

# Hebrews 1:1-4

## Christ is superior—the perfect revelation of God

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 7-10)*

### Look

Verse 2            *“In these last days”*—The last days refer to what we call the New Testament period, between Jesus’ ascension and his second coming. We expect Christ to come back at any time.

### Discuss

1. God spoke through the prophets at many times and in various ways. What was the time spread during which the prophets spoke? What were the various ways through which God revealed his Word to them?
2. God has spoken to us through his Son. What does John 1:17,18 tell us about the unique revelation God has given us through Jesus?
3. The writer’s purpose in this book is to bolster his readers’ faith and confidence that Jesus is superior to all things in every way. In verses 2 to 4, he praises Jesus by pointing out seven of Jesus’ characteristics. Can you identify them?
  - Verse 2b
  - Verse 2c
  - Verse 3a
  - Verse 3b
  - Verse 3c
  - Verse 3d
  - Verse 4

### Apply

4. Our Lutheran liturgy leads us to worship and exalt Christ. Think of different parts of our worship service that reflect some of the words written in this introduction.

*The writer points us to the prophets who spoke God’s Word. Then he points us to the Son of God, who has also spoken God’s Word to us and who in many ways is superior to the prophets.*

# Hebrews 1:5-14

## Christ is superior to the angels

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 10-14)*

### Look

Verse 5            *"Angels"*—It seems that the writer to the Hebrews was addressing people who were worshiping angels or being tempted to do so. People have always been fascinated by angels. (See Colossians 2:18 for another reference to this kind of activity.)

### Discuss

1. What point does the writer make in the first two Old Testament passages he quotes? (verse 5) How does this show Jesus' superiority over the angels?
  
2. Verses 7 and 14 tell us about the angels' role in God's work. What is that role? How does this show Jesus' superiority over the angels?
  
3. What does the writer call Jesus in verses 8 and 9?
  
4. The quotation beginning in verse 10 is very important. Go back to the source and read Psalm 102:19-27. Three times in verses 19 to 24 the psalm writer uses the name *Jehovah* to refer to the one he is praying to. Although the word *Jehovah* is not used in the section quoted by the writer to the Hebrews (Psalm 102:25-27), there is no change in subject. What great fact about Jesus does this convey?
  
5. What point does the writer make in verse 13?

### Apply

6. Discuss how the movie *Star Wars* uses myth to teach spiritual truths. How do the incarnation of Christ and our worship of him conflict with this film?
  
7. Angels are "ministering spirits" who serve those who will inherit eternal life. Why is this verse much more valuable than a dozen angel stories?

*Jesus is greater than the angels. Serve him alone!*

# Hebrews 2:1-9

## Don't drift away from God's blessings in Christ

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 14-19)*

### Discuss

1. In verse 1 the writer expresses his basic concern and reason for writing. What is that?
2. We know the law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. In verse 2, the writer speaks about the law being given through angels as intermediaries between Moses and God. Why do you think he speaks about the law being given like that?
3. How does the writer express the fact that Jesus' salvation is greater by far?
4. At the beginning, God blessed mankind by giving us dominion over all of his creation. We lost that dominion, however, when we sinned. Why did God make the Son of Man a little lower than the angels?
5. At the present, we do not see everything subject to man. What do we see, however? What hope does this give us?

### Apply

6. How could these verses be used to help someone who does not see the danger of slipping in his or her church attendance? Focus especially on the word *drift*.
7. What hope do we have when we see him "crowned with glory and honor"?

*The writer encourages us to hold on to Jesus, who gave us salvation and has restored everything to us by becoming like us and dying for our sins.*

# Hebrews 2:10-18

## Don't be ashamed of Jesus; he had to be humble

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 19-23)*

### Look

- Verse 10      *“Perfect through suffering”*—Of course, Jesus was without sin. In that sense he was always perfect. In this verse, *perfect* means “complete.” When Jesus came to this earth, he had a mission to perform. He had to live as a perfect human being, obeying his Father’s will in every temptation, and he had to die for our sins. This entailed suffering.
- Verse 17      *“Merciful and faithful high priest”*—Priests offer sacrifices. Jesus became the ultimate High Priest when he offered his body on the altar of the cross. He did not shirk any of his responsibilities but faithfully carried out his work to the end.

### Discuss

1. “But Jesus was such a wretched-looking person! Why trust in him?” That’s the kind of argument the Christians were being subjected to. What two reasons does the writer give as to why Jesus appeared the way he did?
  - Verse 10
  - Verse 11
2. The writer quotes three passages from the Old Testament to show that the Savior was to be a human being. Fill in the blanks.
  - Verse 12: Jesus calls those he serves \_\_\_\_\_, implying that Jesus became a human being.
  - Verse 13: Jesus put his \_\_\_\_\_ in God, showing that for a time he put off his glory and became one of God’s creatures.
  - Verse 13: God gave Jesus \_\_\_\_\_, implying that Jesus became human, which was the only way he could have spiritual offspring.
3. How did Jesus defeat sin and death?
4. Why did Jesus have to be made like his brothers in every way (yet without sin)?

### Apply

5. Why can Jesus help us in our struggles and temptations?
6. Why are these words of Martin Luther so comforting? “Christ became incarnate for our sakes in order that we might enter into a great glory, that our flesh and blood, and skin and hair, hands and feet, stomach and back might reside in heaven as God does.”

*Don't let Jesus' humility trouble you. He had to suffer as a human being.*

# Hebrews 3:1-6

## Jesus is greater than Moses

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 23-28)*

### Discuss

1. The writer tells his readers to focus their eyes on Jesus. What thoughts does the writer weave into verse 1 to encourage us to do this?
2. "You follow Jesus. We follow Moses, who is greater by far. And we know God spoke through Moses." That is another challenge addressed to the early Christians. Explain how the writer compared Moses and Jesus.
  - Verse 2
  - Verse 3a
  - Verse 3b
  - Verse 4
  - Verses 5,6
3. The writer's words about Jesus throughout this book are loaded with gospel encouragement. But the book of Hebrews also contains some of the strongest warnings in Scripture. There is a warning in verse 6. Against what does the writer warn us?

### Apply

4. We are told to fix our thoughts on Jesus. How can a parent help children fix their eyes on Jesus? See Luke 24:25-27 and 32.
5. A Christian friend of yours is dying. Reread verse 1. What peace and comfort can you offer from this verse to comfort this friend who is very close to you?

*The writer tells us that Jesus is greater than Moses. Why go back to the Old Testament religion and put yourself under its laws? We follow Jesus, who is not a servant of the house but its builder and its Son.*

# Hebrews 3:7-19

## Jesus offers a greater rest than the Promised Land

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 28-32)*

### Look

- Verse 7      *"Today"*—The quotation in verses 7 to 11 is taken from Psalm 95. This quotation will be referred to in this chapter and in chapter 4.
- Verse 8      *"Do not harden your hearts."* Hardening is a willful act of rebellion against God. "Such a phenomenon might be called spiritual suicide since it is impossible for the Spirit to work repentance in such hearts while they cling to deliberate unbelief" (The People's Bible, *Hebrews*, page 29).

### Discuss

1. Recall how the Israelites acted in the desert on the way to Canaan. List some times when they rebelled against the Lord.
2. Now recall some specific wonders the Israelites saw during their years in the wilderness. What great things have we seen and heard?
3. In what sense is it still the "today" the psalmist spoke about?
4. Why were the Israelites who came out of Egypt with Moses not allowed to enter their rest?

### Apply

5. How do the simple words "the Holy Spirit says" help you in your personal reading of the Bible? (verse 7)
6. What differences or similarities do you see between the call to "encourage one another daily" and the call we sometimes hear today for the congregation to "be more friendly"?

*The Israelites in the desert rejected their "today." God does not want us to reject ours.*

# Hebrews 4:1-5

## Don't lose the rest you have in Christ—part 1

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 32-36)*

### Look

- Verse 1      *“The promise of entering his rest”*—The Promised Land the Israelites inherited and the Sabbath rest they were commanded to observe were only pictures of a greater and longer lasting rest. God rested from his work in Eden, and he gave his finished creation to Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve lost God's rest. God's rest was reestablished through Jesus, who gives us rest from our sins, rest from worries and cares, and eternal rest in heaven.
- Verse 2      Some did not grasp and trust the message of rest found in a future Messiah. (See Isaiah 11:10.) They lost this rest through unbelief.
- Verse 3      Notice the present tense, not the future, in this verse. We enter the eternal rest now through Christ. (See John 5:24.)

### Discuss

1. Why did the writer have to point out that God's promise of rest still stands? Why might his readers have thought God's promise of rest had already been fulfilled?
2. How are we similar to the people in the Old Testament? How must we be different from them if we are to enter God's rest?
3. Work on understanding God's wonderful rest by stating what the writer is referring to in these phrases:
  - “we who have believed enter that rest” (verse 3)
  - “never enter my rest” (verse 3)
  - “on the seventh day God rested” (verse 4)
  - “never enter my rest” (verse 5)

### Apply

4. What various kinds of rest do we enjoy as Christians?

*The writer continued to talk about God's rest, which the Israelites had lost through unbelief. The rest in Canaan pictured the rest God gives us in Christ.*

# Hebrews 4:6-13

## Don't lose the rest you have in Christ—part 2

(*The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 36-42*)

### Look

- Verse 8      *“If Joshua had given them rest”*—The Jewish people were wrapped up in their nation and their land. They expected God to someday restore their power under a new King David, and they expected their land (where God had promised them rest from their enemies) to be the showpiece of the earth. That hope, which was so closely tied to the Promised Land, was ingrained in their systems. New Jewish Christians had given up this hope and were trusting in Jesus. They were tempted to go back to their old, misguided hope. This is what the writer was trying to help them avoid.
- Verses 9-11      *“Sabbath-rest”*—*Sabbath* means “rest.” The day of rest was another picture of the rest we have in God and his Savior. Israel did no labor on the Sabbath Day. We rest in the completed work of Christ, ceasing from our works and admiring what he has done for us.

### Discuss

- Focus on the word *rest* in these verses, and tell what the word means in each section. This will help you see the overarching concept of rest in Scripture and how rest was pictured in the Old Testament. Use this discussion to help you appreciate the rest you live in right now.
  - “some will enter that rest” (verse 6)
  - “if Joshua had given them rest” (verse 8)
  - “a Sabbath-rest for the people of God” (verse 9)
  - “who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work” (verse 10)
  - “every effort to enter that rest” (verse 11)
- Verse 11 summarizes the entire section. What does the writer want us to do?
- God’s Word is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. We often use these thoughts to show the power of God’s Word in conversion. However, in this context the power of God’s Word is used for a different reason. Can you tell what it is?

### Apply

- What can you do to keep yourself focused on God’s rest in Christ?

*Joshua’s rest and the Sabbath Day pictured the true rest we have in Christ. Hold fast to that rest!*

# Hebrews 4:14-16

## Jesus, our Great High Priest, has opened heaven to us

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 42-45)*

### Look

The writer to the Hebrews has been comparing the Christian and the Jewish religions. Christianity is superior, for Jesus is superior. But in the Jewish mind, Christianity suffered from another weakness—the lack of a high priest. It is this lack that the writer will address in the next several chapters.

Verse 14      *“Great high priest”*—This name for Jesus is unique to the book of Hebrews.

### Discuss

1. The Old Testament high priest went into the presence of God on the Day of Atonement. Read or review that account in Leviticus 16:11-14. Where specifically did the high priest go on that day? How is Jesus superior to him? (Hint: Focus on the phrase “gone through the heavens” in Hebrews 4:14.)
2. Old Testament high priests were just men. Who, however, is Jesus?
3. Hebrews 4:14–5:10 shows three ways Jesus is superior to the Old Testament high priest. He has greater sympathy, greater authority, and he is eternal. In 4:15 the writer says that Jesus is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. Why can Jesus sympathize with us?
4. How is Jesus different from us?
5. What is the connection between what the writer says about Jesus going through the heavens and what he says about our being able to stand before God’s throne and find grace to help with all our problems?

### Apply

6. Because of what our Great High Priest did for us, what are we able to do? Describe how you approach God’s throne of grace. List some of the reasons why you have done this in the past week.

*We have a Great High Priest, who has gone into the heavens and enables us to go there with our prayers.*

# Hebrews 5:1-10

## Jesus, our Great High Priest, has authority

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 45-52)*

### Discuss

1. The Old Testament high priest was given the honor of representing the people before God. Why was he able to deal gently with the people?
2. He could understand their weaknesses because he was weak. What did every high priest have to do for himself?
3. In verses 8 and 9, the writer contrasts the Old Testament high priest with Jesus. How was Jesus different?
4. Some Jews may have asserted that Jesus had no authority to lay claim to the high priesthood. In order to counter this, the writer quoted two Old Testament passages. In brief, what does each passage say about Jesus?
5. Jewish antagonists claimed that God would never listen to a sinner and that Jesus was just that. They also claimed that Jesus' sufferings proved he was a sinner rejected by God. Why did God listen to Jesus? What made Jesus a pure and spotless sacrifice?

### Apply

6. Discuss how Roman Catholics use Mary, the priesthood, the papacy, and the saints to lead people away from going directly to the Father through Jesus. What encouragement does our writer give us?

*Jesus has God's authority to be our High Priest.*

# Hebrews 5:11–6:3

## Don't be sluggish in your Christian growth

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 52-56)*

### Look

5:13            *“The teaching about righteousness”*—This is the heart of our faith. To understand this teaching thoroughly is the lifelong goal of every Christian. It begins with Christ's righteousness for us and with his perfect life that is credited to us by faith. It is understanding that with his righteousness dwelling in us, we have become slaves to goodness rather than slaves to sin. It is then learning how to shape our lives around Christ's righteousness.

### Discuss

1. Why is the writer frustrated with his readers?
2. What is the difference between milk and solid food?
3. What is meant by the “constant use” of “solid food”? On the basis of your answer, define spiritual maturity.
4. What is the writer's goal for his readers?

### Apply

5. Martin Luther warned about losing ground and growing complacent in the Word. What warning do you find in these words? “God be praised, the Bible is now in the hands of the people . . . as the saying goes: The cow walks in grass up to its belly. . . . Let us use the Word so that we shall not be obliged to devour stones and thistles again, as we had to heretofore under the papacy, but that we bring forth much fruit and become the Lord's disciples.”

*The writer urged his readers to move on from infancy to maturity in their faith. He said he would continue to work to that end, confident that they would understand.*

# Hebrews 6:4-12

## Don't fall away

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 56-62)*

### Discuss

1. In verses 4 to 6, the writer gives a serious and sobering spiritual message. What does he tell his readers and us?
2. Compare the words in verses 7 and 8 with Jesus' words in John 15:6. Why should we be afraid if we see a lack of good works in ourselves or even in others?
3. How does the writer skillfully mix together his warning with an encouragement?
4. Verses 11 and 12 provide a good summary of the writer's goal in this book. Christians must not become lazy. What ought they do?

### Apply

5. How does the Word of God taste to you?
6. The Lord gives us people we can imitate. Give an example of a Christian who has not been sluggish in growing in God's Word and who has been a good example for you.
7. Do you ever think no one notices the work you do for the Lord? How does verse 10 speak to this problem?

*The writer entered into his discussion of Jesus as our High Priest in order to give his readers warnings and encouragements that would help them prepare themselves for the discussion to follow.*

# Hebrews 6:13-20

## God's promises in Christ are certain

(*The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 62-66*)

### Look

The writer knew his readers. They needed not just encouragement to hold firm to their faith but instructions about the hope they had in Jesus. The writer needed to take them deeper into the Old Testament and let them know that Christ was no add-on to the Old Testament. He was the one who fulfilled it in every way. After encouraging his readers to dig deeper into Scripture, the writer took them by the hand and did just that.

Verses 16,17 “*God . . . confirmed it with an oath.*” God could simply have promised to send his Savior. Yet he confirmed it with an oath to bolster our faith so that we might be “greatly encouraged.” God made this oath to Abraham in Genesis 22:15-18 and repeated it to Isaac in Genesis 26:3,4. Read the “Song of Zechariah” in Luke 1:67-79 and note especially the words that speak about God’s swearing an oath and keeping his promise to Abraham.

Verse 18 “*Two unchangeable things*”—This refers to God himself and to the oath that God swore on himself, that is, on the basis of his own power and authority.

### Discuss

1. Abraham was a model for the Jewish people. The writer here links Christ with Abraham. He speaks about God’s promise to Abraham to give him many descendants. Focus on the word *patiently* in verse 15. Why does Abraham provide a good role model for the Hebrews?
2. Why did God’s swearing by himself give Abraham strength to be patient?
3. The writer pictures an anchor holding to the bottom of a lake, keeping the boat from drifting.
  - What is the anchor?
  - Where does it hold fast?
  - Why doesn’t it come loose?

### Apply

4. Read all stanzas from hymn 382 in *Christian Worship*. Note especially stanzas 2 and 3, which refers to Hebrews 6:19. How does this strengthen you in the temptations and difficulties (the floods) of life?

*We have a secure hope, the anchor Christ set in heaven. Hold to it and you won’t drift!*

# Hebrews 7:1-10

## Jesus, the Great High Priest pictured by Melchizedek, is the eternal Priest

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 66-72)*

### Look

The writer gives us some of the solid food he spoke about in 5:14. Early Jewish Christians wanted to leave Christ and return to the highly visible priesthood of the Old Testament. They are asked to look at Melchizedek, through whom God established an eternal priesthood of which Jesus is the Chief Priest.

Verses 1-3      *“Melchizedek”*—If you are not familiar with Melchizedek, read Genesis chapter 14, especially verses 17 to 20.

### Discuss

1. Discuss all the things that made Melchizedek special. Can you see parallels between him and Jesus?

“priest of God Most High”

“king of righteousness”

“king of Salem”

There is no trace of his beginning or end.

Abraham and Levi gave him a tenth (or tithe) of the plunder.

Melchizedek blessed Abraham.

2. Since Jesus is a Priest after the order of Melchizedek, where does that place him in relation to the priesthood of Aaron, to which the Jewish Christians were tempted to return?

*Jesus, like Melchizedek, is a Prophet, Priest, and King. He is greater than the Levitical priesthood, for the Levites themselves, through Abraham, gave him tithes.*

# Hebrews 7:11-22

## Jesus, who is in the order of Melchizedek, is a greater High Priest than Aaron

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 72-77)*

### Look

The early Jewish Christians were being asked to choose between two systems of religion, that of the Old Testament law and that of Christ. In this section, the writer is pointing out that there are two different systems of priests. Since we draw near to Jesus through priests, it is crucial that we choose the right system of priesthood, as well as the right system of law.

Verse 11        *“Perfection”*—Perfection is required for acceptance before a perfect and holy God. The Old Testament priesthood could not provide this perfection.

Verse 12        *“A change of the law”*—The priesthood predicted in Psalm 110 would not come from the tribe of Levi. This presumed there would be a change in the law. In fact, the old covenant law was done away with and a new covenant was established by Jesus on the basis of his blood.

### Discuss

1. Two things make it clear that Melchizedek and the one he pictured, Jesus, were of a different system than Aaron. Can you spot these two differences? (Hint: Focus on verses 13 and 16.)
2. Why is it critical that a new priesthood replace that of Aaron? (Note: The writer is drawing his information not from the New Testament but from the Old Testament. This is important. He is not proving his point by something Jesus or his followers said but by what David had said many years ago in the psalms.)
3. Jesus' priesthood is linked to “an indestructible life.” Why is this indestructible life of Jesus so essential to our salvation?

### Apply

4. Read 7:18 again. What weakness is there in the Mosaic Law? How can we communicate this to people who still have their hope of salvation in the law?

*The Old Testament spoke about another Priest, not descended from the tribe of Levi, who would establish a covenant that Levi could never have established. This Priest is Jesus.*

# Hebrews 7:23-28

## Jesus the Great High Priest is eternal, and so his priesthood is permanent

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 77-81)*

### Look

Verse 28      *“The oath”*—The oath the Father swore in Psalm 110, in which he made Jesus Priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. This oath is more recent than the law, and so it replaced the law.

### Discuss

1. The writer refers to Jesus' indestructible nature (verse 16). Why does this make his priesthood better than Aaron's?
2. On the basis of verses 26 to 28, contrast the following:  
the Old Testament high priests and the High Priest Jesus

the sacrifices of the Old Testament high priests and Jesus' sacrifice

“the law” and “the oath”

### Apply

3. What comfort do we find in knowing that Jesus lives forever and that he has established a permanent priesthood?
4. “All religions lead back to God.” What key thought from our study in this section shows that this statement is not true?

*Old Testament high priests were sinful, mortal human beings. Their high priesthood was only temporary. Jesus is the perfect High Priest, appointed by God to be our High Priest forever.*

# Hebrews 8

## Jesus is the High Priest of a new covenant

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 81-90)*

### Look

Jesus is a new and perfect High Priest. As a new High Priest, Jesus surpasses the Old Testament high priests in two more ways.

Verse 13      *“What is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.”* The old covenant was no longer necessary after Jesus did his work. In A.D. 70, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, leveled the temple, and scattered the Jews. The Old Testament religion forcefully came to an end. At the time this writer wrote, however, the Old Testament practices were still being followed. Yes, the temple worship was still in existence, he said, but it would soon disappear.

### Discuss

1. The writer has already told us that Jesus ascended into heaven and has taken his place at God's right hand. There he serves as our mediator before God. In this context, the writer says that Jesus is superior to the Old Testament high priests in another way. What does he mean that Jesus serves in “the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man”?
2. All priests must have something to offer God. What did Jesus offer?
3. How did God's warning to Moses reinforce the superiority of Jesus' high priesthood?
4. Jesus serves in heaven. He also serves on the basis of a new covenant. What was wrong with the old covenant? (verse 9)
5. How is the new covenant superior to the old? Find four reasons from verses 10 to 12.

### Apply

6. How does this section help us when we are tempted to find God's favor through what we do?

*Jesus serves us before God's throne in heaven. He does this on the basis of a new covenant.*

# Hebrews 9:1-10

## The High Priest of a new covenant

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 90-97)*

### Look

Verse 1      *“Regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary”*—This is the heart of these verses. Under the old covenant, the priests were assigned duties and a place in which to perform those duties. The very nature of their duties and what they were allowed to do in relation to the tabernacle contain an important lesson.

### Discuss

1. Although the writer does not spend time discussing the meaning of the various items in the tabernacle, you may wish to touch on what lesson each one teaches.
  - the lampstand
  - the consecrated bread
  - the Most Holy Place
  - the altar of incense
  - ark of the covenant
  - cherubim over the atonement cover
2. The writer draws his main lesson from the high priest's duties on the Day of Atonement. What is his point?
3. What was the purpose of the Old Testament laws and regulations?

### Apply

4. Symbolism is important for worship. Discuss some of the symbolism we use during the Lenten season or at Easter. How might we be tempted to turn beautiful symbols that point to Christ into a system of laws?

*The Old Testament regulations were filled with pictures and ceremonies. They all had meaning. The ceremonies on the Day of Atonement were designed to teach the people that God had another, more perfect, way to save us.*

# Hebrews 9:11-15

## The blood of Christ and eternal redemption

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 97-100)*

### Look

Luther said, “For the proper understanding of this section it is necessary to understand the entire epistle to the Hebrews.” In these verses, the writer pulls together everything he has been saying so far. He paints a beautiful picture of Christ, and he shows us beyond any doubt that the Old Testament was only a shadow of the better things to come, which we have in Jesus.

Verse 13      *“The ashes of a heifer”*—The ashes of a red heifer were mixed in water and used to cleanse anyone who touched a dead body and made themselves unclean. See Numbers chapter 19.

Verse 14      *“The blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God”*—If the eternal Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit, we see our triune God working together for our salvation. This term could also refer to Jesus’ divine nature. Using that interpretation, the writer is saying Jesus’ sacrifice is greater because he is the eternal Son of God.

### Discuss

1. What tabernacle did Jesus enter?
2. What blood did Jesus offer as the High Priest?
3. Put these two thoughts together. Why is the hope Jesus offers us greater than the hope offered to the people under the old covenant?
4. The new covenant is superior to the old. How do the following phrases testify to its superiority?
  - “the promised eternal inheritance”
  - “free from the sins committed under the first covenant.”

### Apply

5. Under the banner of pluralism, we are being told to be more tolerant of all religions as equal paths back to God. How do the words about eternal redemption in the blood of Christ reinforce the truth that the Christian faith has the only hope of salvation?

*By virtue of his holy, perfect blood, Jesus entered heaven. Through faith in his blood, we will follow him there.*

# Hebrews 9:16-28

## The importance of Jesus' blood

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 99-105)*

### Look

The writer introduces this section by introducing the idea of a will. The writer is comparing God's covenants with a human last will and testament. His simple point of comparison is this: Someone or something must die for a will to go into effect.

Verse 20      *"The blood of the covenant"*—See Exodus 24:1-8 for this account. The blood of the covenant is the blood that had to be shed in order for God's covenant to go into effect. This is a general principle for all time. If there is to be forgiveness, blood must be shed for God's justice to be satisfied.

Verse 25      *"Again and again"*—Once again, the writer focuses on the imperfect nature of the service performed by the priests in the Old Testament. They had to repeat it again and again. Jesus, however, purified heaven once by his blood (verse 23).

Verse 27      *"Die once"*—The onetime finality of our death illustrates the onetime nature of Jesus' death for sins. After we die once, we face the judgment. After Jesus died once for sin, he did not repeat that act. He will return to judge all people.

### Discuss

1. As we have seen throughout the book of Hebrews, the writer must combat the idea that Jesus' death proved he was helpless. He also had to combat the idea that no true act of salvation could ever come through someone's death. In this regard, what point does the writer make in verses 16 and 17?
2. The Old Testament laws were never meant to be an end in themselves. They were to teach some truth that found its fulfillment only in the coming Savior. What lesson does the law teach us according to verses 18 to 22?
3. The copies of the heavenly things were the tabernacle and its contents. The real thing, heaven, also had to be purified. Since heaven is pure, why does it have to be purified?

### Apply

4. The blood of Christ shed for us is something intense and real. Satan loves to lead people away from the blood of the Lamb and focus them on their own feelings and emotions as a way to feel close to God. How could this happen in worship? in a sermon? in Bible class?

*Unless blood is shed, which alone can purify heaven so we can live there, there is no forgiveness.*

# Hebrews 10:1-18

## Christ made the perfect sacrifice, once for all

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 105-114)*

### Look

- Verse 11      *“Day after day”*—Once again, the writer emphasizes the imperfection of the Old Testament law. As valuable as it was, it was only designed to prepare the world for the Savior.
- Verses 15-18    The writer continually draws his teaching from the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit pointed to the completed work of Christ when through Jeremiah, God promised to put his law in our hearts and remember our sins no more.

### Discuss

1. What does the writer call the entire Old Testament system of ceremonies and regulations?
2. In verses 5 to 7, the writer offers another passage from the Old Testament that promised a new thing. What new thing would replace the Old Testament shadows?
3. Many (it would not be unfair to say most) Old Testament Jewish people thought it was God's will that they continue to offer sacrifices to God indefinitely. How would you summarize God's deepest will for Israel and for the entire world?
4. See Psalm 51:16-19, which the writer quotes here. How did David show that he fully understood this truth concerning sacrifices?
5. Some early Jewish Christians may have been confronted with this challenge: “If the Messiah truly has come, then why does the world still go on as it has, with sin and Satan still exercising their influence? Why hasn't David's perfect kingdom returned?” How would you answer these questions on the basis of verse 13?

### Apply

6. The heavy emphasis on the blood of Christ as a secure covenant of forgiveness helps us appreciate the blessings we have in Holy Communion. How so?

*The Old Testament sacrifices were necessary for a time. But the body Jesus offered has done what the Old Testament sacrifices could never do, gain permanent forgiveness for the world.*

# Hebrews 10:19-25

## The call to persevere

(*The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 115-121*)

### Look

Our writer has taught us about the great hope we have in Jesus. Jesus is God's Son; a true man, made like us, to save us; the giver of true rest; a son, not a servant, in God's house; the Great High Priest; the once-for-all sacrifice for sin; the one who established a new covenant. In this section, the writer encourages us to remain true to our faith in Jesus.

Verse 23        *"Hope"*—In English the word *hope* usually conveys a sense of uncertainty regarding the outcome. For example, "I hope she gets well." In Scripture, however, the word *hope* is used for an established fact. It is called hope only because we are still waiting to receive it.

### Discuss

1. Our hard work so far in this study has prepared us to understand the beautiful words of these verses. Explain each phrase in the light of what we have heard so far.
  - "to enter the Most Holy Place"
  - "by the blood of Jesus"
  - "a new and living way . . . through the curtain"
  - "a great high priest over the house of God"
  - "bodies washed with pure water"
2. Why do you think it was such a great temptation for the early Jewish Christians to give up meeting with their fellow Christians?
3. Why is God's faithfulness the ultimate encouragement for us to remain firm?
4. What does the writer mean by the word "Day"? (verse 25)

### Apply

5. What is the best way you can spur your fellow Christians on toward love and good deeds?

*The blessings we have in Christ, and the hope he has given us, inspire us to remain firm in faith.*

# Hebrews 10:26-39

## Don't throw away your confidence

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 121-128)*

### Discuss

1. What does the writer have in mind when he speaks about “deliberately keep on sinning” and “no sacrifice for sins is left”?
2. Discuss the following strong phrases the author uses to describe what a person actually does when he or she falls away from faith.
  - “trampled the Son of God under foot”
  - “treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him”
  - “insulted the Spirit of grace”
3. In verse 31 we read, “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Why do Christians need to hear strong warnings such as those in this section?
4. Once again, the writer quoted from the Old Testament (Habakkuk 2:3,4). What three lessons do these verses teach us?
5. Why was the writer so confident of his readers?

### Apply

6. In the light of verses 32 to 34, look at your own life. How might an earlier time of your life in Christ serve to encourage you now?

*Hold on to your hope in Christ! Do not crucify Christ again. Keep the faith, for you have suffered so much, and know that the Lord will richly reward you.*

# Hebrews 11:1-8

## The first believers and their faith

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 128-134)*

### Look

Hebrews chapter 11 gives examples of men and women who heard God's promises and knew for certain that they would come true. Their faith shaped their lives. It determined how they dealt with their problems, how they obeyed God's commands, and how they faced death.

Verse 7        *"By his faith he condemned the world."* Noah believed God's Word about the flood. He put his faith into practice and was no doubt ridiculed by the people of the world. Yet their mockery of his faith only served to condemn them.

### Discuss

1. What is the writer's definition of faith? Contrast this definition with the more common definition: "Faith is trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins." Can you see how the writer's definition fits with the context of this book?
2. Why did Abel's faith (1) make his sacrifice acceptable, (2) bring God's commendation, and (3) enable him to continue speaking?
3. How does the writer describe Enoch's faith? (Hint: See the end of verse 6.)
4. What was the unseen thing Noah saw by faith? How did this shape his life? What is the relation of faith in God's short-term promises to faith in his long-term promises?

### Apply

5. See 2 Corinthians 2:15,16. What two things always happen when we, like Noah, confess our faith?

*Faith is being sure of what we do not see. Such faith shaped the lives of God's saints.*

# Hebrews 11:8-16

## What Abraham's faith led him to do

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 133-137)*

### Discuss

1. When God commanded Abraham to move his household and live in Canaan, he obeyed. Why did his faith make it possible for him to be content to live in tents? (verses 8,9)
2. Like Noah's faith, Abraham's faith in the Promised Land was linked to his faith in something more long term. What was that? (verse 10)
3. Why was Abraham able to become the father of Isaac and the father of many nations?
4. Abraham could have returned to Haran and lived in comfort with his relatives. Yet he obeyed God and became a tent dweller in Canaan. Do you think he ever wanted to return to Haran?

### Apply

5. As Christians, of what country are we citizens?
6. What have you left behind in order to be a citizen of heaven? Do you ever long to go back to these things?
7. How does verse 16 help us when we are tempted to return to the spiritual country we left?
8. It has been said of Christians that "they are so heavenly minded that they are worthless for anything important on this earth." How would you answer such a false charge against the Christian faith?

*Abraham was content to live in tents. By faith he saw his eternal, permanent home.*

# Hebrews 11:17-28

## Heroes of faith from Abraham to Moses

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 137-145)*

### Discuss

1. We often focus on Abraham's love for Isaac as the main thing with which he had to struggle when God commanded him to sacrifice his son. But according to these verses, what greater problem did Abraham have to wrestle with?
2. How did Abraham resolve the dilemma?
3. Why was it an act of faith for Isaac to pass on God's blessing to Jacob?
4. Jacob also blessed each of his sons, giving Judah a special blessing. How did Jacob's faith enable him to give these blessings?
5. What did Joseph want done to his bones? Why was this an act of faith?
6. It is not clear what Moses' parents saw in him that prompted them to save him. Yet somehow they knew their son would do great things for Israel. What did Moses' parents believe about the future of Israel that prompted them to save their son?
7. Moses was a man who had it all. Yet what was he willing to do with his wealth and status? Why did he choose to be mistreated along with God's people?
8. What invisible thing did Moses see that enabled him to keep the Passover?

*Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses all afford us examples of people who looked ahead to something they could not see and let that unseen thing dictate their decisions in life. All of them knew of the eternal inheritance God would give them someday.*

# Hebrews 11:29-40

## The Israelites, Rahab, and many more

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 145-151)*

### Discuss

1. What enabled the Israelites to walk through the Red Sea on dry ground?
2. Why did the Egyptians drown when they attempted to cross the Red Sea?
3. What invisible thing did the Israelites see that kept them marching around Jericho?
4. What invisible thing led Rahab to save the spies?
5. As time allows, think about the believers mentioned in verses 32 to 38. What kept them going? Why isn't the world worthy of such people?
6. The writer says that the faith of these people would be made perfect only together with us. What does this mean? Someday our faith will be made perfect. When will that be?

### Apply

7. What invisible things has God promised for you? Pick one of those things, and tell how it has shaped your life and guided your decisions.
8. The people to whom Hebrews was written were being persecuted for their faith. Think of one time you suffered reproach or ridicule for your faith. Choose one person from Hebrews chapter 11 who either did, or could have, helped you through that time.

*People in the Old Testament endured much because they had God's promises. The writer describes the lives of these people, not to praise them but to encourage us. We have the same promises as they had.*

# Hebrews 12:1-6

## Fix your eyes on Jesus

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 151-155)*

### Look

In this chapter, the writer masterfully brings everything together and gives us encouragement and warning that cannot but move our hearts to want to hold on to our faith.

### Discuss

1. What does the writer call the people he has just told us about in chapter 11?
2. Describe “perseverance” in this context.
3. Jesus is the final witness, who gives us the ultimate pattern of faith. What did Jesus see by faith that led him to endure the cross?
4. Jesus is more than an example (verse 3). What role does Jesus play in our faith? (verse 2)
5. Why do you think the writer mentions the opposition from sinful men that Jesus endured?
6. Remember, the people to whom this letter was written were being persecuted. Their enemies were saying, “How can you think God is on your side. Look at all you are suffering. How can a loving God send all this into your life?” How would you answer? (verses 5,6)

### Apply

7. The writer pictures us running in a race—not in a modern track meet but in an ancient marathon through rugged and brushy terrain. What are some things that hinder our race that we should throw off? (verse 1)

*Look at Jesus, who gave us hope and serves as an example of suffering for one's faith. Do not despise God's discipline but treasure it as evidence of a loving God.*

# Hebrews 12:7-17

## The Lord's loving discipline

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 155-162)*

### Look

Verse 17      *"He could bring about no change of mind."* This refers to Esau's father's mind. Isaac intended to bless Esau, but through God's intervention (and Jacob and Rebekah's deceit), the blessing was given to Jacob. Once given, it could not be reversed. Esau had despised the blessing he had by birth and lost it.

### Discuss

1. Complete the following sentence: "We are often tempted to view hardship as \_\_\_\_\_." What does the writer want us to view it as?
2. Compare God's discipline with that of our human fathers as to (1) its perfection and (2) its purpose and result.
3. How might we, like Esau, miss out on the grace of God?
4. Review the story of Esau selling his birthright. Recall how later he cried to his father to give him the blessing after his father had given it to Jacob. How does this story provide a warning for the Hebrew Christians? for Christians of all times?

### Apply

5. How has the Lord increased your righteousness and peace through the persecution he has sent into your life?
6. Think again about the picture of a race. In the context of this book, what are some ways Christians strengthen their arms and knees and make level paths for their feet?

*The writer continues to encourage us to submit to God's discipline. He also warns us against letting the sins of life rob us of our blessings, as Esau did.*

# Hebrews 12:18-29

## Two mountains to choose from

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 162-169)*

### Discuss

1. Which was the first mountain? Why was it so frightening?
2. Ponder each element in this description of the mountain that we Christians call our home.
  - “heavenly Jerusalem”
  - “city of the living God”
  - “angels in joyful assembly”
  - “church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven”
  - “to God, the judge of all men”
  - “spirits of righteous men made perfect”
  - “Jesus the mediator of a new covenant”
  - “the sprinkled blood”
3. Evaluate this statement: “Either Abel’s blood or Christ’s blood will speak about you on the Last Day.”
4. “The greater the message, the greater the punishment if the message is rejected.” Apply that truth to these verses.

### Apply

5. Which foundation can be shaken? Which cannot? On which foundation do you want to be found standing on the Last Day?

*We are now living on Mount Zion, citizens of the new Jerusalem. We will not be destroyed when the earth is shaken. Let us never reject Jesus' blood of the new covenant.*

# Hebrews 13:1-8

## Heavenly minded Christians love those around them

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 169-175)*

### Look

The writer concludes with exhortations to persecuted Christians. As you read this section, try to keep in mind the situation in which the readers found themselves. Although some of these exhortations are more general, others address special temptations and problems encountered by people facing persecution. We are not immune to persecution. Times of persecution may be right around the corner. We can take these words to heart.

### Discuss

1. During times of persecution, many Christians are forced to flee, and some end up in prison. Considering the danger of such times, what temptation do their fellow Christians—those whose lives are not yet touched by persecution—face?
2. In these verses, the writer uses both the law and the gospel. How does he use the law to warn us against sexual immorality? How does he use the gospel to encourage us not to be greedy?
3. Why might it be a temptation to disregard the words of a pastor or teacher during times of persecution?
4. The world's policies toward Christians will shift and change, but Jesus never will. What encouragement does this give to people who are being persecuted for their faith?

### Apply

5. Look at the two verses the writer quotes (Deuteronomy 31:6 and Psalm 118:6,7). What specific thing might you do this week to apply these passages to your life?

*In times of persecution, help fellow believers who are being persecuted, keep yourself morally pure, trust the Lord, and honor your spiritual leaders.*

# Hebrews 13:9-16

## Center your worship on the sacrifice of Christ, not on human rituals

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 174-179)*

### Look

- Verse 9            *“Not by ceremonial foods”*—This was special food commanded under the Old Testament law. “Holiness comes not from outward ritual but from Christ’s redeeming work and God’s sanctifying grace” (The People’s Bible, *Hebrews*, page 175).
- Verse 10           *“Those who minister at the tabernacle”*—The writer is referring to those who served under the old covenant. He does not reject their office and motivation for serving. But as old covenant priests, they have no right to serve at Christ’s altar where his body and blood were offered for us.

### Discuss

1. In this world we always live “outside the camp.” What does this mean? How do we go outside the camp?
2. Why are you content to bear the disgrace of Christ?
3. Just because Christians do not offer animal sacrifices does not mean they don’t sacrifice to God. What are some of the sacrifices we bring to God?

### Apply

4. The writer encourages us to be strengthened by grace. How can we do this?
5. Name one sacrifice you will give to the Lord this week, perhaps something you may be withholding from him or some part of your heart that you have roped off for yourself.

*Christians still offer sacrifices on a greater altar than the one at the tabernacle. We offer the sacrifice of our lives and our lips in service to God.*

# Hebrews 13:17-25

## Final instructions to beloved Christians

*(The People's Bible, Hebrews, pages 179-185)*

### Discuss

1. Why do Christians submit to the authority of their spiritual leaders?
2. In addition to our obedience, what do our spiritual leaders expect and need from us?
3. Look at each phrase, and explain why it adds to the beauty and power of this final prayer.
  - “the God of peace”
  - “blood of the eternal covenant”
  - “back from the dead”
  - “our Lord Jesus”
  - “Shepherd of the sheep”
  - “equip you”
  - “work in us”
  - “to whom be glory for ever and ever”
4. Why do you think the writer thinks this is only a short letter?
5. The writer closes his letter with these words: “Grace be with you all.” Why are these words a very appropriate closing?

### Apply

6. Discuss some of the ways we can be obedient to our leaders.

*The writer closes by reminding us of the tremendous hope we have in our Savior and by encouraging us to hold on to this hope and to serve the Lord.*