

Study Questions

The Letter to the Hebrews

by William Barclay

Letter to the Hebrews

- Kick-Off Meeting**
- I. Distribute Books and Materials
 - II. Ice Breaker

Lesson 1 **INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS** (page 1)
up to but not including

v. 1:1-3

ABOVE THE ANGELS (page 19)

1. The author of our commentary, Barclay, says there are at least 4 ways to view religion. Name three. What was Paul's conception of religion?
2. Just before Hebrews we studied the Gospel of John. How did John view religion when writing that Gospel? How does Barclay say the author of Hebrews view religion?
3. What did the author of Hebrews claim that Jesus enabled us to do?
4. When was Hebrews written? Who authored Hebrews?
5. What does the author of Hebrews say in the opening verses about God's communication with mankind?
6. On page 17, Barclay explains the meaning behind two Greek words that the writer to the Hebrews uses. What were the words and which one helped you to understand the passage better and why?

Lesson 2 **ABOVE THE ANGELS** (page 19)
up to but not including

v. 1:3-2:18

GREATER THAN THE GREATEST (page 33)

1. Why is it important to Hebrew's author to show that Jesus is superior to angels?
2. Barclay talks about angels for frost, rain, lightning and recording angels who wrote everything down. Barclay says, "Every nation had its guardian angel who had the *prostasia*, the presidency over it." Or one could say each nation had a patron angel. If this all this sounds funny consider for a moment why March 15th is so important to those of Irish decent.
3. Hebrews argues that what Jesus had to teach is more important than the Ten Commandments. Why did he believe this?
4. Barclay explains the potential meanings for the Greek word *Pararrein*. What do you think of the alternate translation Barclay provides for v2:1 on page 25?
5. Which two categories of sin, according to the law, would bring punishment?

GREATER THAN THE GREATEST (page 33)

Lesson 3 *up to but not including*

v. 3:1-4:13

THE PERFECT HIGH PRIEST (page 49)

1. Hebrews talks about houses and house builders when discussing Jesus' importance compared to Moses'. In your own words what is the proof the author of Hebrews gives?
2. What does the Greek word *katanoein* mean in the context of the scripture passage? What about the reference to Luke v12:24?
3. Toward the end of Chapter 3, Hebrews talks about a Provocation (Barclay's translation capitalizes the word.) The Bishop's New American Bible translates the word as rebellion without capitalization. What is the event that is referenced and what were the consequences?
4. Chapter 4 talks about the rest of God, *katapausis*. Barclay says our letter's author use it 3 ways, which Barclay then explains 6 ways. Summarize in your own words.
5. What do you think about the alternate translation of v4:1 on page 44?
6. What is extra ordinary about the Greek word *tetrachēlismenos*?

THE PERFECT HIGH PRIEST (page 49)

Lesson 4 *up to but not including*

v. 4:14-6:3

CRUCIFYING CHRIST AGAIN (page 66)

1. Hebrews says in v4:16 we can, "... confidently approach his throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help as need demands" and tells us why we can be confident. What reason(s) does this Epistle give that we can approach confidently?
2. How does the writer to the Hebrews stress the sheer greatness of Jesus?
3. How does the story about Professor John Foster's daughter illuminate how God loves, forgives and identifies with us through his only Son?
4. At the beginning of Chapter 5, Hebrews lists three essential characteristics of a priest. What are those three?
5. According to the Jews, were sins due to emotion, impulse, or passion, considered sins of ignorance or sins of presumption?
6. The Greek word *Teleioun* is translated as perfect. What is the writer to the Hebrews saying in regards to Jesus' experience and his perfection? What kind of hope does it give to us for when we are suffering?
7. In Chapter v5:11-12 does the author of Hebrews call his readers "babies"? Is he being insulting? What is going on?
8. In Chapter 5 we get down to the crux or reason for this epistle. What two difficulties is the author trying to address?
9. What does the author mean when he uses the Greek word *Teleiotēs* to describe the learning path of the epistle's audience?

CRUCIFYING CHRIST AGAIN (page 66)

Lesson 5 *up to but not including*

v. 6:4-20

THE TRUE KING AND THE TRUE PRIEST (page 85)

1. How do we crucify Christ again? How does that put your “trespasses” in perspective?
2. How do we make a mocking show of the crucifixion of Christ? How do Barclays's final words on v6:4-8 affect you?
3. In "The Brighter Side", what extraordinary detail does Barclay describe about names and the Bible. Have you considered this before?
4. Who is Melchizedek?
5. Why is Melchizedek important to our Epistle's author's discussion of Jesus as the High Priest?
6. What is the difference between the priesthood of Aaron and that of Melchizedek?
7. The Latin word for priest is *potifex*. What does it mean?
1. What were the four meanings that scholarly Jews (and current bible study participants) believed were layered in Scripture.

THE TRUE KING AND THE TRUE PRIEST (page 85)

Lesson 6 *up to but not including*

v. 7:1-28

THE WAY TO REALITY (page 102)

2. On pages 86-88 Barclay gives 4 thoughts concerning the search peace in one's life. Which of the four best describes you?
3. The primary reason the author of Hebrews gives for cancelling the old covenant (The Law) is that Jesus doesn't fit The Law; he is not of the tribe of Levi. Does cancelling the whole of The Law because Jesus is of the tribe of Judah make sense to you? Why or why not?
4. Hebrews 7:17 quotes from Psalm 110, "You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" saying it proves the Messiah's priesthood. Who other than our Hebrews author also said Psalm 110 referred to the Messiah? (See Matthew v22:41-46)
5. What is interesting about the use of the Greek word *paramenein* and its application to Jesus?
6. How is Jesus, as fully human, different than us?

THE WAY TO REALITY (page 102)

Lesson 7 *up to but not including*

v. 8:1-9:10

THE SACRIFICE WHICH OPENS THE WAY TO GOD (page 121)

1. The beginning of chapter 8 gives Jesus a new title, the minister of the sanctuary and real tabernacle. What is the significance of the word “real” in that title?
2. On page 104 Barclay tells us the “the supreme function” of any priest (bridge-builder, apostle, mediator.) What does he say that supreme function is?
3. In chapter 8, how does the author of the letter to the Hebrews provide another comparison of Jesus' priesthood to the Levitical priesthood?
4. Barclay takes more than a page to tell us that the Greek word that has been translated “covenant” is not the usual word but rather *diatheke*, which typically means “will”. Why is this important?
5. Describe, in your own words, the “Day of Atonement”. What is the purpose of the Day of Atonement?

Lesson 8 **THE SACRIFICE WHICH OPENS THE WAY TO GOD** (page 121)
up to but not including
THE FINALITY OF CHRIST (page 138)

v. 9:11-10:10

1. What four ways are animal sacrifices different from Jesus' sacrifice of himself? Do you have any additions?
2. On page 126 and 127 it says that Jesus sacrifice of himself accomplished two things simultaneously. What are those two things?
3. The last paragraph of this section really brings home the reason for the extra ordinary nature of Jesus' sacrifice. What do you think of its argument?
4. Barclay says (pg 130), "We are to think of Christianity not in terms of Church membership but in terms of intimate fellowship with God." Do you agree or disagree? – Before you answer, in which way do you lead your life?
5. Chapter 9 repeatedly talks about this world and man's religion as pale copies of the original. Where did this concept come from/originate? Explain it in your own terms.
6. In the end, what makes the difference with how Christ will judge us?
7. What proof is given that the repetition of the ritual sacrifices under the law are ineffective at purifying human souls and not giving full and uninterrupted access to God?

Lesson 9 **THE FINALITY OF CHRIST** (page 138)
up to but not including
THE CHRISTIAN HOPE (page 152)

v. 10:11-39

1. Compared to animal sacrifices made by the priests, which had to be repeated, Christ's one time sacrifice, is good forever. Why?
2. How is Jesus' flesh the veil through which we enter the presents of God?
3. The writer of Hebrews outlines three duties of Christians. What are those three duties?
4. The second duty is to worship together. We have often heard in our discussions the question "what do I say to my friends who see no benefit in church attendance?" Does the discussion on pages 144 and 145 help?
5. What can we do to improve the greatest handicap of the Church?
6. Have you ever been in the situation where you have insulted the Holy Spirit. I.e. done something despite what we knew was wrong?

Lesson 10 **THE CHRISTIAN HOPE** (page 152)
up to but not including
THE ADVENTURE AND PATIENCE OF FAITH (page 169)

v. 11:1-7

1. Our text says, "To the writer to the Hebrews faith is absolutely certain that what it believes is true and that what it expects will come." Is your faith this strong? Do you have doubts? Why is this so apparently easy for Hebrews' writer so say this and believe it?
2. What is your reaction to taking a single imprecise line from Genesis (v5:24) as the point from which we then have 7 pages of discussion concerning death? Before reading this how familiar were you with the Enoch legends? Do you find it interesting how much thought came from this one line?
3. At the end of page 155, Barclay extracts an interesting point about v11:3. Who would have thought that the writer to the Hebrews was an environmentalist?
4. Barclay discusses 8 views of death on pages 160- 165. How do you view death? Have you ever known anyone (yourself even) who truly viewed death without trepidation as "who have seen death as an entering into the nearer presence of him"?

THE ADVENTURE AND PATIENCE OF FAITH (page 169)

Lesson 11 *up to*

v. 11:8-22

FAITH AND ITS SECRET (page 183)

1. Barclay says Abraham's faith was the faith of adventure and goes on to say that. "It is sometimes necessary for the Christian to take the way to which the voice of God is calling him without knowing what the consequences will be." Do you personally aspire to this? If not why not, what are your thoughts?
2. Do you know of an example of faithfully "Believing the Incredible"?
3. From the discussion on page 174, what word has no place in the vocabulary of the church?
4. In what way did Abraham escape the test that God set for him. How is that an example for us when considering the "Our Father"?
5. The patriarchs are often viewed as nomadic herders – those who of normal course moved their animals from pasture to pasture. Both Hebrews and Barclay talk about them being strangers or foreigners upon the land. Are those different thoughts? What are your thoughts on the subject?

FAITH AND ITS SECRET (page 183)

Lesson 12 *up to*

v. 11:23-40

THE RACE AND THE GOAL (page 202)

1. What is extraordinary about Moses' arrangements for the Passover? What does it say about his faith?
2. Both Moses and Judas (Jericho's city walls) acted in unrealistic ways because of God's revelation and were rewarded by fortuitous but unexplainable results. Is this kind of unscientific faith and unnatural result restricted to Biblical times? Why are there few if any "modern" examples?
3. Were you previously aware of the story of Antiochus Epiphanies' persecution of Jews 167 – 160 b.c.? How is it similar or dissimilar to the Roman persecution of the Christians?
4. In v11:35-40, why does the writer to the Hebrews allude to the Macabaeans rather than describe it directly?

THE RACE AND THE GOAL (page 202)

Lesson 13 *up to*

v. 12:1-24

THE GREATER OBLIGATION (page 221)

1. Our text says "In Christian life we have a goal." Consider how different that is from a true atheist's life. From a strictly earthly point of view, is this Christian goal a blessing or a curse? Does it make living your life easier or more trying?
2. Hebrews' writer sees affliction as a positive thing, "discipline the Lord sends." "Why me?" has been an issue throughout Christian history. Have you personally come to grips with this? Have you ever even had to deal with this?
3. Read again page 213 with our liturgical Sign of Peace in mind. Does Barclay's discussion about Jewish thought and language concerning this subject add to your understanding of what we do in Mass? How?
4. What point does the writer to the Hebrews make about the difference between the spilled blood of Abel and Jesus?

THE END OF THE BOOK (page 238)

1. What is the difference that the writer to the Hebrews makes between Jesus and Moses?
2. The author of Hebrews advises his readers not to “refuse to listen to His voice.” Is this easy or difficult for you? Do you have trouble hearing the voice in the first place? Is the voice absent in your life or is there some aspect(s) of refusal?
3. How did the circumstances of the early church threaten the community?
4. According to Barclay, what is the definition of a saint? Have you known anyone who fit that definition?
5. Take a look at Chapter 13:20-21 again. This is a prayer for his readers. You are a reader so this prayer/blessing doesn't just apply to those ancient readers it is for you too. How does that thought affect you?
6. Our religious belief, in fact our societal mores (customs, morals), is often referred to as Judeo-Christian. So the thought is of a continuum, that Christian ethics have a foundation of the Jewish beliefs. The author of The Letter to the Hebrews gives a somewhat unique early Christian view of the joint between that Jewish foundation and Christianity. What is anything is/are your take-aways?