heart**

For the Christian who still worries, at some deep level, whether she is doing enough — whether her prayers are adequate, whether her Christian life is measuring up, whether God is pleased with her — the seated priest is the answer. He is not still working. He is not standing anxiously at the altar wondering if His offering will be accepted. He is seated. His work is done. And because His work is done, your work does not have to save you. Your work is the grateful response to what He has already accomplished, not the effort that completes what He left unfinished. When your conscience accuses you, picture the seated priest. When you feel you must do more to be

acceptable, picture the seated priest. The posture of Christ at the Father's right hand is the most important visual image in the Christian theology of assurance. Say this aloud to your class.

### **Perfected for All Time (10 minutes)**

The climactic sentence. Read it aloud slowly: "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified." Then unpack each phrase.

"By a single offering" — one, not many, not repeated, not supplemented. "He has perfected" — completed, brought to the goal, made fit to stand before God. Perfect tense: accomplished and continuing. "For all time" — not annually, not pending renewal. Across the whole of time. "Those who are being sanctified" — present tense, ongoing work of the Spirit in the Christian life.

Teach the Lutheran distinction between justification and sanctification directly. Justification is what God does for us in Christ, once for all, declaring us righteous on the basis of the single offering. Sanctification is what the Spirit does in us over time, producing the actual transformation of character. Both are gift; neither is our accomplishment. And crucially, sanctification rests on justification, not the other way around. The Christian is not being sanctified in order to become justified. The Christian has been justified, and out of that settled standing, the Spirit is producing sanctification. This is the architectural order of the Christian life, and Hebrews 10:14 is one of the clearest biblical warrants for it.

#### **Justification and Sanctification**

If your class includes members from other Christian traditions or members who have been exposed to teaching that blurs justification and sanctification, this verse is your anchor. Justification is declarative, forensic, instantaneous, complete. "Has perfected." Sanctification is renovative, actual, progressive, incomplete in this life. "Are being sanctified." The two must be distinguished without being separated. Confuse them and you get works-righteousness (thinking you are justified by your sanctification) or cheap grace (thinking justification does not require sanctification). Distinguish them rightly, in the order Scripture gives, and you get the Lutheran evangelical life — secure in justification, growing in sanctification, all by grace through faith.

## **The Spirit's Witness (5 minutes)**

Close the teaching with verses 15–18. The Holy Spirit, through Jeremiah, bears witness to this. Sins forgotten. And then the final word: “Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.”

This is the full closing of the theological argument. The sins are forgiven. No more offering is required. The whole sacrificial system of the old covenant is not merely obsolete; it is unnecessary. What Christ did on the cross is complete, and the Spirit confirms it. The work is done. And every piece of practical exhortation that follows in chapters 10–13 rests on this foundation.



## **Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses**

*“If I have been ‘perfected for all time,’ why do I still sin?”*

Because “perfected” in 10:14 is justification language, not sanctification language. In Christ, your standing before God has been perfected — you are reckoned righteous, accepted, fully qualified to stand before the Father. In your actual lived experience, you are still being sanctified, which is the Spirit’s progressive work in you, not complete in this life. The two are not in conflict. You are simultaneously righteous in Christ (justified) and still a sinner in yourself (being sanctified). This is what Luther meant by *simul iustus et peccator* — at once righteous and a sinner. The justification is already complete. The sanctification will be complete only at the resurrection. In the meantime, the Christian lives in the tension of the already and the not-yet, trusting the already, expecting the not-yet.

*“Does ‘perfected for all time’ mean a Christian cannot lose salvation?”*

The passage strongly emphasizes the once-for-all and permanent character of Christ’s work. Lutherans hold that the promise is sure, the sacrifice is complete, and God’s saving work in the Christian is secure. At the same time, the Lutheran tradition takes seriously the warnings in Scripture (including the one we will see in Hebrews 10:26–31) that warn against willful departure from Christ. We do not read Hebrews 10:14 as guaranteeing that a person who later abandons Christ is still saved; we read it as guaranteeing that those who are in Christ have already been

perfected by His work and will never be rejected on the basis of their ongoing sin. The promise is secure for those who hold to Christ; the warnings exist to keep us holding to Him.

***“How does this passage relate to the Catholic teaching about the Mass?”***

A question that may come up, and one worth handling carefully. The historic Catholic teaching — particularly the pre-Vatican II formulation — sometimes spoke of the Mass as a “representation” or “perpetuation” of Christ’s sacrifice, in ways that seemed to Lutherans to compromise the once-for-all character of Calvary. More recent Catholic theology, including Vatican II, has emphasized that the Mass is not a new sacrifice but a re-presentation (a making-present) of the one sacrifice of Christ. There are genuine convergences in recent ecumenical dialogue, but there are also remaining differences. The Lutheran position holds firmly: Christ was sacrificed once, cannot be sacrificed again, and the Supper is a receiving of His body and blood — not a re-offering. Hebrews 10:14 and 10:18 are definitive for this. We do not deny what Catholics and Orthodox believers are trying to protect — the reality of Christ’s presence in the Supper — but we insist that the sacrifice itself is unrepeatable.

***“What does ‘are being sanctified’ actually look like?”***

Sanctification is the Spirit’s work producing actual transformation in the Christian’s life. It looks like growing in love for God and neighbor. It looks like increasing freedom from patterns of sin that once dominated. It looks like prayer becoming more regular, Scripture reading becoming more nourishing, worship becoming more meaningful. It looks like the ordinary Christian virtues gradually becoming more natural: patience, kindness, honesty, humility, generosity. It is not instantaneous, not uniform, not free of setbacks. But it is real, and Scripture promises it. The Lutheran tradition has always insisted that genuine faith produces genuine fruit, and the fruit is the evidence of the Spirit’s ongoing work. If there is no fruit at all — no change, no growth, no movement over the years — that may be a warning sign. But slow, uneven, three-steps-forward-two-steps-back growth is the normal Christian experience, and it is still the Spirit at work.

***“If no more offering for sin is needed, what is the Lord’s Supper?”***

The Supper is not a new offering for sin. It is the means by which Christ gives us His body and blood — which were offered once at Calvary — as a distribution of the benefits of that one sacrifice. In the Supper, we receive Christ truly (Lutherans insist on real presence), and through receiving Him we receive the forgiveness of sins, the strengthening of faith, and the foretaste of the feast to come. The sacrifice itself is not repeated; its fruits are delivered to us in the Sacrament. This is why Luther was so firm that the Mass must not be understood as a new sacrifice offered by the priest — such an understanding contradicts Hebrews 10 — while still insisting that Christ's body and blood are really given and received in the Supper. The distinction is crucial and worth guarding.

***“Why does the writer keep coming back to Psalm 110?”***

Because Psalm 110 is the Old Testament's clearest prophecy of the Messiah's seated reign and His priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. It is quoted or alluded to more often in Hebrews than any other Old Testament passage, and it is the single most-quoted Old Testament verse in the entire New Testament. It gives the writer a scriptural anchor for the two claims he most wants to make: that Christ is seated at God's right hand (which speaks of His finished work and reigning authority), and that He is a priest forever after an order other than the Levitical (which grounds the whole new-priesthood argument). Every time the writer returns to Psalm 110, he is tying his argument directly to the Old Testament's own testimony.



## **Leading the Discussion**

Notes on each of the six discussion questions.

### ***Question 1 — When repetition reveals insufficiency***

A reflection on Christian spiritual practice. The question is not whether repetition per se is bad — liturgical Christians rightly embrace the repetition of the Church year, the weekly Supper, the daily prayers. Rather, the question is whether a practice has shifted from expressing the gospel to substituting for it. Invite the class to name examples from their own experience or from Christian history. A practice

becomes substitutionary when we begin to think our doing of it earns what only grace can give.

### **Question 2 — Christ's voluntary incarnation**

A theologically rich question. The Son came voluntarily. The cross was chosen, not forced. This changes the emotional tone of how we read the gospel narrative. Every step Jesus took toward Jerusalem was His own. Every moment of His ministry was the outworking of a voluntary self-giving announced at the incarnation. Let the class sit with this. It may reframe their relationship to the cross.

### **Question 3 — The seated priest**

The most pastorally direct question of the set. Invite personal reflection. Where does the image of the seated priest change how you live? Where do you still secretly picture Christ as anxiously working on your behalf, still uncertain whether He has done enough? Let the image correct the picture. He is seated. The work is done. You can rest.

### **Question 4 — Has perfected / are being sanctified**

A doctrinally important discussion. Help the class articulate the Lutheran distinction. Emphasizing only “has perfected” can produce complacency or antinomianism (if I am already perfect, why does my life need to change?). Emphasizing only “are being sanctified” produces anxiety (if my sanctification is still incomplete, am I really accepted?). Both together, in the order Scripture gives, produce the Christian life as Scripture describes it: secure standing and ongoing growth.

### **Question 5 — Forgiveness and confession**

A practical question. If sins are forgotten and no more offering is needed, what is confession for? Confession is not the means by which we earn or secure forgiveness — forgiveness has already been earned by Christ and given in Baptism. Confession is the means by which we receive, again and again, the forgiveness that is already ours. It is the ongoing application of the finished work to the ongoing sins of the Christian life. The class may find this reframing freeing — confession as reception rather than transaction.

### **Question 6 — Looking back**

A synthesis question. Invite the class to name what has most changed in their understanding of Christ as priest across Sessions 5 through 10. What would they tell a friend who has never thought of Christ as priest? This helps consolidate the learning and prepares them for the practical exhortations ahead.



## **If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes**

Keep/cut plan for a shorter class period.

### **Keep:**

- Brief repetition-as-insufficiency argument (5 minutes)
- The Psalm 40 teaching on Christ's voluntary incarnation (10 minutes)
- The seated priest (10 minutes) — this is the heart
- Perfected for all time and the justification/sanctification distinction (10 minutes)
- The pastoral anchor on the seated priest and your anxious heart
- Discussion question 3 or 4

### **Cut or Abbreviate:**

- Detailed treatment of the Hebrew-Greek translation question in Psalm 40
- Extended development of the Spirit's witness and Jeremiah 31 recall
- Most discussion questions



## **For Further Study**

### **Biblical cross-references:**

- Psalm 40:6–8 — the psalm quoted in Hebrews 10
- Psalm 110:1 — the seated priest at God's right hand
- Romans 3:21–26 and 4:1–8 — Paul on justification by faith

- John 19:30 — “It is finished”
- Ephesians 1:7 and 2:8–10 — redemption by His blood, salvation by grace
- Philippians 2:5–11 — Christ’s voluntary humbling

### **From the Lutheran tradition:**

- Augsburg Confession, Article IV — justification by faith
- Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration III — on the righteousness of faith
- Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV — the foundational Lutheran treatment of justification
- Luther’s Bondage of the Will — on the comprehensive character of Christ’s saving work
- Small Catechism, Second Article of the Creed — Luther’s summary of Christ’s work

### **Commentaries:**

- Lenski on Hebrews 10:1–18 — thorough Lutheran treatment with strong justification emphasis
- Philip Hughes on Hebrews 10 — especially on the Psalm 40 quotation
- Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* — good on the has-perfected / are-being-sanctified distinction
- F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* — excellent on the exegetical details



## **A Final Word**

You have taught the summit of the letter. From this point, Hebrews turns from theological argument to pastoral exhortation, and the rest of the letter flows from what you have just laid down. If your class has grasped, even in part, that Christ’s one offering has perfected them for all time — that the priest is seated because the work is done — they are ready to hear the practical calls to draw near, hold fast, and consider one another that come next.

Do not worry if some of the doctrinal distinctions feel dense. The class does not need to be able to pass a theological examination on justification and sanctification. They need to know that their standing before God rests on a finished work, that the priest who secured that standing is seated at the right hand of God, and that the sins they bring to the throne are sins God has promised to forget. These three truths — finished, seated, forgotten — are the pastoral payoff of the whole theological argument.

Session 11 will take up the great “therefore” of 10:19 and press all this into practical Christian life — drawing near with full assurance, holding fast the confession, considering how to stir one another to love and good works. The warning passage that follows — the fourth and last of the letter — will read differently now than it would have read earlier, because your class knows the ground on which it stands. Teach this session as the foundation for what follows. That is what it is.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

SESSION 11

**Let Us Draw Near**

*Hebrews 10:19–39*

TEACHER'S GUIDE

*A free companion to the Bible study  
Something Better: A Study of Hebrews*

## A Note to the Teacher

Session 11 is the pastoral turn of the whole letter. Since chapter 5, the writer has been arguing theology; now he puts theology to work. The three exhortations — draw near, hold fast, consider one another — are the practical payoff of everything the class has learned, and they deserve to be taught with that weight. If your class leaves this session with those three exhortations ringing in their ears, knowing that each one rests on Christ's finished priestly work, you have done your teaching.

The session also carries the fourth and final warning passage of Hebrews. The Lutheran pattern you have taught in Sessions 2, 4, and 6 now applies again. By this point your class should be practiced in hearing the warnings rightly — as real, addressed to the complacent, not describing the anxious. You will not need to lay the whole pattern down from scratch, but do not take it for granted either; a brief restatement of the Lutheran handling is worth the time.

One structural note for pacing. The passage has a lot in it — three exhortations, a severe warning, a remembrance, a call to endurance, and a concluding identity-declaration. Do not try to give each piece equal weight. The exhortations and the identity-declaration are the pastoral bookends, and they bear the most weight. The warning deserves real treatment, but it does not need to dominate the session — your class has heard warnings before. The remembrance and endurance segments are the connective tissue; they can be taught more briefly. Think of the session as having a shape: exhort, warn briefly but clearly, remember, endure, declare. The declaration of identity at the end — “we are of those who have faith” — is the bridge into Session 12.



## Preparing to Teach This Session

### Before you teach:

- Read Hebrews 10:19–39 aloud in one sitting. Feel the shape of exhortation —warning—remembrance—endurance—identity. The pastoral logic moves.

- Re-read Matthew 27:50–51 on the temple curtain tearing at Christ's death — the image the writer picks up in 10:20.
- Review your teaching notes from Sessions 2, 4, and 6. The Lutheran warning-reading pattern applies again and should feel familiar.
- Read Habakkuk 2:3–4 in context. The prophecy “my righteous one shall live by faith” is the bridge verse into Hebrews 11, and understanding its original setting helps.
- Consider your congregation's practice of gathering. The writer's warning against neglecting to meet together is particularly relevant in an age when many Christians have drifted from regular in-person worship. Think about how to say this pastorally, without shaming those who are struggling to return.

### **Key theological points for this session:**

- **The great therefore.** Everything in this passage rests on the theological argument of chapters 1–10. Christian practice flows from Christ's finished priestly work, not from our own resolve.
- **Three exhortations for the Christian life.** Draw near (prayer and access), hold fast (continuing in faith), consider one another (gathered Christian life). Together they constitute the practical shape of faithful discipleship.
- **Do not neglect to meet together.** The gathering of the saints is not optional. The Christian life is communal. Drift from the assembly is drift from the means of grace by which faith is sustained.
- **The fourth warning is real.** Deliberate, settled rejection of Christ after truly knowing Him closes the apostate off from the sacrifice that alone can save. The warning is severe and the warning is pastoral.
- **Remembrance fuels endurance.** The writer does not shame his readers for present drift; he reminds them of past faithfulness and asks them to do again what they have done before. This is a key pastoral move worth imitating.

- **We are not of those who shrink back.** Christian identity is declared, not self-constructed. The writer names what is true of his readers as those who belong to Christ and asks them to believe it.



## Suggested Time Plan

For a 60-minute class period.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer; read Hebrews 10:19–39 aloud
0:05–0:25	The great therefore and the three exhortations (10:19–25)
0:25–0:35	The fourth warning (10:26–31)
0:35–0:45	Remembrance and endurance (10:32–39)
0:45–0:52	The identity declaration; bridge to Hebrews 11
0:52–1:00	Discussion (one question); Looking Ahead; closing prayer



## Teaching Notes, Part by Part

### The Great Therefore and Three Exhortations (20 minutes)

Open by naming the therefore. The writer has finished his theological argument; now he applies it. Verses 19–21 gather the grounds: confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, the new and living way through His flesh, the great priest over the house of God. These are the recap of the letter’s first ten chapters in three phrases.

Then teach the three exhortations one by one. Do not rush.

Exhortation one: let us draw near. The writer describes the drawing near in sacramental and covenantal terms — hearts sprinkled clean, bodies washed with pure water. This is Baptism language, and Lutheran ears should hear it. Our drawing near is not achieved by religious performance in the moment; it rests on what has already been done to us in Baptism, where the Spirit joined us to Christ's death and resurrection and brought us into the new covenant.

### **On Sprinkled Hearts and Washed Bodies**

The two cleansings the writer names in 10:22 are worth treating carefully. "Hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience" recalls the Old Testament blood-sprinkling of covenant-making — but now applied inwardly, at the level of conscience. "Bodies washed with pure water" has been read by the whole Christian tradition as a reference to Baptism. The Lutheran Confessions are comfortable hearing Baptism here, and so should we. The verse is saying, in effect: you come to God on the basis of the cleansing that Christ's blood has accomplished in you (conscience) and the sacrament in which that cleansing was personally applied to you (body). Both are passive: the sprinkling is done to us, the washing is done to us. We do not draw near on the basis of our own purification. We draw near on the basis of the purification Christ and His means of grace have accomplished.

Exhortation two: let us hold fast the confession of our hope. Holding fast is a repeated Hebrews theme. The ground of the holding is not our tenacity but God's faithfulness: "he who promised is faithful." Emphasize the direction. When we are tempted to waver, the answer is not more willpower; the answer is to remember who has promised.

Exhortation three: let us consider one another. This is the communal exhortation, and it deserves real teaching. Stir one another up to love and good works. Do not neglect to meet together. Encourage one another, all the more as the Day approaches. The Christian life is communal, lived in the gathered assembly, sustained by mutual encouragement.

### **On Neglecting the Gathering**

The writer's warning against neglecting to meet together has particular force today. In an age of streaming services, online devotionals, and podcasts that

can simulate much of what the church offers, many Christians have drifted from regular in-person worship. Some have never returned after the disruptions of recent years. Say to your class, gently but directly: Christian faith cannot be sustained on a diet of individual consumption. The Word preached, the sacraments received, the singing of the saints, the bodily presence of brothers and sisters — these are ordinary means of grace that cannot be downloaded. The writer of Hebrews saw drift from the assembly in his own time and warned against it. The warning still applies. If someone in your class is struggling to return, do not shame them; invite them. Show them that the gathering is where faith is fed. Make the in-person assembly the pastoral priority it has always been.

### **The Fourth Warning (10 minutes)**

Teach this passage with the pattern your class has learned. The warning is real; the warning is severe; the warning is not describing anyone who is anxious about it. Go on sinning deliberately (a strong Greek construction indicating settled, willful sin) after receiving the knowledge of the truth — this is apostasy language, parallel to chapter 6. The person who tramples underfoot the Son of God, profanes the blood of the covenant, outrages the Spirit of grace is not the struggling believer but the deliberate apostate.

The three Trinity-offending phrases are worth naming. Each person of the Trinity is specifically dishonored by the apostate: Son trampled, blood of the covenant profaned, Spirit outraged. This is not light rebellion; it is the full-orbed rejection of the Triune God's saving work. The consequence — a fearful expectation of judgment — is appropriate to the offense.

Then do what the writer does. Name the pastoral reality immediately, before moving on. Say: "If you are worried that this passage describes you, that very worry is strong evidence that it does not. The willful apostate does not agonize over his condition; he is settled in it. The writer's very next move — to remember his readers' faithfulness — is for those who are worried." This is the same pastoral anchor from Session 6, and it deserves to be said again here.

**Pastoral Anchor — The Fourth Warning and the Same Comfort**

If anyone in your class has carried lingering fear from the Session 6 warning, this session's warning may reawaken it. Say plainly: the pastoral answer is the same. The warning is addressed to the complacent apostate, not the anxious believer. The one who is troubled by the passage is not the one the passage is describing. Scripture warns to protect; it does not terrify God's children. The remembrance of your readers' faithfulness that the writer issues in the very next verse is the pastoral proof that he does not believe his readers are the apostates of whom he has just warned. He names them as faithful endurers. He names them as people of faith. The warning serves their endurance; it does not predict their destruction. The same pastoral handling applies today.

### **Remembrance and Endurance (10 minutes)**

Walk through verses 32–36. The remembrance is vivid and specific: public exposure, reproach, affliction, prison visits, the plundering of property received joyfully. These are not abstract hardships; they are concrete experiences the readers had genuinely endured. The writer asks them to remember.

Teach the pastoral principle at work here. The writer does not shame his readers for any current weariness; he reminds them of their own history of faithfulness. The remembrance of past faithfulness is itself a spiritual resource. If God sustained you then, He sustains you now. If the gospel held you then, it holds you still.

Then the call to endurance. You have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. The Christian life is long. Endurance is not a heroic one-time effort but a repeated return to the same Christ, the same Word, the same Supper, the same gathering of saints. The faithful Christian is simply the Christian who keeps coming back. Endurance is the shape of the long walk of faith.

### **Identity and Bridge to Hebrews 11 (7 minutes)**

Close with the identity declaration of 10:39. Read it aloud slowly: “We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.” Emphasize the declarative present tense. The writer does not hedge. He names his readers as people of faith.

This matters pastorally. There are seasons in the Christian life when we cannot declare our own identity with confidence — when our doubts feel larger than our certainties, when our failures feel more real than our justification. In those seasons, the Church declares for us what we cannot declare for ourselves. The pastor absolves. The congregation confesses the Creed. The brother or sister says, “this is who you are in Christ.” The writer of Hebrews is doing this for his readers. He is naming their identity on the basis of what Christ has done, not what they currently feel.

And this sets up Hebrews 11 perfectly. Having declared his readers to be “of those who have faith,” the writer now unpacks what faith is and what it looks like in the lives of the saints who have gone before. The cloud of witnesses assembles, and the Christian who reads Hebrews 11 reads it as one of them — one more name in the great roll call of those who have lived by faith.



## **Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses**

### ***“Is Hebrews 10:22 teaching baptismal regeneration?”***

The Lutheran answer: yes, in the sense that Baptism is a means of grace by which God actually washes and regenerates, not merely symbolizes what He has already done. But this needs to be said carefully. Lutherans do not teach that Baptism saves as a mechanical rite apart from faith — the Augsburg Confession and Luther’s catechisms are clear that the water alone does not save, but water with God’s word and faith. What we affirm is that Baptism actually delivers what God promises — the washing away of sins, the gift of the Spirit, incorporation into Christ — and that Hebrews 10:22 describes the Christian as one who has been baptismally cleansed. This is not an anti-biblical imposition onto the text; it is reading the text in light of the whole New Testament, which consistently treats Baptism as the moment at which the benefits of Christ’s death are personally applied.

### ***“How do I respond to someone who says they don’t need to go to church because they can worship alone?”***

With real pastoral love, and with the biblical word. Private devotion is good and commanded; it is not a substitute for the gathering of the saints. Scripture

commands both — personal prayer, Scripture reading, family worship, and the assembly of the Church. The assembly is where the Word is preached authoritatively, where the sacraments are administered, where the body of Christ is embodied in mutual encouragement. None of these can be fully replicated in solitary practice. The person who says she can worship alone is in most cases saying she has not found the gathering worth her time — a pastoral concern worth exploring gently — or she has not grasped that the Christian life is essentially communal. The writer of Hebrews warns against exactly this drift. Invite the person to taste what the gathering gives. Often the drift reverses itself when the assembly is actually experienced rightly.

***“Is the writer saying that if I keep sinning, I lose my salvation?”***

No. The writer is saying that those who go on sinning deliberately, with settled willful rejection of the truth they have known, close themselves off from the sacrifice that is the only means of their salvation. This is apostasy language, parallel to chapter 6. It is not a warning to the Christian who sins ordinary sins and struggles with them — every Christian does. It is a warning against the deliberate turning away from Christ. The ongoing struggle with sin is the normal Christian experience (Paul discusses it at length in Romans 7). What the writer is warning against is not struggle but desertion. If you struggle with sin and keep coming back to Christ, this passage is not describing you. If you are considering leaving Christ altogether, this passage is for you.

***“Why does the writer remind them of the plundering of their property?”***

Because it was a concrete demonstration of where their treasure actually was. They joyfully accepted the loss of earthly possessions because they knew they had a better possession and an abiding one. This is Christian eschatology in action. If your treasure is on earth, the plundering of earthly property is devastating; if your treasure is in heaven, it is manageable — even, the writer says, occasion for joy. The readers' ability to lose property without losing their footing was evidence that their faith was real. The writer is saying, in effect: you already know how to live by faith because you have done it; do it again now.

***“What does ‘the Day drawing near’ mean?”***

The Day is the day of Christ’s return — His second appearing, which the writer has already referenced at the end of chapter 9. The expectation of the near return of Christ shaped the early church’s mutual encouragement; as the Day approaches, the writer says, we should encourage one another all the more, not less. There is sometimes worry that the early church’s expectation of a near return was disappointed, since two thousand years have passed. But Peter addresses this in his second letter: “With the Lord a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day.” The Christian is always near the Day in the sense that the Day is always our horizon. It could be today. It could be in a hundred years. The posture is readiness. And the mutual encouragement the writer commends is the posture of readiness lived out together.

***“What does ‘my righteous one shall live by faith’ mean?”***

It is one of the foundational sentences of the whole Bible on justification. Habakkuk wrote it first, in the context of Israel’s impending judgment — the righteous one would live by faith, trusting God while the world collapsed around him. Paul quotes it in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11, making it a pillar of the doctrine of justification by faith: we are counted righteous by God through faith, not through works. Hebrews quotes it here as the charter of the Christian life between the two appearings: we live by faith, not by sight, trusting the coming one who has come and will come again. This is the same gospel Paul preached and the Reformation recovered. Hebrews was teaching it before either Paul’s letters were in circulation or the Reformation occurred. The doctrine is not Reformation innovation; it is biblical bedrock.



## **Leading the Discussion**

Notes on each of the six discussion questions.

### ***Question 1 — Grounded in Christ***

A reflection on Christian motivation. When practical exhortations are grounded in Christ’s finished work, the character of the practice changes. It becomes grateful

response rather than anxious performance. Invite the class to name places where they have experienced the difference.

### **Question 2 — Neglecting the gathering**

A direct pastoral question. Receive answers gently. Common pressures: busy schedules, weariness, conflict within the congregation, preference for online alternatives, post-pandemic drift, disillusionment with institutional church. Name these, and also name what the gathering uniquely provides. Do not shame. Invite.

### **Question 3 — Reading the warning rightly**

A synthesis question, drawing on the pattern your class has learned. Faithful warning-reading honors the warning's seriousness (does not soften) while recognizing who the warning describes (does not terrify the anxious). The sign that a warning is doing its work rightly: it produces in the hearer renewed attention to Christ, not paralyzing fear. Complacency is shaken; anxiety is comforted.

### **Question 4 — Remembering faithfulness**

A question about spiritual practice. Christians who deliberately remember God's past faithfulness — through journals, through family stories, through communion with the saints — tend to endure present hardships better. The remembrance of what God has done is a resource for trusting what He will do. Invite the class to share practices that have helped them remember.

### **Question 5 — Endurance**

A personal question. Most in the class have some place where endurance is required right now — a long illness, a difficult relationship, a grief that has not lifted, a ministry that is wearying. Receive what is shared carefully. The pastoral point is that endurance is fed by the same means of grace as every other dimension of Christian life: Word, sacraments, assembly, prayer. We do not manufacture endurance; we receive it.

### **Question 6 — Declared identity**

A pastoral question. Invite reflection on times when someone else's declaration of who we are in Christ has been load-bearing for us. This may be private absolution, a pastor's counsel, a friend's reminder, the weekly declaration of the Creed. The

Christian identity is objective — given by Christ, not constructed by us — and sometimes we need others to voice it for us when we cannot hear it in ourselves.



## **If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes**

Keep/cut plan for a shorter class period.

### **Keep:**

- The three exhortations, briefly but with full pastoral weight (15 minutes)
- The warning — state it, apply the Lutheran pattern, move on (7 minutes)
- The pastoral anchor on the fourth warning and the same comfort
- Endurance and the identity declaration (8 minutes)
- Discussion question 2 or 6

### **Cut or Abbreviate:**

- Extended treatment of the sprinkled heart / washed body imagery
- Detailed walk-through of the remembrance of past struggles
- Full development of the Habakkuk quotation



## **For Further Study**

### **Biblical cross-references:**

- Matthew 27:50–51 — the temple curtain torn at Christ's death
- Habakkuk 2:3–4 — “my righteous one shall live by faith” in its original context
- Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11 — Paul's use of Habakkuk
- Acts 2:42–47 — the gathered life of the early church
- 1 Peter 4:12–19 — suffering and identity in persecution

- Deuteronomy 32:35–36 — the source of “vengeance is mine”

### **From the Lutheran tradition:**

- Small Catechism, Holy Baptism — what Baptism gives, on the “bodies washed with pure water” reference
- Augsburg Confession, Article V — the office of the ministry, on why the gathered church is essential
- Luther’s preface to the Large Catechism — on the importance of hearing the Word preached
- Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration XI — on the proper use of warnings, applicable again here

### **Commentaries:**

- Lenski on Hebrews 10:19–39 — careful treatment of the three exhortations
- Philip Hughes on Hebrews 10 — strong on the warning’s severity and its pastoral function
- Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* — helpful on the communal exhortations
- F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* — excellent on the Habakkuk bridge into chapter 11



## **A Final Word**

You have taught the pastoral turn of the letter. From here, the rest of Hebrews flows — the faith chapter, the call to run with endurance, the practical exhortations of chapter 13. All of them rest on what you have just laid down in this session. The three exhortations — draw near, hold fast, consider one another — are the frame for everything that follows. Let your class carry them home.

Do not worry if the warning felt less weighty than in Session 6. That is appropriate. The first time through the Lutheran warning pattern, in Sessions 2 and

4 and especially 6, there was much explanatory work to do. By now, the pattern is familiar. The warning in this session does its proper work and moves on; the pastoral weight of the session is elsewhere — in the exhortations, the remembrance, and the identity-declaration that closes it.

Session 12 is the faith chapter. You will find, I think, that Hebrews 11 reads more powerfully after your class has heard 10:39's declaration — “we are of those who have faith.” The cloud of witnesses that assembles in chapter 11 is, in the writer's framing, the company to which your class already belongs. Teach this session as the setup for that one, and Session 12 will land with the weight it deserves.

### *Soli Deo Gloria*

SESSION 12

**By Faith**

*Hebrews 11*

TEACHER'S GUIDE

*A free companion to the Bible study  
Something Better: A Study of Hebrews*

## **A Note to the Teacher**

Session 12 takes up the most famous chapter in Hebrews. Everyone in your class will recognize it, at least in parts. The challenge is not that they do not know the material; the challenge is helping them see the material freshly, inside the theological framework Hebrews has been building. The chapter is not a gallery of inspiring heroes to be admired and imitated; it is the writer's sustained argument that faith has always been the way God's people have belonged to Him, and that the company of the faithful spans the covenants.

The central pedagogical decision for this session: which figures to treat in depth. Do not try to give each of Hebrews 11's many names equal time. The cumulative force of the chapter comes from its length; the teaching force comes from careful treatment of the main figures. The manuscript selects four: Abel, Enoch, and Noah as the pre-Abrahamic witnesses; Abraham as the extended focus; and Moses as the figure of costly choice. The later figures are named in the sweep-summary. Follow this shape in your teaching unless you have specific reasons to adjust it.

Two theological emphases to land in this session. First, the unity of faith across the covenants. Old Testament saints were justified by the same faith as we are — Hebrews 11 says this explicitly, and it is foundational Lutheran teaching. They looked forward to Christ; we look back to Him; but the faith that received righteousness was and is the same faith. Second, the teaching that faith does not guarantee favorable outcomes in this life. The chapter places the dramatic deliverances and the brutal sufferings side by side, under the same banner of faith. This is crucial for guarding against any prosperity-style distortion. Faith does not produce the circumstances we want; it produces the commendation of God and the inheritance of the eternal city.



## **Preparing to Teach This Session**

## Before you teach:

- Read Hebrews 11 aloud. Count the number of times “by faith” appears; feel the cumulative rhythm.
- Re-read Genesis 4 (Abel), 5:21–24 (Enoch), 6–9 (Noah), 12–22 (Abraham), and Exodus 2–14 (Moses). Your class will not need you to recite every detail, but your confidence with the source material will show.
- Read Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV, especially the sections on the faith of Abraham. The Lutheran confessions use Hebrews 11 heavily to argue that Old Testament saints were justified by the same faith we are.
- Think carefully about how to handle the figures you will not treat. Acknowledge them; do not simply skip them. Pronouncing their names briefly, even without extensive commentary, honors their place in the chapter.
- Consider whether anyone in your class has experienced the “sawn in two” side of faith — the side where faith did not produce visible deliverance. Be prepared to speak to that reality without minimizing it.

## Key theological points for this session:

- **Faith is confident trust, not blind leap.** It rests on the word of the God who has spoken. The unseen realities are as real as the seen.
- **Old Testament saints were justified by faith.** Abel was commended as righteous by faith. Noah inherited the righteousness that comes by faith. This is Pauline doctrine in pre-Pauline Scripture.
- **Abraham is the pattern.** Leaving home without a map. Living as a stranger in the land of promise. Raising the knife over Isaac. His life traces what sustained faith looks like over a lifetime.
- **Moses chose the reproach of Christ.** The suffering of God’s people, even before the incarnation, is Christ’s reproach borne in advance. Moses made the costly choice because he saw the greater wealth.
- **Faith produces varied outcomes in this life.** Some faithful were delivered dramatically; others were tortured and killed. The same faith,

different circumstances. The commendation of God is the common inheritance.

- **One family across the covenants.** The saints of old did not receive what was promised in their lifetime; something better was provided for us, so that together we might be made perfect. We belong to their family and inherit with them.



## Suggested Time Plan

For a 60-minute class period. Hebrews 11 is long; you will feel the tension of material to cover versus time to teach. Pick weights carefully.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer; read Hebrews 11:1–2 and 11:39–40 aloud (the chapter’s frame)
0:05–0:15	What faith is; Abel, Enoch, Noah as pre-Abrahamic witnesses
0:15–0:30	Abraham: leaving home, stranger in the land, sacrificing Isaac
0:30–0:40	Moses: the choice of the reproach of Christ
0:40–0:50	The cloud grows: triumphs and sufferings, both by faith
0:50–0:55	One family across the covenants (11:39–40)
0:55–1:00	Discussion (one question); Looking Ahead; closing prayer



## Teaching Notes, Part by Part

## **What Faith Is; Before Abraham (10 minutes)**

Open with the definition. “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Name what this definition does and does not say. It is not wishful thinking or a leap in the dark. It is settled confidence in the word of the God who has spoken. The unseen realities are as real as the seen ones — more real, in fact, because they are eternal while the seen is passing.

Then move through Abel, Enoch, and Noah quickly but meaningfully. Abel was commended as righteous by faith — the first accepted worshiper in Scripture was accepted by the righteousness of faith. Enoch pleased God, and without faith it is impossible to please God, so Enoch had faith; the logic is simple but foundational. Noah built the ark in response to a warning about what was not yet seen, laboring year after year at the commission God had given him, and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

### **The Righteousness That Comes by Faith**

Twice in Hebrews 11's early verses, the righteousness that comes by faith is attributed to pre-Abrahamic figures. Abel is commended as righteous through faith (11:4); Noah becomes an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith (11:7). This is important. Lutheran theology has always insisted that justification by faith is not a Reformation innovation or even a distinctively Pauline invention; it is the way God has saved His people from Genesis forward. Abel was justified by faith. Noah was justified by faith. Abraham was justified by faith — Paul makes this central in Romans 4 and Galatians 3, and Hebrews 11 sets it in a long tradition that began before Abraham. The Reformation did not invent this doctrine; it recovered what the whole of Scripture had always taught. Make this point plainly for your class. The righteousness that comes by faith is how the God who does not change saves the people He loves, from the beginning to the end.

## **Abraham (15 minutes)**

Abraham receives the most space in Hebrews 11 for a reason. He is the paradigm. Three moments to teach.

First, leaving home. God called Abraham to go out to a place he was to receive as an inheritance, and Abraham went, not knowing where he was going. This is the

fundamental act of faith. Abraham had the command and the promise; he did not have the map. And on the strength of the word of the God who had spoken, he went. Emphasize the “not knowing where.” Faith is not certainty about the future; it is trust in the one who is leading us into it.

Second, stranger in the land. When Abraham arrived in the land of promise, he lived in it as a foreigner — in tents, without title, for the rest of his long life. He could do this because he was looking for the city with foundations, whose designer and builder is God. His eschatology held his geography loosely. He treated the promised land as a shadow of the heavenly country, because he saw beyond it.

Third, raising the knife. The sacrifice of Isaac was the most searching test of Abraham's faith. God had promised descendants through Isaac; now God was commanding Isaac's death. The command seemed to contradict the promise. The writer tells us what Abraham concluded: God is able to raise him from the dead. And Isaac was spared. Abraham received him back, figuratively speaking, from the dead. Faith trusted God at the limit of what it could understand, and God provided. Point out to your class that this is the pattern of Christian endurance through crisis: God's commands sometimes seem to contradict His promises, and faith trusts that He is able to reconcile them even when we cannot see how.

Touch briefly on Sarah's faith and the birth of Isaac — “she considered him faithful who had promised” — and on the closing summary in 11:13–16: these all died in faith, not having received what was promised, having acknowledged they were strangers and exiles on the earth. The pattern of the sojourner who looks for the heavenly country is the pattern of every believer.

### **Moses (10 minutes)**

Moses is the figure of costly choice. His parents' faith in hiding him, defying Pharaoh's edict, leads directly to his own choice as an adult — refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

Teach the phrase “the reproach of Christ” (11:26) deliberately. Moses considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt. Christ was not yet incarnate; Moses lived thirteen centuries before Christ. But the writer calls the reproach Moses bore, as one of God's afflicted people, the reproach of Christ. This is a profound theological claim. The sufferings of God's people have

always been, in some sense, Christ's sufferings borne in advance. Christ's identification with His people reaches back through the whole history of their affliction; He is not a latecomer to their suffering but its secret center from the beginning.

### **Moses and "He Who Is Invisible"**

Hebrews 11:27 says Moses "endured as seeing him who is invisible." The phrase deserves to be lifted up. Faith does not make God visible in any ordinary sense, but it gives us the conviction to live as if we could see Him — because we know He is there. Moses could stand before Pharaoh because he saw the true King of whom Pharaoh was a counterfeit. The external circumstances were the same for everyone around him; what differed was what Moses, by faith, perceived. This is one of the Christian life's deepest resources: the capacity to see, by faith, what others cannot see. The invisible God is more real than the visible Pharaoh, and the one who sees this can endure anything the visible world brings against him.

Close Moses with his leaving of Egypt — "not being afraid of the anger of the king" — and the crossing of the Red Sea by faith. Move quickly to the fall of Jericho, and to Rahab, whose story concludes the individual portraits.

### **The Cloud Grows: Triumphs and Sufferings (10 minutes)**

This is the sweeping summary section, and it is theologically crucial. Read 11:32–38 aloud in two halves. First the triumphs: conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched fire, put armies to flight, received back the dead. Then the sufferings: tortured, mocked, flogged, imprisoned, stoned, sawn in two, killed with the sword, wandering in caves.

Stop and name what the writer is doing. He places the triumphs and the sufferings side by side, under one banner: "by faith." He does not say one group had more faith than the other. He says all of them were commended through their faith. This is the theological correction to any prosperity-style distortion. Faith does not produce the circumstances we want. Faith produces trust in the God who has promised eternal life — and the particular shape of our earthly experience is not guaranteed by the amount of our faith. The widow who received her dead back

and the prophet who was sawn in two were both vindicated by God in eternity. Both belonged to the same company.

### **Pastoral Anchor — When Faith Did Not “Work”**

Some in your class have experienced the side of faith where the deliverance did not come. The prayed-for healing that did not happen. The marriage that ended in spite of faithful prayer. The child whose rebellion has not yet turned. The chronic illness that grinds on. Do not let them feel, even implicitly, that their faith was insufficient. Hebrews 11 is clear: the same faith produced in some the dramatic deliverances of the first half of 11:32–38, and in others the tortures and the deaths of the second half. Both were commended. The widow who received her dead back did not have more faith than the prophet who was sawn in two; she had a different providence. What matters is not whether faith produces the outcomes we want but whether faith holds to the God who has promised eternal life. The ones who did not receive deliverance in this life received the same inheritance as the ones who did. Say this clearly for anyone who needs to hear it.

### **One Family Across the Covenants (5 minutes)**

Close the teaching with the chapter's final two verses. All these were commended through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised. God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Two pastoral points land here. First, the saints of old are our family. We belong with them. Their example is not distant or foreign; it is the testimony of our own relatives in the faith. Second, we are all waiting together. The Old Testament saints did not receive the full promise in their lifetimes, and neither have we. We wait together — they from their rest, we from our race — for the full consummation that only Christ's return will bring. There is one company of the faithful across the covenants, and we will stand together at the last.



## **Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses**

*“Were Old Testament saints saved the same way we are?”*

Yes. This is one of the main points of Hebrews 11 and a central Lutheran teaching. Old Testament saints were justified by faith — the same faith that justifies us. They looked forward to the Messiah they did not yet know by name; we look back to the Christ we do know. But the faith was the same faith, and the righteousness received was the same righteousness. There is one way of salvation from Genesis to Revelation: the righteousness of God received by faith, on the basis of Christ's saving work, which God applied retrospectively to the saints before His incarnation just as He applies it now to those who come after. Abraham was justified by faith (Romans 4). Abel, Enoch, Noah were commended by faith (Hebrews 11). The doctrine of justification is not a New Testament innovation; it is how God has always saved.

### ***“Why is Hebrews 11 sometimes called ‘the Hall of Faith’?”***

The phrase is a popular nickname, not a biblical term. It captures something true — the chapter is a roll call of the faithful — but it can suggest, wrongly, that these figures were heroes to be admired from a safe distance. Hebrews itself offers a different image: the cloud of witnesses (12:1), a company that surrounds us and pulls us forward. They are not exhibits in a museum; they are our family members calling us onward. “Hall of Faith” is fine as shorthand; do not let it distance the figures from your class. They are our relatives, not our heroes. We are in their company, not their audience.

### ***“What is the ‘reproach of Christ’ that Moses bore?”***

The phrase is theologically rich and worth unpacking. Moses lived thirteen centuries before Christ's incarnation, but the writer calls the reproach Moses bore — as one of God's afflicted people — the reproach of Christ. This is because Christ is, mysteriously, identified with His people throughout their history. When Saul persecuted the church, the risen Christ told him, “Saul, why do you persecute me?” Christ is so united to His people that their sufferings are His. Moses, suffering with God's oppressed people, was bearing in advance what Christ would later bear fully. The reproach of being identified with God's despised people has always been, in the mystery of the gospel, Christ's reproach. This is good news for every Christian who suffers for belonging to Christ: we are not suffering alone, and we are not suffering for nothing. We are suffering with Christ, who suffered before us and suffers with us.

***“If faith doesn’t produce the outcomes we want, what’s the point of praying for healing or deliverance?”***

Because Scripture commands us to pray for these things, and because God genuinely hears and sometimes grants what we ask. Prayer for healing, for deliverance, for protection, for provision — all of this is commanded and commended in Scripture. What Hebrews 11 prevents is the conclusion that faith guarantees any particular answer. We pray in faith, trusting God’s wisdom about how to respond. Sometimes the answer is yes, and the healing comes. Sometimes the answer is no, and the suffering runs its course. Sometimes the answer is “not yet” or “not in that form” or “in a better form than you asked for.” Faith is not the means of controlling outcomes; faith is the means of trusting the God who orders them. The prayer is real; the faith is real; the answer is God’s.

***“What about people in the chapter who aren’t always moral heroes — like Rahab, or Samson, or Jephthah?”***

An important question. Hebrews 11 includes figures whose biblical biographies include serious moral failures. Rahab was a prostitute. Samson was rash and self-destructive. Jephthah made a tragic vow. The writer does not pretend their lives were uniformly admirable. He names them among the faithful because at critical moments of their lives, faith moved them. Rahab welcomed the spies because she had heard about the God of Israel and trusted Him — that act of faith is what Hebrews commends. This is actually good news for us. The saints of Hebrews 11 are not a collection of flawless moral exemplars; they are sinners whose faith in God became the load-bearing feature of their lives even in the midst of their failings. This is how faith operates in all of us. We are not commended for being flawless; we are commended for trusting the God who justifies the ungodly.

***“Can I teach Hebrews 11 without turning it into moralism?”***

Yes, by following the writer’s own framing. Hebrews 11 is not primarily a call to imitate these figures’ courage or perseverance. It is a demonstration that faith has always been the way God’s people belong to Him. The pastoral application is not “be brave like Abraham” but “you belong to the family of those who live by faith, and the God who carried them home will carry you home too.” The first framing produces anxious performance (am I faithful enough?); the second produces restful identification (I am of their company). Keep the focus on God’s sustaining work

across the centuries, not on the saints' heroism in themselves, and moralism stays at bay.



## **Leading the Discussion**

Notes on each of the six discussion questions.

### **Question 1 — What faith is**

A definitional reflection. Common modern distortions of faith: wishful thinking, optimism without grounds, blind leap, emotional certainty. The biblical definition: confident trust in the word of God who has spoken. Invite the class to notice where their faith feels most grounded (typically where they have experienced God's faithfulness) and where it feels more hopeful than settled (typically where the promises touch matters they cannot yet see resolved).

### **Question 2 — Walking without a map**

A personal question. Most Christians have places where they have walked into territory they could not map — vocational changes, marriages, moves, times of waiting on God, seasons of suffering. Receive what is shared. The pastoral point: the map was not the thing that got them through. The God who called them was. Faith in the caller, not certainty about the destination, is what walking by faith looks like.

### **Question 3 — Moses's valuation**

A costly-choice question. Invite the class to think about places where they have had to choose between the world's rewards and identification with Christ's people. This may be small (declining a business opportunity that would compromise integrity) or large (costly decisions about career, relationships, public witness). The theological point is that faith gives new eyes — the capacity to see the true value of what is being traded.

### **Question 4 — Varied outcomes**

A theologically crucial discussion. Do not let this become an abstract reflection. Some in your class have experienced the side where faith did not produce

deliverance. Honor their experience. The pastoral point is that the faith of the widow who received her dead back was not greater than the faith of the prophet who was sawn in two; they had different providences, not different faiths. The commendation of God is what matters, and that is given to both.

### **Question 5 — Family across the covenants**

A synthesis question. The class can reflect on what it means to be the heir of Abel and Abraham and Moses and the prophets. The Old Testament saints are not historical strangers; they are our relatives. We will meet them. In the meantime, their testimony is ours to draw on. This may reframe the Old Testament for some in your class who have thought of it as foreign terrain rather than family archive.

### **Question 6 — Your own cloud of witnesses**

A pastoral question that often produces moving answers. Invite members to name saints — biblical, historical, or more recent (a grandmother, a pastor, a friend who has died) — whose testimony has shaped their own faith. This is a way of practicing the cloud of witnesses in the room. Receive what is shared gently. The Christian life is lived in the company of those who have gone before; remembering them is part of how we endure.



## **If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes**

Keep/cut plan for a shorter class period. Hebrews 11 especially benefits from full time; if at all possible, arrange for the hour.

### **Keep:**

- The definition of faith (3 minutes)
- One pre-Abrahamic figure (Abel or Noah) to establish justification-by-faith before Abraham (3 minutes)
- Abraham — focus on leaving home and the sacrifice of Isaac (10 minutes)
- Moses and the reproach of Christ (7 minutes)

- The triumphs-and-sufferings section with the pastoral anchor on ‘when faith did not work’ (10 minutes) — do not cut this
- The one-family-across-the-covenants closing (5 minutes)
- Discussion question 4 or 5

### **Cut or Abbreviate:**

- Extended treatment of Enoch
- Sarah and the details of Abraham’s descendants
- Rahab and the briefly-named judges



## **For Further Study**

### **Biblical cross-references:**

- Genesis 4 (Abel), Genesis 5:21–24 (Enoch), Genesis 6–9 (Noah) — the pre-Abrahamic figures
- Genesis 12–22 — Abraham’s full story, especially Genesis 22 on the sacrifice of Isaac
- Exodus 1—2 and 12–14 — Moses’s birth, calling, and the Red Sea crossing
- Joshua 2 and 6 — Rahab and the fall of Jericho
- Romans 4 — Paul’s extended treatment of Abraham’s justification by faith
- Galatians 3 — Paul on the faith of Abraham and its relation to the Law
- James 2:14–26 — the complementary teaching on Abraham’s and Rahab’s faith as living

### **From the Lutheran tradition:**

- Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV — extensive use of Hebrews 11 to ground justification by faith
- Luther’s lectures on Genesis — his treatment of Abraham is among his richest expository work

- Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration III — on the righteousness of faith across the covenants
- Small Catechism, Third Article — Luther on what it means to believe in Jesus Christ

### **Commentaries:**

- Lenski on Hebrews 11 — careful Lutheran treatment of each named figure
- Philip Hughes on Hebrews 11 — particularly strong on the unity of faith across the covenants
- Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* — helpful on the chapter's structure and cumulative force
- F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* — excellent on the Old Testament backgrounds



## **A Final Word**

You have taught one of the most beloved chapters in Scripture. If the class leaves with three things settled, you have done your work. First, faith is confident trust in the word of God, not wishful thinking. Second, Old Testament and New Testament saints are one family, justified by one faith, inheriting one city. Third, the shape of our earthly circumstances does not measure the quality of our faith — the same faith that brought dramatic deliverance for some brought suffering and death for others, and both were commended by God.

Do not worry if some of Hebrews 11's many figures got only brief mention. The chapter is designed to work cumulatively; your treatment of the main figures, set within a sense of the sweeping whole, is sufficient. The class does not need to remember every detail; they need to carry home the pattern and the identity — we belong to this family, and the God who carried them home will carry us home too.

Session 13 takes up the image of the cloud of witnesses directly. The saints who have been named now surround us as we run. Hebrews 12 applies Hebrews 11 in the most vivid way, calling us to lay aside every weight and run with

endurance, looking to Jesus. Your teaching in this session prepares them for that one. The family tree is drawn. The next session will put us in the race.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

SESSION 13

# Run With Endurance

*Hebrews 12:1-17*

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

*A free companion to the Bible study  
Something Better: A Study of Hebrews*

## **A Note to the Teacher**

Session 13 is the most pastorally warm session in the volume. The dramatic arguments have been made; the major warnings are past; what remains is the sustained call to long faithfulness. If Session 12 gave your class their family tree, this session puts them in the race itself — surrounded by the cloud of witnesses, running toward Jesus, receiving the Father's shaping, guarding their hearts and their community. Teach with warmth. The class is near the end of a long journey through Hebrews, and the writer's tone here models the tone you should adopt.

The session carries three major teaching moments. First, the call to run with endurance looking to Jesus (12:1–3). This is the iconic passage, and it deserves full treatment — not rushed in the hurry to cover more material. Second, the discipline passage (12:4–11). This is pastorally tricky and requires careful handling, especially the warning against misapplication to others' suffering. Third, the communal exhortation and the Esau warning (12:12–17). These tie the session to the practical Christian life your class leads and close with a sober note that anticipates the final warnings of the letter.

One pastoral caution to note upfront. The discipline passage has been used badly by pastors and counselors more times than any of us want to count. Someone in your class has almost certainly been told, at a hard moment, that their suffering was “God's discipline” — with the implication that it was deserved and that they had only to figure out what sin had brought it on. This misapplication is cruel and unbiblical. Handle 12:5–11 as a first-person resource for understanding our own journey in retrospect, not as a diagnostic tool for judging anyone's current suffering — our own or others'. The passage is a gift when rightly used and a wound when wrongly used. Use it rightly.



## **Preparing to Teach This Session**

**Before you teach:**

- Read Hebrews 12:1–17 aloud, then 11:39–40 and 12:1 together. The connection between the cloud of witnesses of chapter 11 and the race of chapter 12 is a continuous thought, and hearing it as such helps.
- Read Proverbs 3:11–12 in its original context. The writer quotes this as the scriptural foundation for the discipline teaching; understanding its setting deepens the teaching.
- Read Genesis 25:27–34 and 27:30–40 for the full Esau narrative. The birthright sale is in Genesis 25; the later rejection of the blessing, which the writer alludes to in 12:17, is in Genesis 27.
- Review the Lutheran handling of suffering in the catechisms. Luther's theology of the cross — that God's work is often hidden in suffering — is the context in which the discipline passage of Hebrews 12 should be read.
- Think about your own experience of the Father's shaping. You will teach this passage better if you have a concrete sense of how God has, in retrospect, used hardship in your life to produce godliness.

### **Key theological points for this session:**

- **The cloud of witnesses surrounds us.** The saints of chapter 11 are not distant heroes but a company of family members cheering our race. We are not alone.
- **Jesus is the founder and perfecter of faith.** Our faith begins in Him, is sustained by Him, and will be brought to completion by Him. The race rests on His work from start to finish.
- **Christ endured the cross for the joy set before Him.** His endurance is the pattern of ours. When we grow weary, we consider Him.
- **The Father disciplines those He loves.** Discipline is evidence of sonship, not a sign against it. It is painful in the moment and yields peaceful fruit later in those trained by it.
- **The discipline teaching is for self-application.** It is a resource for the believer understanding her own journey, not a diagnostic tool for judging others' suffering.

- **Guard against bitterness and Esau's trade.** Bitterness corrupts communities; trading eternal goods for momentary satisfactions corrupts souls. Both require vigilance.



## Suggested Time Plan

For a 60-minute class period.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer; read Hebrews 12:1–3 aloud slowly
0:05–0:20	Looking to Jesus: the race, the weight and sin, the founder and perfecter
0:20–0:35	The discipline of the Lord: Father's love, sonship evidence, peaceful fruit
0:35–0:45	Straight paths: peace, holiness, the root of bitterness
0:45–0:52	The warning of Esau
0:52–1:00	Discussion (one question); Looking Ahead; closing prayer



## Teaching Notes, Part by Part

### Looking to Jesus (15 minutes)

Open with the image. The runner, surrounded by the cloud of witnesses, running the race. Lay aside every weight and the sin that clings. Run with endurance. These are the iconic images of the passage, and they deserve to be taught slowly.

Teach the distinction between weights and sin. Weights are not necessarily sinful; they are encumbrances. A weight might be a habit, a commitment, a

possession, even a relationship that has become disordered in our lives. The call is to lay them aside for the sake of the running. Sin is the more acute problem — the clinging, tripping pattern that must be actively fought. The Christian life involves both pruning (laying aside weights) and fighting (resisting sin). Both are part of running the race.

Then the heart of the exhortation: looking to Jesus. Teach each phrase of 12:2 carefully. Jesus is the founder — the pioneer who began our faith. Jesus is the perfecter — the one who will bring it to completion. He endured the cross for the joy set before Him; the endurance was worthwhile because of what lay beyond. He despised the shame; the shame did not have the last word. He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God; the race is run toward a Person who has already arrived.

### **The Founder and Perfecter**

The two titles given to Jesus in 12:2 are theologically load-bearing. He is the founder (archēgos — pioneer, author, origin) and the perfecter (teleiotēs — the one who brings to completion) of our faith. Our faith does not begin with our own initiative; He begins it. Our faith does not end with our own persistence; He perfects it. The whole span of Christian life is His work in us. This is not a denial of our responsibility to run the race — the passage commands endurance — but it locates the running within a larger frame. We run because He is carrying us home. We endure because He is enduring with us. Our faith, at its deepest level, is not our doing. It is His work in us, from first to last. Point this out explicitly. The Christian who understands this runs with a kind of restful tenacity that the one who thinks her own persistence is the ground of her faith cannot manage.

Close this segment by emphasizing the pastoral resource of considering Jesus. When you grow weary, when you become fainthearted, look to Him. Consider His endurance. Think about what He bore from sinners. Let the gaze on His faithfulness sustain yours. The Christian life is not sustained by willpower; it is sustained by looking. Keep looking.

### **The Discipline of the Lord (15 minutes)**

This is the pastorally tricky segment. Spend the time, and handle it with care.

Teach the core claim: God disciplines those He loves. He treats us as sons. A father who does not discipline his children is not loving them rightly; his discipline is an expression of his claim on them. When God’s discipline comes, it is evidence of our belonging to Him, not a sign against our sonship.

Teach the comparison. Earthly fathers disciplined us as seemed best to them — fallibly, limitedly, sometimes imperfectly. God disciplines us always wisely, always for our good, always toward our sharing in His holiness. His discipline is never arbitrary. It is never cruel. It is always shaped by His wisdom and His love for us.

Teach the timeline. Discipline is painful in the moment. The writer does not pretend otherwise. But later — not immediately, not on our preferred schedule — it yields peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. The fruit is not automatic. It is produced in those who respond rightly to the discipline. The response matters.

#### **Pastoral Caution — Do Not Apply This to Others**

The Lutheran pastoral tradition is firm on this point, and Scripture supports it. Hebrews 12:5–11 is given to the believer as a resource for understanding her own journey. It is not given as a diagnostic tool for labeling anyone else’s suffering. When someone in your class is suffering, do not tell them “this is God’s discipline.” That framing, imposed from outside, is frequently cruel. The first pastoral posture toward another’s suffering is to weep with them and to love them — not to explain their pain. If in God’s providence they come, in time, to see His shaping work in what they have endured, that recognition is a gift. It is not something we can announce for them. Teach your class to hold this distinction clearly. The theology of discipline is first-person. It is not third-person.

#### **Pastoral Anchor — For Those Who Cannot See the Shaping Yet**

Some in your class are in the middle of suffering that makes no sense to them. The discipline passage may feel remote or even irritating in such a season. Say gently: the writer does not say that all discipline is understood in the moment. He says it is painful in the moment. The peaceful fruit comes later — sometimes much later, sometimes only in retrospect. If you cannot see what God is doing in what you are enduring right now, that does not mean He is not

doing anything. It means you are in the middle of the process, where the pain is present and the fruit is not yet. Trust the Father who is shaping you, even when the shaping is hidden. This is what it means to walk by faith. We do not demand to see the fruit before we trust the gardener.

### **Straight Paths (10 minutes)**

Walk through 12:12–15. Lift drooping hands, strengthen weak knees, make straight paths, strive for peace and holiness, watch against bitterness.

Teach these as concrete disciplines of the long-distance runner. Christian endurance is not stoic grimness; it is active care for our own condition and for the path we are running on. The runner lifts what is drooping. The runner strengthens what is weak. The runner makes the terrain as favorable as possible, so that injuries heal rather than worsen.

Pause on the bitterness warning. The root image is vivid and important. Bitterness begins small, often invisibly; it grows underground; it breaks to the surface with wide damage. Many are defiled. The writer's instruction is communal: "see to it." The whole community has responsibility for watching against bitterness in individual hearts. This requires the kind of community described in 10:24–25 — genuine encouragement, regular gathering, mutual care. Bitterness withers under the sunlight of Christian community. It thrives in isolation.

### **The Warning of Esau (7 minutes)**

Close the teaching with Esau. Tell the Genesis 25 story briefly for any in the class who may not know it well. Esau, hungry, traded his birthright for a bowl of stew. A permanent good for a momentary satisfaction.

Teach the pattern. The warning is not only against sexual immorality (though the writer names that). It is against the general pattern of trading eternal goods for momentary pleasures. Esau is the figure of the man who did not value what God had given him.

Apply this pastorally, without multiplying examples. Every Christian knows what the contemporary "stews" are — the momentary satisfactions that can, over time, erode our grip on the eternal realities entrusted to us. The warning is to hold the birthright with the seriousness it deserves, even when we are hungry, tired,

aggrieved, or tempted. The bowl of stew is always less valuable than the inheritance. Always.

Note the sobering closing verse: Esau, when he later sought the blessing, could not obtain it, though he sought it with tears. The writer is not saying that Christian repentance is impossible — he has said the opposite throughout the letter — but he is warning that choices have real consequences, and the trades we make today may shape what we can recover tomorrow. Take the warning seriously. Hold the birthright.



## **Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses**

### ***“Is every hardship I face God’s discipline?”***

No, not in the sense of specific punishment for specific sins. Hebrews 12 is not teaching a transactional view of suffering. Some hardships come from the brokenness of the fallen world. Some come from other people’s sin against us. Some come from our own foolish choices. Some come from mysterious providence. What Hebrews is saying is that God, as a loving Father, can use all of these — whatever their immediate cause — to shape us toward holiness. The question is not, “what did I do to deserve this?” The question is, “what is God making of me in this?” The first question leads to anxiety; the second leads to faith.

### ***“How do I know if something is God’s discipline or just suffering?”***

Often we cannot know in the moment. The discipline passage is usually applied retrospectively — looking back, we can see how God shaped us through what we endured. In the middle of the hardship, we may not be able to tell what He is doing. That is fine. The call is not to figure out God’s specific purpose but to trust His shaping even when we cannot see it. We walk by faith, not by sight. If you find yourself wondering whether something is discipline or just suffering, the best posture is to bring it to God in prayer, ask Him to use it for your good, and wait. Time, and the Spirit’s work in your reflection, will often clarify what the moment could not.

***“How should I respond when someone tells me my suffering is God’s discipline?”***

First, recognize that they may mean well even if they are misapplying Scripture. Second, gently note that Hebrews 12 is given to the believer for first-person application, not as a diagnostic tool for others. Third, if the framing is doing genuine harm — making you feel that your suffering is uniquely your fault, or that you need to figure out what sin God is punishing — push back. Ask your pastor for help, or a trusted Christian friend. Do not carry a burden that Scripture does not actually place on you. God is shaping you, yes, but that shaping is not necessarily tied to specific sins, and it is not someone else’s job to diagnose what you are supposedly being disciplined for.

***“What does ‘the holiness without which no one will see the Lord’ mean? Doesn’t justification make us holy?”***

Good question that gets to the heart of Lutheran distinction-making. Justification declares us righteous in Christ, once for all. Sanctification is the ongoing work of the Spirit making us actually holy in our lived experience. The “holiness without which no one will see the Lord” is the sanctification that flows from justification — the actual growth in holiness that is the evidence of genuine faith. The passage is not saying that we need to earn holiness in order to see God; it is saying that genuine Christian faith produces genuine fruit, and the absence of any fruit would be a sign that the faith was not genuine. This is the Lutheran teaching on good works: they are necessary as the fruit of saving faith, but they are not the ground of salvation. Hebrews 12:14 fits this framework.

***“Can a Christian really become like Esau?”***

The warning is real. The writer uses Esau as a figure of someone who did not value what God had given him and traded it away at a moment of hunger. He is warning Christians against the same pattern — against the accumulated small choices that, over time, can reshape a person’s grip on eternal realities. The full question of whether Esau himself was finally lost is a question Scripture does not entirely settle; what the writer emphasizes is the pattern of his choice, which Christians can imitate to their harm. The pastoral upshot is vigilance. Hold the birthright seriously. Do not make small choices that, cumulatively, weaken your grip on what

God has given you. The Christian life is a long series of small choices, and those choices shape us over time.

***“What does the cloud of witnesses actually do? Are the saints in heaven watching us?”***

Scripture is not explicit about the mechanics of the image. The cloud of witnesses is not primarily a description of the saints' present activity but an image of their testimony to us. They have run the race and finished it. Their example is available to us — in Scripture, in Church history, in the lives of those who have gone before in our own families and communities. Whether they are specifically aware of us in some active sense is a question Scripture does not answer definitively, and speculation on that point is not very profitable. What is certain is that their faith testifies to us, encourages us, and shows us that the race we are running is runnable. That is what the image is for. The specific details of how the saints in glory experience our earthly struggles belong to the mysteries we will understand only when we join them.



## **Leading the Discussion**

Notes on each of the six discussion questions.

### ***Question 1 — Weights and clinging sin***

A reflection on pruning. Common weights include over-commitment, digital distractions, relationships that have become disordered, possessions that have demanded more than they have given. The clinging sin is often more personal — a pattern that returns year after year. The pastoral point is that both require attention. The race cannot be run well with too much baggage.

### ***Question 2 — Founder and perfecter***

A question that relocates confidence. Many Christians carry a quiet anxiety about their own persistence — will I hold out, will I finish, will my faith survive? The answer of 12:2 is that our faith is not finally our achievement; it is His work in us. He began it; He will complete it. This can be enormously freeing, especially for

those who have been taught, implicitly or explicitly, that the Christian life rests on their own strength.

### **Question 3 — Retrospective shaping**

A personal question. Most mature Christians can name times when, in retrospect, they saw God's shaping work in hardship they did not understand at the time. Invite these reflections. The pastoral point is that God's work is often only visible after the fact; in the middle, we walk by faith. The testimonies of those who have seen the shaping in retrospect are a resource for those currently in the middle of hardship.

### **Question 4 — Pastoral misapplication**

An important discussion. The misapplication is dangerous because it imposes from outside a framework that only the believer, in prayer, can rightly apply to her own experience. Right pastoral posture: weep with those who weep, love without explanation, trust God to do His shaping work in His own way. Explaining someone else's pain is usually pride dressed as insight. Let the class work through this; it matters.

### **Question 5 — Bitterness in community**

A reflection on Christian community. Bitterness is prevented by genuine fellowship — encouragement, honest conversation, mutual care, shared prayer. It spreads most easily where Christians are isolated, where hurts are nursed in private, where conversations happen about others rather than with them. Invite the class to reflect on what has helped them catch bitterness early in their own hearts, and what has helped their congregations do so.

### **Question 6 — The contemporary stews**

A searching question. What momentary satisfactions tempt us to trade eternal goods? Common contemporary stews: the approval of peers, comfort and ease, entertainment that crowds out devotion, professional advancement at the cost of family or worship, relationships that compromise integrity. Invite honest reflection. What has helped each one resist the trade? Usually it is some combination of clear understanding of what the birthright actually is, regular

connection to means of grace, and the company of Christian friends who help us see what we might otherwise miss.



## **If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes**

Keep/cut plan for a shorter class period.

### **Keep:**

- Looking to Jesus (12:1–3) — the iconic passage, not to be rushed (12 minutes)
- The discipline passage with the pastoral cautions (10 minutes)
- The root of bitterness warning (4 minutes)
- The warning of Esau (5 minutes)
- Discussion question 2 or 3

### **Cut or Abbreviate:**

- Extended treatment of the drooping hands and weak knees imagery
- Full walk-through of the earthly-father/heavenly-Father comparison
- Most discussion questions



## **For Further Study**

### **Biblical cross-references:**

- Proverbs 3:11–12 — the source of the discipline quotation
- Genesis 25:27–34 and 27:30–40 — the full Esau narrative
- 1 Corinthians 9:24–27 — Paul on the Christian life as athletic training
- 2 Timothy 4:7–8 — “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race”
- Romans 5:3–4 — suffering produces endurance

- James 1:2–4 — testing produces steadfastness

### **From the Lutheran tradition:**

- Luther's Heidelberg Disputation — the theology of the cross as the framework for understanding suffering
- Small Catechism, Lord's Prayer, Sixth Petition — on being led into temptation
- Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration XI — on the Christian life under the cross
- Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* — a modern Lutheran treatment of following Jesus through suffering

### **Commentaries:**

- Lenski on Hebrews 12:1–17 — careful treatment of the race and discipline passages
- Philip Hughes on Hebrews 12 — particularly good on the discipline teaching
- Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* — helpful on the passage's pastoral structure
- F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* — excellent on the Esau warning



## **A Final Word**

You have taught the pastoral heart of the letter's closing movement. The dramatic arguments are behind you; what lies ahead is the capstone session that will close Hebrews, Volume 4, and the whole four-volume series. Your class is tired, probably, after so long a journey. The writer's counsel fits: look to Jesus. Consider Him. Run with endurance. The cloud surrounds you. The Father is shaping you. The finish is near.

If the class has taken anything from this session beyond the iconic imagery of 12:1–3, let it be the pastoral framing of discipline — the understanding that their

hardships, in the Father's hands, can become the raw material of their holiness. This is a Lutheran theology of the cross, applied to ordinary Christian life. Suffering is not the proof of God's absence; it may be the evidence of His presence, shaping us for the city He has prepared. Not every hardship is discipline in a direct sense; but every hardship, received in faith, can become the shape God works in us.

Session 14 closes everything. The two mountains, Sinai and Zion. The practical exhortations of chapter 13. The benediction of the God of peace. And with it, the close of Hebrews, of Volume 4, and of the whole 'Something Better' series. Teach this session well, and let its warmth set up the benediction of the final session. Your class has run a long race with you. The finish is near.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

SESSION 14

# Outside the Camp

*Hebrews 12:18–13:25*

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

*A free companion to the Bible study  
Something Better: A Study of Hebrews*

## **A Note to the Teacher**

Session 14 carries triple weight. It closes Hebrews. It closes Volume 4. It closes the whole four-volume “Something Better” series — the long pastoral journey that began with James and now ends with the God of peace benediction. Teach this session with that weight in view. Your class has been with you a long time. What you give them in this final hour will shape how they carry all four volumes forward into the rest of their lives.

The session covers more ground than any previous one — Hebrews 12:18–29 and the whole of chapter 13. The pastoral strategy is to move briskly through parts of chapter 13’s rapid-fire exhortations while giving full weight to the theological vision (two mountains, unshakable kingdom, outside the camp) and to the closing benediction. Do not try to teach every individual exhortation in 13:1–17 at length. Name them, let them stand, and conserve your time for the theological weight-bearing sections and the benediction.

Three pastoral priorities for this session. First, the two mountains passage (12:18–29). This is the theological climax of the closing chapter and deserves full treatment. Second, “outside the camp” and “no lasting city” (13:12–14) — the identity formation of the Christian as stranger-and-exile that connects back to Volume 2’s teaching on 1 Peter. Third, the closing benediction (13:20–21), which deserves its own unhurried treatment as the capstone of the whole letter and series. Plan your time around these three weights, and let the rest move more briskly.

The warmth that marked Session 13 should mark this one even more. Your class is finishing a long journey. Speak tenderly. Acknowledge what they have walked through. The closing benediction is, in a real sense, your word over them as much as it is the writer’s word over his first readers — and it should feel that way.



## **Preparing to Teach This Session**

### Before you teach:

- Read Hebrews 12:18–29 and all of chapter 13 aloud. Feel the shift from theological vision to practical exhortation to benediction.
- Read Exodus 19:16–25 for the Sinai background to 12:18–21.
- Read Haggai 2:6 for the “yet once more” prophecy quoted in 12:26.
- Read Psalm 23 and John 10 to have the shepherd imagery fresh in mind as you prepare to teach the closing benediction.
- Take a moment to reflect on the whole four-volume journey. What has it meant to walk with your class through James, 1 Peter, the letters of John, and Hebrews? What have you seen God do in and through the study? Your own reflection will inform the tone you bring.
- If it would be appropriate in your context, consider whether to mark the close of the series in some way — a meal together, a note to the class, a final word of thanks. These are pastoral details, and your own sense of your class will guide them.

### Key theological points for this session:

- **Two mountains, two covenants.** Sinai is fire, darkness, terror. Zion is festal gathering, the heavenly Jerusalem, Jesus the mediator, the sprinkled blood that speaks better than Abel's. We have come to Zion.
- **The unshakable kingdom.** Everything that can be shaken will be shaken. What remains is the kingdom of God, which we are receiving. Therefore, grateful worship with reverence and awe.
- **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.** The stability of the Christian life rests on the unchanging Christ, who does not adjust to cultural fashions.
- **Outside the camp.** Christ suffered outside the gate; we go to Him there, bearing His reproach. The Christian is not fully at home in the world's centers of acceptance.
- **No lasting city here.** We inhabit our earthly cities as pilgrims, holding them loosely because our true home is the city that is to come.

- **The God of peace equips and works in us.** Christian faithfulness is His gift and His working, not our achievement. The benediction is the pattern of the Christian life: received grace producing responsive obedience.



## Suggested Time Plan

For a 60-minute class period. This session has more ground to cover than most; plan your time deliberately.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer; read Hebrews 12:22–24 and 13:20–21 aloud (the session’s bookends)
0:05–0:20	Two mountains: Sinai and Zion (12:18–24)
0:20–0:27	The unshakable kingdom (12:25–29)
0:27–0:37	Practical exhortations of chapter 13 (brief walkthrough)
0:37–0:45	Outside the camp and no lasting city (13:12–16)
0:45–0:55	The God of peace benediction (13:20–21)
0:55–1:00	Brief reflection on the whole series; closing prayer



## Teaching Notes, Part by Part

### Two Mountains (15 minutes)

Open with the Sinai scene. Paint the picture. Fire, darkness, gloom, tempest, trumpet, voice so terrible the people begged it to stop, mountain untouchable, even Moses trembling. Read Hebrews 12:18–21 aloud with weight. The old covenant

was inaugurated in holy terror. The gulf between God and people was reinforced, not closed.

Then the turn. Verses 22–24. “You have come” — present tense, right now — to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to the innumerable angels in festal gathering, to the assembly of the firstborn, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator, to the sprinkled blood. Read this list slowly. Let each phrase land.

Teach the pastoral payoff. This is not a description of where we will be someday. It is a description of where we are by faith, right now. When your class gathers for worship on Sunday morning, they are gathering in this company. The angels are there. The saints who have gone before are there. Jesus the mediator is there, the sprinkled blood is there, God the Judge is there, already reconciled to them through Christ. Christian worship is not a self-contained human activity; it is a participation in the heavenly assembly. The visible congregation is, invisibly, a gathering that spans the ages.

### **On Abel's Blood and Christ's Blood**

The closing detail of 12:24 deserves notice. Christ's blood speaks “a better word than the blood of Abel.” Abel's blood, in Genesis 4, cried out from the ground for justice — a word of accusation against the brother who had shed it. Christ's blood speaks a better word. It does not accuse; it secures forgiveness. It does not cry for vengeance; it intercedes for mercy. Where Abel's blood called down judgment, Christ's blood calls down grace. Point this out to your class. The contrast is deliberate, and it captures something essential about the new covenant: the blood at its center is blood that pleads for us, not against us. Every time you remember a past sin, you can let Christ's blood speak its better word over it.

### **The Unshakable Kingdom (7 minutes)**

Move to 12:25–29. The warning: do not refuse Him who is speaking. Then the eschatological vision: God will shake not only the earth but also the heavens. What can be shaken will be removed; what cannot be shaken will remain. We are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Therefore, grateful worship.

Teach the pastoral point. The things we build in this life — careers, reputations, possessions, even institutions — are shakable. They will, in some sense, all be shaken. But what we receive in Christ is unshakable. The kingdom of God is not a human construction; it is a divine gift. And because it is given, not built, it cannot be destroyed by the forces that destroy human works. This is an enormous pastoral comfort in seasons when our earthly structures feel unstable — political crises, cultural upheavals, economic uncertainty, personal losses. Whatever shakes in our lives, the kingdom we are receiving does not shake.

Close this segment with the closing verse: “Our God is a consuming fire.” The warmth of Zion and the seriousness of the consuming fire are not contradictions. They describe the same God. We approach with confidence because Christ has made the way. We approach with reverence because the God at the end of the way is the living God.

### **Practical Exhortations of Chapter 13 (10 minutes)**

Move briskly through the exhortations of 13:1–9, 13:16–17. Do not try to give each one its own extended treatment; the writer himself is moving rapidly. Name them and let them stand.

Brotherly love: continue. Hospitality: do not neglect. Remember those in prison and the mistreated: you are in the body. Honor marriage: God judges sexual immorality. Contentment: the Lord is my helper. Remember your leaders and imitate their faith. Do not be led away by strange teachings. The heart is strengthened by grace, not by foods. Do good and share what you have — such sacrifices please God. Obey your leaders.

Among these, give 13:8 a few extra seconds: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” This is one of the most famous sentences in Hebrews, and it belongs in the memory of every Christian. The stability of the Christian life rests on the unchanging Christ. Diverse and strange teachings come and go; Jesus remains. The Christian anchored in Him is stable in a way the world cannot imitate.

#### **Jesus Christ, the Same Forever**

Hebrews 13:8 is a verse worth memorizing. It answers the deepest anxiety of every age — the fear that the ground is shifting under our feet, that what is

true today may not be true tomorrow, that we might be left behind by cultural and theological change. The answer is that the Jesus around whom the Church stands is the same Jesus yesterday, today, and forever. He does not adjust. He does not revise. He does not become more palatable in each new age. He is who He is, and what He has said is what He has said. Teach your class that this verse is an anchor. When they feel the pressure of changing cultural winds, they can return to this verse and remember that the Lord they worship does not change with the weather. This is a Lutheran commitment too — our confessions are not reinvented every generation; they confess the one faith in the one Christ who is the same forever.

### **Outside the Camp and No Lasting City (8 minutes)**

Teach 13:10–16 with weight. The Day of Atonement imagery — the bodies burned outside the camp — parallels Christ's crucifixion outside the gate of Jerusalem. Then the exhortation: we go to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

Teach this as Christian identity formation. The Christian is not fully at home in the world's centers of acceptance. Following Christ involves a kind of displacement from the comfortable mainstream — willingness to be seen as odd, willingness to bear reproach, willingness to go where He went. This is not the whole of Christian life (we are also called to be good neighbors, honest citizens, responsible members of our societies), but it is part of it. The Christian who is perfectly at ease with the surrounding culture's values has probably not yet gone outside the camp.

Then the beautiful summary: "Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come." Read this aloud slowly. This is the Christian's posture toward the world. We inhabit our earthly cities as pilgrims. We love them, we serve them, we seek their welfare (as Jeremiah told the exiles in Babylon), but we do not belong to them finally. Our citizenship is elsewhere. We are seeking the city to come — the city with foundations, the heavenly Jerusalem, the home Christ has prepared for us.

Connect this back to Volume 2 briefly if it helps: 1 Peter's strangers-and-exiles theology is the same pastoral orientation that Hebrews now articulates. Your class

has been taught this before; this is the closing reinforcement of what has been a theme throughout the curriculum.

### **The God of Peace Benediction (10 minutes)**

Give the benediction full unhurried treatment. Read 13:20–21 aloud slowly. Then walk through each phrase.

“The God of peace.” The God who reconciles. The God who has made peace between Himself and us through Christ’s blood. The God who is Himself at peace and who extends His peace to those who come to Him.

“Who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus.” The resurrection. The one explicit mention in the whole letter. Hebrews has focused on Christ’s priestly seating, but the writer closes by naming the resurrection as the act of the God of peace. The shepherd was dead; the shepherd was raised; the shepherd is now alive and leading the sheep.

“The great shepherd of the sheep.” The shepherd-sheep relationship. Psalm 23 echoes here; John 10 echoes here; Isaiah 40 and Ezekiel 34 echo here. Christ is the shepherd who has gone through death; we are the sheep still being led. The shepherd is alive, and the leading continues.

“By the blood of the eternal covenant.” The covenant is eternal. The blood that seals it is Christ’s own. This is the summary of everything the letter has been arguing. The covenant cannot be broken. The blood cannot be surpassed. We are in an eternal relationship with the God of peace.

“Equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight.” The prayer is for equipping, and the equipping is for doing God’s will. And notice: the working is His. “working in us.” Our pleasing-in-God’s-sight obedience is actually His work in us. This is the Lutheran understanding of the Christian life in a single phrase. God equips and God works; we do His will as those He is carrying.

“Through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” Everything is through Christ. Everything is for the Father’s glory — or Christ’s glory, the grammar allows either reading, and the theological point is the same. The Amen seals the benediction.

**Pastoral Anchor — The Benediction Over Your Class**

Consider pronouncing the benediction over your class at the end of this session. Read 13:20–21 slowly, as a prayer from the pastor (you) to the congregation (them). You have walked with them through many sessions and many years. This prayer is for them. Let them receive it as such. “Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” This is what the writer did for his readers. It is a fitting thing to do for yours.

### Reflection on the Whole Series (5 minutes)

Close the session — and the series — with a brief reflection. You might ask the class: what from the four volumes do you most want to carry forward? What has changed in your understanding of the Christian faith through these studies? What will you do differently as a result of what you have studied?

Receive what is shared gently. Do not try to summarize four volumes in five minutes. Let the class name what they have received. Then pronounce the closing benediction and end.



### Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

#### *“Are the saints in heaven actually watching us?”*

Scripture does not give us a detailed mechanics of what the saints in glory are aware of regarding our earthly struggles. Hebrews 12:1 speaks of them as a “cloud of witnesses,” and 12:23 says we have come to “the spirits of the righteous made perfect.” The imagery is real, but its literal mechanics are not fully specified. What is certain: the saints testify to us through their finished races; they are part of the same Church we belong to; and we are joined with them in a communion that the visible congregation does not exhaust. Whether they are individually aware of your particular struggle is a question Scripture does not answer, and speculation on this

is not profitable. Focus on what is plain: we are not alone, we belong to a great company, and we will join them when our race is finished.

***“Does ‘outside the camp’ mean Christians should separate from society?”***

No. Scripture also commands Christians to be good neighbors, to seek the welfare of their cities, to be honorable citizens, to live at peace with all people as far as possible. “Outside the camp” is not a call to physical separation but to spiritual independence. The Christian does not draw her ultimate identity from her society; she belongs to Christ and to the heavenly city. This may put her at odds with her society on certain specific points — and she will bear reproach for that — but it does not require her to withdraw from ordinary civic and cultural participation. The call is to inhabit the world without belonging to it finally — to be in the world but not of it, in the language of John 17. A Christian who withdraws from all engagement has misunderstood; so has a Christian who is fully assimilated. The faithful walk is the harder middle path of full engagement with loose holding.

***“Why is the resurrection mentioned only once in Hebrews?”***

An interesting observation. Hebrews focuses on Christ’s priestly work — His sacrificial death, His entry into the heavenly sanctuary, His seated reign at the Father’s right hand. The resurrection is implicit in all of this (a dead priest cannot intercede, a dead shepherd cannot lead), but the writer does not develop it as a separate theme. It appears explicitly only in the closing benediction. This is not because the resurrection is unimportant to the writer — quite the opposite — but because his argument runs through the priesthood rather than the resurrection. The resurrection is everywhere assumed and surfaces at the end as the climactic note. For a fuller biblical treatment of the resurrection’s theological weight, Paul’s writings (especially 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 6) and the Gospel narratives are the primary places to go. Hebrews assumes what Paul and the Gospels spell out.

***“What does ‘our God is a consuming fire’ mean for us as Christians?”***

It is a reminder of God’s holiness even within the new covenant. The consuming fire is not a threat to those who are in Christ — we have come to Mount Zion, not to Sinai — but it is a description of the God whose holiness is real. The passage is calling for grateful worship “with reverence and awe.” We approach with confidence because Christ has opened the way. We approach with reverence

because the God at the end of the way is a living God whose holiness consumes what is not His. The danger is not that He will consume His children, for whom Christ has stood surety; the danger is that we would come casually, as though we were approaching a triviality rather than the living God. Reverence and awe are the appropriate affections of Christian worship. Neither grim terror nor casual familiarity fits.

***“How do I pronounce a benediction over people? Isn't that a pastor's job?”***

In Lutheran theology, the public pronouncing of the benediction in worship is part of the pastoral office and is rightly done by an ordained pastor. In the context of teaching a Bible study, however, a lay teacher can certainly read a benediction from Scripture aloud over the class as a closing prayer. The distinction is not about the words themselves — anyone can read Scripture aloud — but about the formal liturgical context of the worship service. Reading Hebrews 13:20–21 as a closing prayer for your Bible study class is a pastoral-teaching act, not a formal benediction in the liturgical sense. It is appropriate and fitting. If your context is more formal and a pastor is present, you might invite the pastor to pronounce the closing benediction while you read it as a prayer. Either way, the text is available to be spoken over the class, and it belongs to them.

***“What do I do now that the study is over?”***

Keep reading Scripture. Keep gathering with the saints for worship. Keep receiving the Supper. Keep praying. If you have been part of a regular Bible study group, consider what the next study might be — there is always more Scripture. If you want to deepen your grasp of what you have studied, re-read one of the four volumes on your own, with your own Bible open beside it, and notice what you missed the first time. Pass on what you have learned to someone else; teaching is one of the best ways to consolidate learning. And most importantly, continue to walk with Jesus Christ — the same yesterday, today, and forever — whose Word these studies have tried to serve. The end of a study is not the end of the Christian life. It is just the end of a season of particular, focused engagement. The life continues.



## **Leading the Discussion**

Notes on each of the six discussion questions. In this final session, the discussion is less about learning new content and more about consolidating what has been learned and sending the class forward.

### **Question 1 — *The gathering at Zion***

A reflection on worship. Receive what the class shares. Many in your class may not have thought of Sunday worship as participation in a heavenly assembly. The image can renew their experience of Sunday morning. Next week, when they gather, they will know they are gathering in a company that includes the angels and the saints. This changes things.

### **Question 2 — *Christ the unchanging***

A personal question. Most Christians have moments when the stability of the unchanging Christ has been load-bearing — a death, a cultural upheaval, a personal crisis. Invite these testimonies. They are resources for other class members facing similar challenges.

### **Question 3 — *Outside the camp today***

A searching question about Christian displacement. Where does following Christ put you outside the cultural mainstream? The answer will vary by person and by circumstance. Some carry the reproach in professional contexts; some in family contexts; some in civic contexts. The pastoral point is that bearing reproach well requires neither combativeness nor capitulation — it requires simple faithfulness to Christ with love for those who misunderstand.

### **Question 4 — *No lasting city***

A reflection on pilgrimage. How does the Christian inhabit her country and community well while holding it loosely? The answer is not withdrawal but proper orientation. We love our earthly homes without worshiping them. We serve them without needing them. We seek their good without pinning our eternal hopes on them. This is a harder walk than either assimilation or withdrawal, and it is the one Scripture calls us to.

### **Question 5 — *God's working and our doing***

A theologically important discussion. Receive stories of times when the class has experienced God working in them to produce what they could not have produced on their own. This may be a change of heart, a capacity for forgiveness, an endurance through suffering, a generosity, a forgiveness received. The Lutheran understanding of Christian life as God's work-in-us producing our obedience should be audible in the discussion.

### **Question 6 — Looking back at the whole series**

The closing reflection. This is not a test question; it is an invitation to share what has mattered. Receive generously. The class may name things you did not expect. Let the reflections stand. End with gratitude, and move to the closing benediction.



## **If You Only Have Forty-Five Minutes**

Keep/cut plan for a shorter class period. This session particularly benefits from the full hour; if possible, arrange for it.

### **Keep:**

- Two mountains (12 minutes)
- Brief walk-through of 13:1–9 exhortations, with 13:8 lifted up (5 minutes)
- Outside the camp and no lasting city (6 minutes)
- The benediction — full unhurried treatment (10 minutes) — do not cut this
- Brief whole-series reflection (4 minutes)
- Discussion question 6

### **Cut or Abbreviate:**

- Extended treatment of the unshakable kingdom
- Most of the 13:1–9 exhortations (name them, do not develop each)
- Most discussion questions



## **For Further Study**

### **Biblical cross-references:**

- Exodus 19:16–25 — the Sinai background for 12:18–21
- Haggai 2:6 — the “yet once more” prophecy
- Revelation 21–22 — the heavenly Jerusalem in fullest description
- Genesis 4 — Abel’s blood crying from the ground
- Psalm 23 and John 10 — the shepherd imagery behind the benediction
- Jeremiah 29:4–7 — seeking the welfare of the city while living as exiles

### **From the Lutheran tradition:**

- Luther’s sermons on Hebrews — his extended treatment of the two-mountains passage is particularly rich
- Small Catechism, closing prayers — Luther’s models for daily benediction
- The Lutheran liturgy of the Divine Service — the benediction from Numbers 6 and its use in worship
- Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Comprehensive Summary — the Lutheran confession as a closing vision of the whole faith

### **Commentaries:**

- Lenski on Hebrews 12:18–13:25 — careful Lutheran treatment of the closing material
- Philip Hughes on Hebrews 12–13 — particularly strong on the two mountains
- Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* — helpful on the structure of the closing and the benediction
- F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* — excellent on the final exhortations and benediction



## **A Final Word**

You have finished. Fourteen sessions of Hebrews, four volumes of the whole “Something Better” series, many hundreds of hours of preparation and teaching and discussion. What you have done with your class is a real work. You have helped them hear the Word of God preached, explained, and applied across four of the richest pastoral books in the New Testament. Whatever your sense of your own performance — and teachers are always hardest on themselves — you have given your class what they could not have given themselves. The Word has done its work in them, through your faithful handling of it.

The closing benediction of Hebrews is the writer’s prayer over his readers. Make it yours, too — over your class, over yourself, over everyone who will read this volume in years to come. “Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

You have been an instrument of that prayer. The God of peace has worked through your teaching to equip your class with what they needed. He will continue to work in them, and in you, whether or not another Bible study ever follows. The Word has begun its work. It will finish what it began.

Go forth, with the God of peace. Keep reading. Keep gathering. Keep running the race set before you. The great Shepherd of the sheep goes ahead of you, and all the saints — those named in Hebrews 11, those named in your own family tree, and those of us still running — go with you.

*Soli Deo Gloria*