

Hebrews

IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE QUESTIONS

Welcome

“You are approaching the ‘word of God’. But for thousands of years, ... the Word of God has been approaching you.”

The following guide is provided to enhance your reading of the Letter to the Hebrews using the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*. If you are new to this resource or to reading the Bible, we recommend you read the general Introduction before you begin. It explains what it means that Scripture is the Word of God as well as how we understand and interpret it as Catholics. It also introduces the special features of the Study Bible and tells how they can enrich your reading and study.

A simple rhythm of prayer followed by reading and reflection is offered below to guide you through the book one chapter at a time. Questions draw attention to key footnotes and word studies to lead you into a deeper understanding of what you read and then prompt you to consider how to apply what you have learned. For a deeper dive, take advantage of additional features as you go: not just the other footnotes but also cross-references to Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* that are provided above the footnotes as well as any maps, charts, or essays that are not touched on in the questions.

Don't miss these helpful icons as you read! They highlight footnotes that pertain to the Church's criteria for interpreting Scripture (see CCC 112–14):



Be attentive to the content and unity of Scripture

Notes marked with a Bible icon connect Old Testament passages and New Testament mysteries, fostering appreciation for God's unified plan.



Read Scripture in light of the Church's living tradition

This icon marks notes drawn from the Holy Spirit's guidance of Church teaching and the spiritual senses of scripture. Here you'll find official teaching as well as interpretations from Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church.



Be attentive to the “analogy of faith”

Explore notes marked with an icon of keys to learn how the mysteries of faith, revealed in Scripture and defined by the Church, clarify and connect with one another in a unified, coherent way.

May God bless you as you read his word!

of God,* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself,[†] taking the form of a servant,[‡] being born in the likeness of men.[§] And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.[¶] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,^{||} that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,^{|||} and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Shinin
12 Therefore, obeyed, so now much more in salvation with f work in you, bo pleasure.
14 Do all thi tioning,¹⁵ that y children of God crooked and per

2:9–11: Rom 10:9; 14:9; Eph 1:20–21. 2:13: 1 Cor 15:10. 2

2:7 emptied himself: The Greek verb *kenōō* means “empty out” or “render void”. The idea is, not that Christ divested himself of divinity when he united himself with humanity, but that he restricted his rightful exercise of certain divine abilities during his earthly life and accepted certain limitations of the human condition. In effect, the Son of God made himself poor in order to make us rich with his grace (2 Cor 8:9) (CCC 472). • Christ emptied himself by compressing the glory of his Godhead within our smallness. What he always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what he assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinarius*).

2:8 death on a cross: The ultimate indignity. Death by crucifixion was the most awful and degrading form of criminal execution in the ancient world. The Romans reserved it for slaves and insurrectionists. See note on Mk 15:24.

2:9 exalted him: By raising him from the dead, enthroning him in heaven, and clothing his humanity with divine glory. A similar destiny awaits all who humble themselves as Jesus did (3:21; Lk 14:11).

2:10 every knee should bow: An allusion to the divine oath in Is 45:23. • Yahweh swore that all peoples, to the very end of the earth, would acknowledge his Lordship and bow before him in homage. Paul moves Christ into the center of this prophecy as the divine Lord destined to be revered by all. **heaven ... earth ... under the earth:** The three principal realms in the world view of ancient Israel (Ex 20:4). Homage will come from all creatures great and small—the angels and saints above, the family of man and beasts spread over the earth, and the dead and the demons of the underworld.

2:11 confess: I.e., acknowledge. Included in this open dec

serious that we pur sense of awe at sen the prospect of sinn Encouragement con readers that God's g desire (intention) at 21; CCC 308) (CC “work”, he address and trembling”, he good deeds were th not boast of your g within you (St. Augu **2:15 pervers** • Deuterono poetic lawsuit that and ingratitude du

A Thing to Harpagmos (G in the Greek O Occurrences of “robbery”. Its considerable d the leading vi (1) Some, like “something sel

Prepare

Read the Introduction to Hebrews, paying particular attention to the *Destination and Purpose* and the *Themes and Characteristics* of the book. What one thing stands out to you, that you would like to remember?

Read the Outline of Hebrews to get an overview of the book. What are its major divisions?

Pray

Use the following questions to guide your reading of Hebrews, going at a pace that is comfortable to you. Before you begin each new section, pray simply for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit, open my heart to hear and receive these words as what they truly are, the Word of God. Enlighten my understanding and give me grace to put what I read into practice in my life. Amen.

Read and Reflect

Read and reflect on Hebrews as follows:

- Pray before you read
- Read a section of biblical text by itself
- Read the text again, referring to the notes that accompany the text
- For deeper understanding and to aid in applying what you read, answer the questions that follow. The references at the top of each numbered question correspond to particular notes.

At the end of each chapter, review what you have written and linger where you feel drawn, asking the Lord to speak to your heart and into your life. What do you hear? Respond in prayer and ask his help to live what you hear in your attitudes and actions this week.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

For understanding

1. **1:1–4.** With what contrast does Hebrews open? What roles does Christ, who finalizes the saving purposes of God for the world, play in all this?
2. **1:3.** How does Christ “reflect the glory” of God? To what does the expression “stamp of his [God’s] nature” give testimony? Of what is Christ’s enthronement the beginning?
3. **1:5–13.** What purpose do the seven quotations from the OT serve? Taken together, what do they say about Christ?
4. **Word Study: First-born (1:6).** In ancient Israel, what distinction did the status of first-born son confer, both socially and religiously? How do the Mosaic and Davidic covenants set the stage for the New Covenant? How does the first-born sonship of Christ affect the rest of the family of faith?

For application

1. **1:1–2.** How does God speak to the world today? How does this manner of speaking affect you personally; that is, how do you “hear” him speaking to *you*?
2. **1:5.** As a child, when did you realize that you are in some ways like your parents? What did this realization mean to you? If you are a parent, what does your children’s resemblance to you mean to you? How do you “acknowledge” each of your children and their place in your family?
3. **1:5–14.** What do you believe about angels? According to these passages, what roles do they play? What do you believe about the existence of a “guardian angel” over you, and how have you experienced his intervention?

Chapter 2

For understanding

1. **2:1–18.** In continuing the discussion of angels, on what does Hebrews 2 focus? What contrast does the chapter make with regard to mediation of the Covenant?
2. **2:9.** When Jesus tasted death for the entire human family, of what was his act representative? What is the possible background for the expression “taste death”?
3. **2:15.** In what sense is the fear of death a form of bondage for us? What was Jesus’ response to it? How did this speak to the original readers of Hebrews?
4. **2:17.** What is emphasized in this passage about Christ’s priestly ministry? How does this emphasis evoke the divine oracle in 1 Sam 2:35? How did Jewish tradition understand this oracle?

For application

1. **2:1–4.** Why do these verses suggest you should pay greater attention to hearing the word of God? What do the gifts of the Holy Spirit (refer to 1 Cor 12:4–11) have to do with it? How have you seen these gifts operating in the proclamation of the gospel?
2. **2:8–9.** If, as the passage (including the reference to Ps 8:6) indicates, we do not yet see everything under mankind’s control, under whose control is everything? How is Jesus’ death the “grace of God”? How might this understanding be of comfort to you in times of suffering or distress?
3. **2:10–11.** How is it possible for the sinless Christ (called here the “pioneer of salvation”) to be made perfect through suffering? How does suffering perfect anyone?
4. **2:15.** Do you often think of your own death? When are such thoughts most likely to occur? What emotional reaction do they cause in you? What impact do such thoughts have on your faith in God?

Chapter 3

For understanding

1. **3:1.** Why are believers holy? Why are they brethren? Who is the “apostle” in this passage? How many other times in the NT is this word used of him?

2. **3:5–6.** What comparison is being made here? What is the significance of the word “house” in the author’s argument?
3. **3:7–11.** What is the difference between the Greek and the Hebrew versions of Ps 95:7–11, which Hebrews is quoting here? From which of these two versions is Hebrews quoting? What is the significance of this psalm for the author of Hebrews? How will people enter the land of rest that God has prepared for them?
4. **3:14.** About what does Hebrews warn Christian believers? What does the author urge readers to do in the face of this danger?

For application

1. **3:5.** According to this verse, what was Moses’ role, and what was his task? In what respect can you say that your role as a Christian is similar to that of Moses? What is your task, then?
2. **3:12–13.** According to verse 13, what causes an “evil, unbelieving heart”? How is sin deceitful? How willing are you to recognize the presence of sin in your own life? What is your understanding of what constitutes sin? Compare this understanding with that of the Catechism (CCC 1849–51; for an expanded discussion, refer to CCC 1846–76).
3. **3:15.** What might cause you to “harden your heart” when you hear the voice of God? Have you ever done that? What is the importance of the word “today” in this verse? How can you hear God’s voice today and keep your heart open to him?
4. **3:16–19.** What is the connection between disobedience and unbelief? Which do you think causes the other? Does failure to enter God’s “rest”—starting even in this life—result from God’s wrath or from the consequences of disobedience and unbelief?

Chapter 4

For understanding

1. **4:1–11.** What is the key word discussed in these verses? What does it mean to say that the author’s interpretation is typological? What are readers urged to do?
2. **4:4.** What passage of the OT is cited in this verse? What is the call to enter the day of rest a call to do?
3. **4:12.** How is the word of God both a weapon and a pledge? What OT passages illustrate this theme? How does the danger of “falling” by the “sword” recall the rebellion of the Exodus generation? What other OT passages compare the word of God to a sharpened sword?
4. **4:16.** What is the “throne of grace” to which the author refers? What is the OT background to this? What is Christ’s role before the heavenly throne?

For application

1. **4:2.** What can keep you from benefiting from hearing the Good News? Why, do you think?
2. **4:4–10.** What is your approach toward the Christian Sabbath (Sunday, the Lord’s day)? How do you use it to imitate God or to spend time with him? What may you need to change to make Sunday less a break from your job and more the kind of rest that God has in mind?
3. **4:11–13.** How do you approach the reading of Scripture or homilies at Mass? Although it is easy to imagine how the word of God (as read or preached) can be used as a weapon against others, how does it become a scalpel in the hands of God to reveal your own heart to you? Can you think of any occasions when hearing God’s word helped to reveal intentions that had lain buried, perhaps for years?
4. **4:15–16.** What do you think Jesus *really* thinks of you? How well do you think he understands the problems you face? How much do you think he actually *likes* you? How confident are you to approach the “throne of grace”—and how often do you do it to seek help for yourself when you need it?

Chapter 5

For understanding

1. **5:1–4.** Describe the difference between the way Aaronic priests are united with men and called by God from the way that Jesus is. Why is priestly ministry not a volunteer work that men can take upon themselves?
2. **5:5–6.** What do the two psalms cited in these verses have to say about the appointment of Jesus as high priest? What is the implied link between them?

3. **5:8.** What does it mean to say that Jesus learned obedience? What does suffering have to do with this?
4. **Word Study: Made Perfect (5:9).** What can the Greek word for “to complete” or “to perfect” be used to describe? In the Letter to the Hebrews, what two uses does the author give the term? On what two levels of meaning does the second use of the term (in reference to Jesus) operate?

For application

1. **5:4.** How might a man detect or discern that God is calling him to the priesthood? Has your family ever encouraged vocations to the priesthood or the religious life? If so, how did they do this? What was the result of this encouragement? Do you pray regularly for vocations?
2. **5:5.** Why is it dangerous to take upon yourself a ministry to which God has not called you? If you are not called to the priesthood or the religious life, to what kind of ministry in the Church do you think you *are* called? How can you verify that the call you sense is a true calling (as opposed to, say, mere ambition)?
3. **5:8.** Why would Jesus, of all people, need to learn obedience? Why, do you think, is suffering an appropriate way to learn it? Has God taught you obedience through difficulties?
4. **5:11–14.** How is it possible for a Christian who has grown up in the faith to become “dull of hearing”? If the author of Hebrews were to visit you or your parish, would he take a “back to the drawing-board” approach, or would he think you are ready for more advanced material? How is it a sign of maturity in Christ to be able “by practice to distinguish good from evil”?

Chapter 6

For understanding

1. **6:1–2.** What function do these verses serve? What three things was it necessary in this context to explain?
2. **6:4–8.** What warning do these verses convey to the baptized Christian? Where else in Hebrews is the prospect described here noted? What interpretation of this text is unwarranted and without basis?
3. **6:13–20.** What is the strong encouragement that readers are given in these verses? Why can God always be taken at his word? What accommodation did God make to our human weakness in his promise to bless the world through Abraham?
4. **6:14.** To what historic moment does the excerpt from Genesis 22:17 refer? What is the occasion? How does Christian tradition view this event?

For application

1. **6:4–6.** What do these verses suggest about the possibility of someone repenting for his apostasy? Look up CCC 679; a footnote to this paragraph refers to these verses from Hebrews. How does the *Catechism* understand Hebrews here?
2. **6:11–12.** Who is one of your patron saints (such as the saint for whom you are named or whose name you chose at Confirmation)? What problems with faith or with Christian behavior did your patron saint go through? Do these problems reflect the issues you face in your own life? What inspiration can you take from the saint’s faith and patience?
3. **6:16.** Why is an oath “final for confirmation” in disputed matters? What is an oath (look up CCC 2150)? Have you ever sworn something under oath? What was your attitude to the matter at hand as you swore the oath?
4. **6:19.** Why do you think the anchor is used as a symbol for the theological virtue of hope? What is anchored to what? Do you experience weakness in your own life related to the virtue of hope?

Chapter 7

For understanding

1. **7:1–28.** What is examined in these verses? On what two levels does the author’s discussion operate?
2. **Topical Essay: The Order of Melchizedek.** What exactly is the “order of Melchizedek”? What verse of the OT relates this priestly order to the Messiah? What four links does the essay make between Jesus and Melchizedek?
3. **7:3.** What is the significance of saying that Melchizedek and Jesus are “without” father or mother? Likewise, what does it mean to say they had neither “beginning” nor “end” of life?
4. **7:12.** According to this verse, a change in the priesthood necessarily involves what additional change? What biblical precedent exists in the OT for this type of change?

5. **7:27.** What two liturgical traditions does the author seem to be telescoping? How does this combined activity contrast to that of Christ? What does it mean to emphasize that the single sacrifice of Christ is performed “once for all”?

For application

1. **7:4–5.** What do you think is the purpose of a tithe? What is your responsibility for contributing to the support of the Church? What is your actual approach to it? If you were to calculate the amount of money you contribute annually to the Church, what percentage of your income would it represent?
2. **7:15–22.** What does it mean to say that a priest acts “in the person of Christ”? When you receive a sacrament from a validly ordained priest (for example, the Sacrament of Penance), how do you experience the person of Christ acting through that priest?
3. **7:25.** In union with Christ’s priesthood, what is one of the major functions of a priest? For whom does he exercise this function?
4. **7:26–28.** Christ, our High Priest, is sinless and perfectly holy. In what respect can you call all priests *holy*? In what does their holiness consist? If you are a priest, how can this holiness contribute to your own growth in virtue?

Chapter 8

For understanding

1. **8:1.** What function does the citation of Psalm 110 serve in Hebrews? As a messianic psalm, what does it describe?
2. **8:4.** Why would Jesus not be a priest at all in his own social and religious context?
3. **8:8–12.** Why does the author of Hebrews quote so extensively from Jer 31:31–34? How does Jeremiah contrast the Old Covenant with what he understands to be the new “covenant” that God will establish?
4. **8:13.** To what does the author of Hebrews allude that indicates that the Temple in Jerusalem was still standing when the book was written? How does the overall perspective of the letter confirm this indication?

For application

1. **8:1–6.** How does Catholic worship, which uses symbols and sacramental signs, differ from Mosaic worship done “according to the pattern ... shown” to Moses on Sinai? In what respect is Catholic worship the “real thing” and not a symbolic copy? (Hint: Reflect on the meaning of the first two verses.)
2. **8:10.** How deeply is the new law of God placed in your mind and written on your heart? Who puts it there? Who brings it alive there? How have your understanding and love of the law of God grown as a result?
3. **8:13.** Has your adherence to the Christian way of life matured since you were a child? In what respects does your growth in maturity resemble the transition from the “law written on stone” to the “law written on the heart”? Since there is still a “law”, how does the later stage of growth amount to growth in freedom?

Chapter 9

For understanding

1. **9:1–14.** Describe the layout of the Mosaic Tabernacle summarized here. Of what was the sanctuary proper composed? What is the significance of the first and the second chambers for the author? Thus, what is the connection with Christ?
2. **9:3.** What was the second curtain? What was the Holy of Holies, and what did it contain? What was inside the Ark?
3. **9:7.** What did the high priest do with the blood of the sacrifices performed for himself and the people? What was the significance of this annual event? What did these sacrifices accomplish?
4. **Topical Essay: Will or Covenant?** In translating the Greek word as “will” or “testament” (instead of “covenant”) in vv. 16–17, how do Scripture scholars explain their shift of terminology? As to *literary context*: How might one argue that the author of Hebrews is thinking of “covenant”, not a person’s “last will”? Does the *historical context* of testamentary practice lend support to this argument? What would be the benefit of adopting “covenant” as the translation? In light of the paraphrase with the revised translation in the essay, what is the author of Hebrews explaining?

For application

1. **9:8–10.** In addition to Christ’s action in a sacrament (such as the Eucharist), on what else does a sacrament rely for its effectiveness? What is the role of the communicant when it comes to the nourishment that Christ provides by his body and blood?

2. **9:11–14.** If Christ has “entered once for all into the Holy Place” by his atoning death on the Cross, what is the point of offering the Sacrifice of the Mass day after day? In your experience, what is the difference between a “dead work” and a live service?
3. **9:20–22.** If the life of the sacrificial animal is in the blood, and if forgiveness of sins requires the shedding of blood, what does Jesus’ blood in the Eucharist give us? By receiving the Eucharist (Jesus’ body and blood), what are you taking into yourself? Adapting the argument of Hebrews to a Christian context, why is it important to be in a state of grace to receive the Eucharist?
4. **9:27.** Why do Christians not believe in reincarnation? What Catholic doctrine does this verse call to mind? According to it, when does the judgment occur?

Chapter 10

For understanding

1. **10:1.** What does the expression “true form” imply about New Covenant worship?
2. **10:19–25.** To what do these verses call us? What are readers invited to enter? In what are they invited to grow?
3. **10:22.** What sacrament is alluded to in this verse? With what are sprinkling with blood and washing with water associated? How does this association hint at what the sacrament accomplishes in the Christian’s relationship with Christ? To what other sacrament might this verse refer?
4. **10:26.** For what kind of sin is sacrifice to no avail?

For application

1. **10:10–14.** By saying that we have been “sanctified . . . once for all”, is the author saying “once saved always saved”? If the door of salvation is open to everyone, what does everyone need to do in response?
2. **10:17–18.** What is the hardest thing you have ever had to forgive? How long did it take you to accomplish the act of forgiveness? What does God’s promise not to remember sin once it is forgiven imply for you when you are called on to forgive the sins of others against yourself?
3. **10:23–25.** These three verses exhort you to do four things; what are they? In what context do Catholic Christians regularly meet? Why is it important for Christians to meet regularly?
4. **10:38–39.** As you have grown older, what aspects of the Catholic faith have you been most tempted to shrink from embracing or holding onto? Rationalizations aside, what is the real cause of this reluctance? How do these verses suggest God views such reluctance?

Chapter 11

For understanding

1. **11:1–40.** What do these verses celebrate? How is the chapter organized? Through the array of biblical examples, what kinds of things does the author show faith as perceiving?
2. **11:13–16.** For what kind of home were the Patriarchs looking? How does Hebrews picture it? How were these transcendent realities symbolized on earth?
3. **11:23–28.** Through the example of Moses and his parents, what is the author trying to bring out regarding faith? What events in the life of Moses reveal this?
4. **11:32–38.** What are some of the specific examples of faithful judges, kings, prophets, and martyrs to whom the author alludes?

For application

1. **11:1–3.** How much faith do scientific explanations of the origin of the universe require of the modern mind? How might the “big bang” theory of the universe be compatible with the origin of the universe through the word of God? If the word of God can create the universe, what is your response when his word promises a destiny you cannot yet see?
2. **11:6.** Why is it impossible to please God without faith? What does it mean to “draw near to God”? How perfect does your faith have to be for you to draw near to him?
3. **11:13–16.** Why is belief in an afterlife not unrealistic? When you think of death, do you also think of heaven? What are your fears, concerns, and hopes when you think of these things?

4. **11:32–38.** When measured by the amount of time you spend, how important is your faith to you, especially in relation to other aspects of life (such as your career, your marriage or vocation, your athletic or artistic interests)? How important may others who know you well think your faith is to you? On what might they base this opinion? What would you be willing to give up to preserve your faith?

Chapter 12

For understanding

1. **12:1.** At what does the image of the faithful departed surrounding believers and cheering them on hint? What does it show about the Church? What does it mean to “lay aside every weight”? To “run with perseverance”?
2. **12:5–6.** What does the citation from Prov 3:11–12 teach about divine discipline? What does the author want readers to see about both God and suffering?
3. **12:14.** For what is the author of Hebrews urging readers to strive? How important is holiness to our personal salvation? How is that salvation described in the text?
4. **Word Study: Mediator (12:24).** What is a mediator? Of whom is this term used in the NT? How did Moses function as a mediator? Why is Christ a more perfect mediator? What does Christ mediate and administer?

For application

1. **12:1.** The 20th century has been a century of numerous saints—some canonized, some well known and in the process of being canonized, and some perhaps unrecognized. How many of them can you recall? How influential has this “cloud of witnesses” been on your own practice of the faith?
2. **12:5–11.** How has God acted in your life to discipline you? What were some of the issues you faced when you needed discipline? Have you ever asked for God to provide the discipline you need to grow in holiness? If you have, what was the result? If not, why not?
3. **12:14–15.** Has bitterness ever affected your relationships with other Christians? How might a small seed of bitterness grow to cause problems for an entire community? When you feel that you have been wronged, how quickly do you act to forgive and restore the relationship?
4. **12:25–29.** Why do you think God allows events to happen that “shake” people’s faith? According to these verses, what is the purpose of this shaking? Has your own faith ever been shaken—and did it grow stronger or weaker as a result?

Chapter 13

For understanding

1. **13:4.** To whom does the standard of chastity apply? What does it prohibit?
2. **13:5.** Why is the love of money a deadly vice? What does God’s promise to Joshua of care and protection show about God?
3. **13:10.** To what does the reference to the altar most likely refer? What are five reasons to think that the Eucharist is a significant, even if not obvious, element in the theology of Hebrews?
4. **13:12.** What final connection does the author make with the Day of Atonement liturgy in reference to being “outside the gate”? For the author of Hebrews, what does this connection signify? How does it challenge the readers?

For application

1. **13:3.** With the steady rise of the prison population—including the population of Christian prisoners—in this country, do you “remember” them “as though in prison with them”? For example, do you often pray for prison inmates? If you do not “remember” prisoners in any way, what do you think Jesus would want you to do about that?
2. **13:4.** What is the attitude of our culture toward honoring marriage? How might this cultural attitude color your own attitude? How may chastity be practiced even within marriage?
3. **13:15.** What is a “sacrifice of praise”? How might praise become a sacrifice? If praise is the “fruit of lips that acknowledge” the name of Jesus, how does your own prayer reflect that? How do you praise him when you least feel like doing it?
4. **13:13–14.** As a Catholic Christian, is there anything that makes you uncomfortable about a wholehearted practice of the faith? How comfortable are you with the idea that your Catholic Christianity involves suffering some sort of “abuse”, such as ridicule, from people whose respect you might like to have? Does that abuse lead to recognition that v. 14 is truer than you might have thought?