

# “Jesus is Better”

## Session 1 – Hebrews 1:1-14

### Week 1 Bible Study Method:

Author and Audience

Genre and Purpose

Historical Context



**Watch It: 8min** (watch this video from the Bible Project with your group to give them an overview of the structure of Hebrews and a little taste of where we are going.)

[Book of Hebrews Summary: A Complete Animated Overview](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fNWTZZwgbs)

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**Read It: 3min** (As the leader, you should read this text aloud to your group.)

As we work through this new series in the Book of Hebrews, we will be modeling different tools and practices for studying the Bible. Today, we will consider the author and audience, the genre and purpose, and the historical context of the Book of Hebrews. Knowing these things changes the way we understand what we read and gives us a clearer picture of what the Bible actually means.

**Author and Audience:** The author of Hebrews is unknown. Scholars have suggested several options (Paul, Apollos, Barnabas, Luke, and Priscilla) but there is no consensus. In Chapter 2 verses 1-3, the author refers to being around the disciples saying:

*“Salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to **us** by those who heard Him.”*

By saying “us,” the author includes himself, so he must have interacted with the disciples personally. This message is clearly rooted in the teachings of Jesus.

**Genre and Purpose:** Hebrews is an Epistle, a letter written to encourage other Christ followers to remain faithful to Jesus despite their cultural influences and persecution. The author aims to show that Jesus is better than anything offered anywhere else.

**Historical Context:** Hebrews was written to 1<sup>st</sup> century Christ followers. The author assumes a deep knowledge of Jewish practices and concepts, so it is believed that this audience had once been Jewish but had come to know Christ. Unfortunately, most of the people surrounding them and the foundations of their culture remained Jewish and were persecuting them as “defectors.” (Some of their persecution is described in 10:32-35.) In that oppressive environment, these Christ followers were struggling and weary, tempted to give up on Jesus and go back to the Judaism they had known their whole lives.

In their world, Judaism made sense. Their whole world had been built upon it, and Christianity was just seen as this weird offshoot, a strange cult. As a marginalized people, these Christians were naturally wrestling with the idea of returning to Judaism where they could avoid persecution, be accepted in their community, and feel the security of community structures around them. If not outright abandonment of their faith, these Christ followers were also at risk of subtle “drift” back into the lifestyles and practices of the people and culture surrounding them.

We find ourselves in a similar situation. This is why this study is so timely for us. Our culture is screaming out against us. Our world is attacking the foundations of our faith, and we stand at a crossroads. Will we choose to follow the masses and allow our culture to lead us or will we choose Christ? How will the cultural drift around us affect us individually? How will it affect the church collectively? Do we really believe that He is better than what the world offers?

God offers us answers in the book of Hebrews.

**Read It: 1min** (Ask someone in your group to read the passage aloud and encourage your group members to keep their Bible open throughout the rest of the discussion.)

- Hebrews 1:1-4

**Discuss It: 15min** (This is the first of our focused discussions regarding the Scriptures. Aim to spend most of your time in these spaces. Refer your group back to the passage regularly.)

**Vs 1-3** (Focus: Origin and Authority – Jesus is better than prophets.)

- The author starts by contrasting how God spoke *"through the prophets at many times and in various ways"* versus *"by his Son."* What is the practical difference between hearing from lots of prophets in the Old Testament versus hearing the one King, Jesus? With just one voice, the people may have perceived Jesus as less credible than the whole group of prophets who spanned across thousands of years, but Jesus' one voice is actually the only authoritative and true voice. Hearing directly from the King is much better than hearing from a thousand of His servants.
- How does the phrase *"sustaining all things by his powerful word."* (1:3) challenge common ideas about how the universe works? (ex: random chance, natural law, independent forces). This idea places all authority in Jesus. Our world is sustained by Him. He did NOT set up the systems and then leave. Jesus is present and participating in it all. The universe doesn't just exist, but rather, it is actively *held together*.
  - How does this challenge your thinking?

- How does it encourage you?
- Verse 2 says, “*in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.*” Why do you think God chose Jesus as His final word instead of allowing the prophets the last word? The prophets themselves knew they weren’t the last word. They actually spoke clearly of the coming Messiah. Jesus is the fulfillment of their words. They were preparing the way for Him. Jesus is also the more accurate voice because he is the “exact representation” (vs 3) of God.

**Vs 4** (Focus: Jesus is superior to angels and creation. He is sovereign over all things.)

- The author is systematically placing Jesus over everything that their Jewish counterparts held in high regard by giving Him several honorable titles. Look at the titles given to Jesus in verses 3-4. Which of these titles might have been especially encouraging for these persecuted and weary Christ followers and why? (radiance of God’s glory, exact representation of his being, sustainer of all things by His powerful word, purifier of sins, enthroned at the right hand of God, superior to the angels) Encourage group members to consider what these titles say about God’s character.
  - In your life, how have you seen these character traits in God?
- The author states Jesus “*sat down*” after making purification for sins. What does sitting down symbolize, (The job is complete.) and how does this give meaning and finality to your spiritual life? There is no more work to do. Our sins are completely forgiven in Christ. Our efforts are not about earning salvation or forgiveness, but only serve as ways to show our gratitude and pursue a deeper relationship with Jesus.

**Reflect on It: 10min** (Feel free to use these “reflect” sections as you see fit for your group. The idea is to provide a space for some quiet reflection even within a group setting. If you’ve never done this with a group, it will probably feel awkward at first, but I have found that many times, these are very fruitful moments. Giving people space for quiet, allows them to hear what God wants to say. We need time to process.)

- Ask participants to sit quietly for 2 minutes and consider this question privately: **Knowing that Jesus is superior to everything, where are my allegiances? Am I trusting in something inferior like money, reputation, talents/abilities, or fear?**
- **Share Prayer:** Ask willing participants to share a brief one-sentence prayer based on their answer. It might be helpful to give them started prompt like: “Lord teach me

to come to you instead of \_\_\_\_\_.” (trusting my abilities, going to my friends, numbing or distracting myself, etc) Lead with a little vulnerability yourself.

**Read It: 1min** (Ask someone in your group to read this next section aloud and encourage group members to keep their Bible open throughout the rest of the discussion.)

- Hebrews 1:5-14

**Discuss It: 15min** (If you have limited time, you could move directly to the last question about comparing verse 14 to verses 8 and 13.)

**Vs 5-14** (Focus: In the hierarchy of things, Jesus is superior to the angels. The purpose of angels is compared to the purpose of Jesus.)

- **In the Old Testament, angels often played a role in God’s interactions with people.** (Gen 18, Gen 28, Ex 3, Judges 6, 1 Kgs 19, Dan 6) **Why is it so important for the author to prove that Jesus is superior to them?** (With a proper understanding, the author hopes they will call on Jesus instead of returning to what they have always done. He leads them to live in the truth despite the culture they are in and have known.)
- **In our culture, we aren’t tempted to look to angels for help, but where do you turn for guidance and help? Is Jesus your reflex or do you seek help from friends, social media, or ChatGPT?** Lead your group with vulnerability.
- **Verses 11-12 say the earth will “wear out like a garment.” Writing to these persecuted people, in a world that is in a constant state of change, why would the author choose to focus on Jesus’ unchanging nature?**
  - **Why is this encouraging to you?**
- **How does verse 14 describe angels? Ask your group to compare this to the description of Jesus in verses 8 and 13.** There really is no comparison. Angels are described as “ministering spirits” and Jesus is enthroned. Angels serve. Jesus is served. Jesus is better in every possible way.

**Do It: 10min** (Ask your group members to choose one way to “do something” with the lessons from today. Choose from the list below or allow them to come up with their own. Talk about your plan and encourage them to share theirs and then talk about it again next week. Create a little accountability within your group.)

- Reread Hebrews 1:3 every morning this week and choose a different title of Jesus (e.g., "Sustainer," "Purifier") as a focus for your day.
- Do an authority inventory: Write down the top 3 voices that shape your decisions (Jesus, Bible, family, finances, allegiances, habits, etc.) and consider which voices represent the anchor in verse 12.
- Identify one "religious" or "practical" safety net you instinctively reach for when life feels unstable (control, routine, approval, productivity). Intentionally loosen your grip on it once this week and instead pray Hebrews 1:2–3.
- Before a decision this week (big or small), ask: *If Jesus really is better and supreme, what would trust look like here?* Act on that answer.

**Pray It: 2min** (Pray however your group prefers, but if your group struggles with prayer requests becoming a burden (gossip space, or just too time consuming), we are offering an alternative each week. Remember: The goal is always **Bible Study, Community, and Care**, so praying for one another is important, but it doesn't have to take place inside your meeting times. As a matter of fact, it's better if it reaches beyond your time constraints. You are the leader and guiding your group to healthy practices is important.)

Pray a prayer of thanksgiving for the ways God has brought your group together. Thank Him for the gift of our recent holiday break. Ask Him to reveal new opportunities for each person in your group as you start the new year and settle into new rhythms. If you'd like to include everyone without doing requests. Go around the room and ask each person to share one word describing something they are grateful for.

**Total time: 65min**

**Leader Tools:**

