



LifeLight

"In Him was life, and that life was the light of men." John 1:4

Hebrews



LEADERS GUIDE



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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 7.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;
- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator *(optional; the director may fill this role)*

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. **(Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 00.)** There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than 12 participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (see p. 63);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;

- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion-leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week’s work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week’s lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week’s assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of 12 or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week’s

study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). They will follow the same schedule. The discussion leader will obtain the leaflets from the director. The congregation may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources for Hebrews

The Lutheran Study Bible, English Standard Version. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. This Bible contains over 26,500 uniquely Lutheran study notes; over 80,000 cross-references; 120 full or half-page maps, charts, and diagrams; 220-plus articles and introductions to Biblical books and topics; and 31,000 concordance entries.

Kleinig, John. *Concordia Commentary: Hebrews.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017. This commentary by emeritus professor of exegetical theology in Australian Lutheran College (formerly Luther Seminary) in Adelaide, Australia proposes an interpretation that uses a new kind of liturgical rhetoric, and a new consideration of the context and purpose of the homi-

ly known as the book of Hebrews.

Bruce, F. F. *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964; revised and enlarged, 1990. A helpful resource, carefully expounds the many analogies drawing heavily on the Old Testament and their fulfillment in Christ (typology).

Concordia Self-Study Bible, New International Version. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. Interpretive notes on each page form a running commentary on the text. The book includes cross-references, a 35,000-word concordance, full-color maps, charts, and timelines.

Guthrie, Donald. *The Letter to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983. Comments on the Christological emphases of Hebrews.

Lauersdorf, Richard E. *Hebrews* (People's Bible Commentary Series). Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1986. Reprinted by Concordia Publishing House, 1992. A "readable" commentary that avoids technical jargon.

Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Epistle of James.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966. A lucid exposition with emphasis on the Christological themes of the writer of Hebrews. Careful attention to typology.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. An invaluable one-volume commentary on the Bible.

Westcott, B. F. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint. Although somewhat old, still a helpful resource with special reference to the Greek and the early church fathers.

Every Voice a Song: Pipe Organ Accompaniment for 180 Hymns and Liturgy. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-1565). Use this music CD for worship hymn accompaniment.

Listen to the Son

Hebrews 1–2

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

We are like pilgrims who need a word of encouragement; Hebrews encourages us to listen to the Word of God revealed in the Son of God, Jesus.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit, will

1. recognize that Jesus is the decisive revelation of God to us;
2. be aware of angels as the servants of God for our sake;
3. be confident that Jesus has overcome the power of the devil, sin, and death by His perfect completion of all that is required for our salvation;
4. honor and worship Jesus as the Son of God.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 00.

For the Lecture Leader

Bible Background

Ordinarily, authors of New Testament epistles identify themselves. Not so in the case of Hebrews; it is anonymous. (The superscriptions and titles in printed Bibles are the work of collectors and editors, not part of the inspired record.) Nor do we know for certain the persons to whom it was first addressed. “To the Hebrews,” the title added in the second century A.D., could mean “Jews,” “Jewish Christians,” or “Christians of a particular Jewish background.” It is a good hypothesis that a Hellenistic Jewish Christian teacher (Luther suggested Apollos) sent this message to a separatist group of Jewish Christians in Rome shortly before A.D. 70.

While it is desirable to have a workable hypothesis, to be certain about the author and original historical situation is not essential. But it is good to recognize the form and value of the document. Hebrews is a word of exhortation, a homily, a first-century sermon sent by mail. It has strengthened the faith and encouraged the perseverance of many generations of believers.

Throughout Hebrews, exhortation (encouragement) and doctrine (teaching, assertions) alternate. While many students of Hebrews have been fascinated with its doctrinal assertions about Jesus Christ, we are convinced that the exhortations are the author’s main points and the doctrinal sections present the basis of the encouragement—the reasons why the readers should do what the author says. Those doctrinal sections make assertions about Jesus as the fulfillment of what was revealed in the Old Testament period.

Thus the doctrinal sections are constantly accompanied by references to Old Testament passages and discussions of how the Old Testament itself points forward to Jesus. This use of the Old Testament shows how important Holy Scripture was to the first readers and how important the correct (Christ-centered) interpretation of the Old Testament is. The portions of the Old Testament most often referred to are the Pentateuch and the Psalms. Of special interest for review are Genesis 14, Exodus 25–26, Leviticus 16, Deuteronomy 4, and Psalms 2, 8, 95, and 110. Jeremiah 31 is also an important passage.

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It’s especially helpful for mission congregations.

gations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.

Devotion

Read aloud or (preferably) put into your own words the following brief devotional message.

As we know by our own experience, listening is sometimes difficult and is often hard work. I mean, *really* listening. Failure to communicate damages and sometimes destroys relationships. Failure to communicate sometimes comes when people don't talk to one another; more often, it comes when people don't listen to one another.

In this first section of the Letter to the Hebrews, we are encouraged to listen—to listen to Jesus, the Son of God. If listening is important for preserving our everyday relationships with other people, it is even more important for preserving our most important relationship of all—our relationship with the Lord. The consequences of failing to listen to the Lord are far more terrible than those of failing to listen to another person. For only with the Lord do we find grace, grace that gives us life, life that never ends but takes us from this world to the next.

So listen! Listen to the Son!

Pray together the prayer printed in the study leaflet.

Lecture Presentation

1 Introduction—Pilgrims: Receive This Word of Encouragement

A. Christians Are Pilgrims

"I'm but a stranger here, heaven is my home"—so we sing in a popular hymn. When we sing the words of that hymn, we are saying that we don't belong to this earth, that we are just passing through on our way to another destination—heaven—where our permanent home is located. We Christians know we are pilgrims on this earth—people who are temporary residents while passing through.

Perhaps you have traveled to, or been a temporary resident in, a foreign country. You may have been advised of precautions to take while in that country. Perhaps dietary cautions were in order. Or perhaps you needed to be advised of certain laws in that country. Or you

may have needed to be advised of rules governing travel. Or you may have been advised about customs or the personal sensibilities of the people among whom you would be for a time. Such advisories are helpful and may even be crucial for a safe and successful visit.

Hebrews is a letter written to advise and encourage Christians, who know they are "aliens and strangers on earth" on their way to "a better country—a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:13, 16).

B. Hebrews Is a Word of Encouragement

At an unidentified time and place in the first century A.D., a particular group of Christian pilgrims needed this travel advisory; in fact, they were in serious danger. They were in danger of losing the true faith. So God put it into the heart and mind of a Christian teacher to send them a "word of exhortation" (Hebrews 13:22).

Who was this teacher? Some have suggested Paul, but this is not likely for a number of reasons we cannot discuss now. Perhaps it was Apollos or Barnabas or another of Paul's associates. It was written either from Rome or to Rome (Hebrews 13:24). But we do not know for sure. The fact is, the name of the author and identity of those first readers have been long forgotten. But God's inspired words in the Epistle to the Hebrews have encouraged pilgrims for centuries ever since.

May this study help you understand and receive that word of encouragement so that your faith is strengthened and your endurance is increased, resulting in your being brought to that heavenly home!

C. The Message and Plan of Hebrews—Boiled Down

The author wrote to a specific audience. He wanted them to do certain things. And he told them why they should do it, always backing up his reasons with passages from the Old Testament Scriptures. Approaching Hebrews in this way, we find three simple and memorable commands in Hebrews: (1) *Listen*; (2) *draw near*; (3) *endure*. *Listen* to the Word of God revealed through the Son, Jesus (1:1–4:13). *Draw near* to God through the High Priest, Jesus (4:14–10:22). *Endure* through faith, which looks up to Jesus (10:23–13:35).

This is the essence of this word of encouragement.

2 Listen to the Son

A. He Reveals God (1:1–4)

The very first sentence of Hebrews (1:1–2) tells us that these days, since Jesus has appeared, are the Last Days. With Jesus' coming, the writer asserts, God's way of speaking has changed. In former times God spoke through prophets. But now, in these Last Days, He has spoken to us by His Son, Jesus. The writer refers to Jesus' person and work with a series of seven concise statements (vv. 2–4). He declares, concerning Jesus: (1) He is appointed heir of all things (at the end); (2) He was God's agent of creation (at the beginning); (3) He is the radiance of God's glory and the imprint-copy of God's being; (4) He upholds the universe by His powerful command; (5) He provided purification for our sins; (6) He sat down at the right hand of God in heaven; (7) He has received a name and inheritance better than the angels.

With these declarations the writer begins a major point: Jesus, and the new covenant He brought into being, is superior. What we have in Christ is better—far better! Even the disgrace and possible persecution we may be called on to bear for the sake of Christ does not diminish the superiority of Christ and of the covenant that came about through Him. The writer will speak of this superiority throughout this letter.

B. He Is Superior to Angels (1:5–14)

The seventh assertion—that Christ is superior to angels—leads to the next section, where the writer marshals Old Testament passages to tell of the superiority of this exalted and enthroned Son over the angels. This demonstration is important for two reasons. First, some Jews held that various angels were closer to God and more powerful than the Messiah, whom they held to be only a human king (Son of David). Hebrews proves that Christ, the Son of David, who became a human being and made purification for sins, is also truly the Son of God. While Christ humbled Himself and “was made a little lower than the angels” (2:9) for a time, He has now been exalted far above all angels. Second, God made use of angels in connection with His revelation of the Law in the Old Testament. Hebrews 2:2; Galatians 3:19; and Acts 7:53 all indicate that angels were involved in the

giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. Therefore, the Word of God spoken of old was through prophets and associated with angels. But a message brought through angels can never be set above the Gospel revealed in Jesus. Nor is any angel the ruler of the world to come. No, angels are ministering spirits, God's servants appointed for the sake of people who are to be saved (1:14).

The author makes this point that Christ is superior to angels with a long string of Old Testament passages and a concluding summary of his own (v. 14). He quotes verses (mostly from the psalms) that speak of the Messiah, the Son of David and the Son of God. These passages show that the Son (1) is begotten by God (v. 5); (2) is worshiped by the angels (v. 6); (3) is an eternal and upright king (vv. 7–8); (4) is anointed by God to be above all others (v. 9); (5) is eternal and unchanging (vv. 10–12); (6) has been commanded to sit at God's right hand (v. 13). Two prominent psalm verses, 2:7 and 110:1, open and close the chain, testifying to the enthronement of the Messiah. Throughout this collection of Bible passages the angels are shown to be subservient to the Son: they worship Him (v. 6) and are winds or spirits, flickering flames of fire (v. 7). Hebrews concludes (v. 14) that God has created angels to be ministering spirits to help people who are to be saved, not dominating powers to be feared and served by humans.

Angels serve as agents of God's care of us, His people. This is great comfort and reassurance for us. God's holy angels watch over and guard us, both in spiritual and in physical matters. These invisible servants of God, who surround us every moment, are another evidence that our God loves us and preserves us in all our ways. How grateful we can be to God for the service of the angels, creatures of our God as we are, who obediently serve God by watching over and caring for us. Though holy and more powerful than we, the angels serve us as they carry out God's will in regard to us.

C. He Must Therefore Be Heard (2:1–4)

Now we come to a paragraph of encouragement. The basis of this encouragement is what has just been asserted and proven in chapter 1. Since the Son is above the angels, the word He spoke should be listened to even more keenly than the revelation given through the angels (i.e., the Law at Mount Sinai). This does not mean that the Old Testament is to be rejected. The Old

Testament is God's Word and is to be heeded. But its meaning and purpose is to be seen in the light of the revelation in Jesus, not the other way around. The Gospel, testified to in the Old Testament but revealed in all its clarity in Jesus, is God's final word and is to be heeded most carefully. The content of that Gospel is alluded to in 1:3 ("after He had provided purification for sins") and will be stated more explicitly soon (see 2:9: "that . . . He might taste death for everyone").

Here, in verses 3–4, we have a description of how that revelation of salvation has been preserved for us. First, (v. 3) it was spoken by the Lord; then those who heard Him confirmed it to us.

How can we be sure that they delivered the truth of the Gospel to us? God Himself testified to the truth of their preaching with signs, wonders, various miracles, and special gifts of the Holy Spirit. The miracles performed by the apostles were God's seal of approval on the content of their preaching.

The apostles and eyewitnesses of Jesus at first delivered His Gospel in oral preaching and teaching. As time went by, they were inspired to write their reports, their witness, and their teaching in the Gospels and in their Epistles. In this way the Holy Scripture of the New Testament, the divinely confirmed apostolic testimony, comes to us, and we receive the true Gospel, the Word of our Lord, the Son of God.

How wonderfully God has given and preserved for us the Gospel witness by way of the divinely inspired Scriptures! How we ought to treasure and make daily use of the Bible! The Bible is, as one hymn says, like a jewel case made of gold, in which we find the sparkling gem of the Holy Gospel, by which we are saved!

D. The Old Testament Points to Him as the Coming King (2:5–18)

Angels are not to be the powerful rulers of the world to come. Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of David, true God and true man, has that honor. Jesus, who made purification for sin through His incarnation and death, has been exalted to rule forever. Precisely that God-man Jesus, who suffered and died, is the captain of our salvation, the eternal King who came to rescue the lost.

And the Old Testament testifies to this. Hebrews (2:6–7) introduces verses from Psalm 8 that find their fulfill-

ment and complete meaning in Jesus. That psalm says, "You made him [the son of man] a little lower than the angels." But the phrase "a little" can mean either "a little bit" or "a little while." Hebrews shows us that the verse finds its fulfillment in Jesus (2:8), who for a little while (when He humbled Himself to become a man so He might give His life for us) was lower than the angels (v. 9). His purpose in lowering Himself in this way was that He might die, tasting death in the place of everyone, and then be crowned with glory and honor by God in the events following His death on the cross. Jesus' becoming a man for the purpose of becoming our substitute before God is the key to understanding Psalm 8!

Hebrews 2:10 pictures Jesus as a leader (captain of salvation) bringing many to the glorious goal; it was God's plan to bring Him to the goal ("make . . . perfect") through suffering. "To perfect" in Hebrews means "to bring to the goal." Jesus, as the Savior of mankind, is (v. 11) "of the same family" of those He came to save, our "brother."

To show the Old Testament basis for this (in vv. 12–13), the writer cites Psalm 22 and Isaiah 8. He became a man so He might die and, by dying, defeat and destroy the devil and set all people free from the fear of death. His incarnation (becoming man) was necessary, because those He came to save are not the angels but human beings ("Abraham's descendants," that is, believers). And to accomplish this purpose to—do away with sin as our Substitute and to help us in our need—He had to become like us in every way. He had to become one of us.

We can only bow in wonder and thanksgiving as we review this wonderful truth. God Himself came down to us in Jesus to save us by lifting us out of our sins to Himself in glory! What gracious love stands behind God's coming into this world in Jesus! May that amazing, divine love move us to respond with gratitude and praise as we give Jesus our worship, obedience, and service!

3 Review of the Main Points

A. The Encouragement

Now let's review what God has told us in this section from Hebrews. We have seen how the Word of God came in three time periods: (1) of old through the prophets

and angels; (2) by the Lord, God's Son, in these Last Days; and (3) "today," when it is preached and spoken to the current generation by those who have received it from those who heard the Lord. The Word revealed of old through prophets and angels, which we now call the Old Testament, was divine, powerful, and to be taken seriously. It challenged the hearers to believe, and it discerned and punished unbelief (2:2; 4:12). Since that is true, we ought to take the Word revealed through the Son of God with utmost seriousness: to neglect the salvation it offers is to lose everything. So this is the first chief encouragement, as summarized in 2:1: to pay even closer heed to the Gospel, the Word of Jesus.

B. Doctrinal Rationale, Based on Scripture

Jesus is the final and perfect revealer of God, greater than angels and greater than the greatest prophet, Moses. As true God and true man, Jesus is the one perfect mediator between God and mankind. St. John taught the same thing when he described, at the beginning of his Gospel, how (John 1:14, 18) "the Word became flesh" and how "the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known." That God's Son, Jesus, is greater than the angels is stated in the Old Testament Scripture (Hebrews 1:5–13). That Jesus was also true man and so able to help and to die for His brothers is also proved from Old Testament Scripture (Hebrews 2:6–18). This is the Son who has been exalted to rule forever.

C. The Decisive Assertion of Superiority

Since Jesus Himself is superior, His Word is superior. The Word of God came also through angels and prophets. But the key and controlling revelation, the highest and clearest, is the Son Himself, begotten of the Father from all eternity, born of the Virgin Mary, died, raised, and exalted forever. Jesus was God incarnate. Jesus revealed and taught the complete truth. Some who heard Him gave a solemn account of it for us—an account whose truthfulness God Himself confirmed by granting to those first-generation eyewitnesses, evangelists, and apostles (2:4) "signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will." The Word before Jesus, the Old Testament, meant nothing other than what Jesus Himself revealed. He is the fulfillment and so also is the key for understanding the Old Testament. All who do not find

the Old Testament fulfilled in Jesus are bound to get the Old Testament wrong. (John 5:39) "You diligently study the Scriptures," Jesus told the Jews, "because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me."

The Word today, proclaimed by the church, must never be anything other than what Jesus revealed and what the divinely appointed and attested apostles and evangelists handed on to us. The Word of God in Jesus delivered to us in the inspired Scriptures of the New Testament is the final authority and judge of all preaching and teaching in the church. (John 8:31) "If you hold to My teaching," Jesus said, "you are really My disciples."

D. Implications for Today

So we can also judge contemporary preachers and rightly interpret the words of the Old Testament prophets by noting how they do or do not coincide with the Gospel revealed in Jesus. (Matthew 17:5) "This is My Son, whom I love," said the voice from the cloud. "Listen to Him!" The author of Hebrews is saying the same thing. Christians now can "listen to Him" by studying the inspired writings of the evangelists and apostles of the New Testament. Preachers devoted to preaching nothing else and who teach and interpret the Old Testament as testimony to Jesus are faithful voices. They call and guide and help weary pilgrims to persevere on the journey of faith. They let the Word of God in Jesus be (Psalm 119:105) the light to our path and the lamp to our feet.

Concluding Activities

Make any necessary announcements and distribute study leaflet 2 and the enrichment magazine. Encourage participants to browse in the magazine and keep it as a helpful reference for coming lessons.

Encourage participants to set a weekly plan for their LifeLight study. A consistent daily schedule works best for most. Some begin or end the day with LifeLight. Others find another time during the day at home or during lunch hours at work. Invite participants to share their practices, especially if your group has some who are new to LifeLight.

Listen Today and Believe

Hebrews 3:1–4:13

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

The Word of God addresses us today; hearing it with faith leads to our entering the promised eternal rest.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit, will

1. understand the Spirit's warning to listen to the Gospel now in this "today" of opportunity;
2. earnestly yearn to enter the heavenly rest;
3. believe more firmly the Gospel message;
4. hear and heed the Gospel Word by weekly worship, daily Bible reading, and faithful study of the Bible with fellow Christians.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 00.

For the Lecture Leader

Bible Background

Materials from several Old Testament passages hover in the background of this section. It is wise to review them and highlight their import.

1. Genesis 2:2 states that on the seventh day God rested from all the work He had done. This established a pattern in which there is revealed a prophecy and promise: six days of work in the life of this age and rest on the seventh, when no work of this world is to be done. To testify to that pattern and that otherworldly rest, God commanded the Israelites to rest every seventh day of the week. When Jesus came, He brought a new era, the promised kingdom of God, heavenly rest and peace.

Since Jesus has come as our Savior and Lord, God no longer requires us to observe the Sabbath day and other holy days of the Old Testament (Colossians 2:16–17). But God does require Christians to worship together (Acts 2:42, 46; Hebrews 10:25). The church worships together especially on Sunday, because Christ rose from the dead on Sunday (Luke 24:1–2; Acts 20:7).

2. God had the Promised Land of Canaan prepared and waiting for those who left Egypt with Moses. But they showed lack of trust in God by their faultfinding and murmuring at Massah and Meribah (Exodus 17:1–7; Psalm 95:8–9; Hebrews 3:8–9). Because of such unbelief, they wandered 40 years in the wilderness. A whole generation (except for Joshua and Caleb) died off there and did not make it to the Promised Land of Canaan. That failure to believe and failure to attain the goal is a pattern recorded to warn future generations.

3. In the time of David that word of God's reign and that warning not to reject it with the hardened heart of unbelief were repeated in Psalm 95. The important thing to note here is the oath (Psalm 95:11; Hebrews 3:11) and the word *today* (3:7). God has a rest. It was offered to some, but they did not enter it. Years later, in the time of David, the appeal was again given to hear His voice and respond not with unfaith but with faith. The implication is that the "rest" offered is not in this world's history but at the end of this world's history. It was not accomplished when Joshua defeated all the Canaanites (Hebrews 4:8). Nor was it accomplished when David conquered all of his enemies. Nor is it even accomplished yet, for the Son of David, Jesus Christ, has been told: "Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet" (Psalm 110:1). Thus "there remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9)—the rest prophesied at creation and foreshadowed in the Sabbath of the Old Testament. And the Word of God, living and active, still addresses people *today*, in the day of the author of Hebrews and in our day, so long as this world's history continues.

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 00.

Devotion

Perhaps you are familiar with the adage that tells us "opportunity knocks but once." There are many opportunities that do seem to come once and must be accepted then. Such an opportunity may not come again.

God is presenting us with an opportunity—the opportunity to hear and believe the Gospel and, in doing so, to be saved. God, in His mercy and grace, usually offers this opportunity not once but many times, perhaps countless times in a lifetime. But we never know when the opportunity we have to hear and believe the Gospel will be the last such opportunity. Finally, there will come a day when such an opportunity, though not the first, is the last. The opportunity will not come again.

Therefore the urgent plea: "*Today*, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7–8, quoting Psalm 95:7–8). Or, in the words of Paul: "I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, *now* is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). We cannot assume that there will come another time to believe the Gospel or that there is no particular hurry to accept God's invitation. Each time we hear the Gospel we may say to ourselves: "This may be it. This may be the last opportunity that will be given me. Now is the time to believe."

Listen *today* and believe!

Pray together the prayer printed in the study leaflet.

Lecture Presentation

1 Introduction

A. Linking This Segment to the Preceding Section

To begin the lecture use an attention-getting device: a whistle, a loud "Listen up!" or a sharp clap of the hands might do the job.

Did you ever have to get the attention of a group in that way? You probably have if you have ever been a scout leader, a parent with several children, or a LifeLight lecturer—just kidding.

But the author of the letter to the Hebrews isn't kidding as he says to us, "Listen to the Son—*now!*—and believe."

In the section we studied last week the author emphasized the need to listen to the Word revealed in the Son even more attentively than to the Old Testament Word alone. The section we studied this week tells us about the nature of the Word of God and the manner of listening required for it to work beneficially for the hearer.

Sometimes we may have the idea that the written word is a lifeless thing. That is not true, of course, as anyone who enjoys reading knows. And it certainly is not true of God's Word! As long as this world stands, God's Word is and will be living, active, challenging, and judging. God's Word says, "Listen *today!*" as it addresses each subsequent generation.

B. Key Concepts in Hebrews 3:7–4:13

As we work through these paragraphs, we find several important themes. We need to have these themes clear in our minds. The most important theme is the contrast between hearing with an evil, hardened heart and hearing with faith (Hebrews 3:12–13; 4:2).

We are confronted with a mystery here. The Holy Spirit enables some to know the secret of the Kingdom. They hear rightly and believe and understand. Their hearing is a hearing by faith, a faith produced in the hearing itself (Romans 10:17).

On the other hand, hearing God's Word has just the opposite effect in others. Consider the generation of Israelites whom God led out of Egypt. Though they heard the Word, they heard it with unbelief, with hearts

hardened against the Word they were hearing. They did not receive God's Word with faith.

We need to receive the true Word of God as it comes from outside us with trusting, accepting faith in order to enter God's rest (salvation). This is the first important theme in this section.

And that leads us to the second important theme, that of the Sabbath-rest (Hebrews 4:1–5). What is this Sabbath-rest? Entering the Promised Land and the command to do no work on the seventh day testified to this rest. The Sabbath-rest, is the end-time rest of heaven, the kingdom of God. Entering the Promised Land and doing no work on the seventh day both pointed to this.

The third important theme is "Today" (Hebrews 4:6–13). The Word of God addresses each generation in its own day and invites it to receive salvation through faith. Since the promised rest comes at the end of this world's history, the Word that promises the rest and calls for and calls forth faith is present, relevant, and addressed to every generation, (Hebrews 3:13) "as long as it is called Today," until the end of the age comes.

Hearing with faith; Sabbath-rest; the Word today, living, active, and effective—these are the themes in Hebrews 3:7–4:13. Let's recognize that these themes are also addressed to us.

2 Listen Today and Believe

A. Beware of Hardening Your Heart (3:7–15)

With this overview of the major themes in mind, let's go back to the beginning of this section once again. The previous verse, Hebrews 3:6, introduces the idea of persevering and anticipates the third great encouragement to endure. Holding on to our courage and hope calls for paying careful attention to the Gospel. Now our author moves on to encourage the right and fruitful kind of listening by calling up Old Testament passages that warn us against hearing with a hard or unbelieving heart.

Our author cites Psalm 95:7–11. The passage refers to the entire 40-year period during which the Israelites were led through the desert to the Promised Land. During this entire period the Israelites provoked the Lord with their repeated complaining and faithlessness. However, two incidents receive special attention. The first is recorded in Exodus 17:1–7, where the Israelites

complained of thirst. In response, the Lord commanded Moses to strike a rock, and water gushed from it. The names *Massah* (meaning "testing") and *Meribah* (meaning "quarreling") were given to the place after the sins the Israelites had committed there. The Hebrew text of Psalm 95 retains these names; the Greek text of the psalm cited by the author of Hebrews refers to what the names mean: "rebellion" and "testing."

The second incident from the exodus is reported in Numbers 13, where scouts are sent into the Promised Land. They returned to report that the land was good and fruitful, but 10 of the 12 scouts advised not entering the land. They maintained that the land's present inhabitants would be too strong for the Israelites. Only Caleb and Joshua expressed confidence that the Lord would keep His promises to give them the land. The Lord responded to this refusal to believe His promises and to obey His command to enter the land. He swore that none of that generation of Israelites except Caleb and Joshua would enter the Promised Land. Only their children would enter it. The Israelites of that generation were condemned to be shut out of the land in which the Lord would give Israel rest.

B. Learn from the Unbelief of Ancient Israel (3:16–19)

God brought a generation of Israelites out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses. The Lord rescued them and protected and provided for them as they made their way across the desert. They had seen many miracles and had heard the Lord's promise that He was bringing them to a land of rest and peace. And yet they did not enter that land of rest. Why not? Was it God's fault? Certainly not! Did they hear the Word? Yes, they did. Why, then, did they not enter? Because they failed to trust God and to obey Him.

Two terms express their failure: (v. 19) *unbelief*, a failure to trust; and (v. 18) *disobedience*, a failure to be convinced and to act accordingly. Though distinct, those two ideas are always linked: faith and obedience. Behind all disobedient, rebellious behavior lies unbelief. The account of the Israelites during the exodus and the commentary on that account in Psalm 95 reveal this instructive fact: (3:19) "They were not able to enter, because of their unbelief."

Is it possible that a serious warning is meant for us also in this earnest admonition? Is it possible for us who

have received the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacraments to yet reject Him? Is it possible for us who have the Gospel to fail to receive it with faith? Is it possible for our hearts to grow cold with unbelief? Is it possible that the devil may find an unguarded entrance into our hearts and gradually take them over? Is it possible, with all of our advantages, that such an end might still come upon us?

Certainly our own experience bears out what we learn in this Bible passage. When our faith in God is strongest and most alive, we find it easier to resist temptations to disobey God. But when we fail to keep our faith strong and well nourished, then we find we are most prone to disobey God and to sin against Him. The conclusion is obvious. If we would obey God we must give the Holy Spirit plenty of opportunities to nourish and strengthen our faith as we pay attention to the Gospel and incorporate God's Word and Sacraments into our weekly living.

C. Turn in Faith to the Promised Rest (4:1–2)

Three points are made, as the Israelites of the exodus are compared with the present readers: (1) the promise of entering God's rest still remains; (2) just as those Israelites heard the Good News preached to them, so do we; and (3) (v. 2) "the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith." If it happened before, it can happen again, and that is just what the author of Hebrews is afraid of. This warning is of the greatest importance for understanding the whole section.

D. We Shall Enter That Rest! (4:3–11)

Verse 3 begins with a straightforward statement: "Now we who have believed enter [are going to enter] that rest." Then our author proceeds to show from the Old Testament how that must be true. The argument follows these steps: (1) In the time of the kings (Psalm 95) God said He had sworn that certain (earlier) people would not enter His rest. (2) But (vv. 3b–4) God had finished with all of His work after the six days of creation and rested on the seventh day. (3) (V. 6) So there was from creation some kind of rest of God waiting for people to enter into it. (4) (V. 6b) The ones who formerly had the Good News spoken to them did not enter into that rest

because of disobedience. (5) (Vv. 6–8) When God spoke of another rest, available "today" in the days of the kings, that showed that the rest in Canaan under Joshua was not the real rest. (6) (V. 9) Therefore, there is still a great Sabbath-rest waiting for the people of God. (7) Those who enter it rest from their works in this world, as God did. This shows that the rest in store for us is the eternal life in heaven in the age that will come when this present life, with its burdens and troubles, is past.

The "rest" spoken of is not something that will happen in this world, like entering into Canaan. It is a heavenly rest, a rest that takes place in another world. Genesis 2:2 shows that God's rest has lasted since the end of creation and suggests that observing the Sabbath was to be an anticipation of the eternal, heavenly rest. Psalm 95:7–11 tells us how we enter into that rest: by hearing God's Word "today" without a hardened heart. The "rest" is heavenly. And hearing the Good News with faith is the key that opens the door to that rest.

E. God's Word Does God's Work (4:12–13)

Fittingly, the section that encourages hearers to listen with faith (4:12–13) concludes with one of Scripture's most memorable statements about the Word of God. Whenever and wherever it is preached—in all the "todays" from the start of creation to the end of this world—it is living, powerful, and active. That is the Word we are dealing with—or, rather, that deals with us! It cuts into all who hear it and lays bare their souls, whether they are believers, those who trust in God, or unbelievers. It exposes and condemns unbelievers just as surely as it rescues and protects believers. And so it divides all hearers into two groups: believers and unbelievers, the ones being saved and the ones rejecting the gift of salvation.

Thank God that the Spirit has used that Word to bring us to repentance and faith! Pray God that He will use our sharing of that living and active Word to confront and bring many others to repentance and faith!

3 Review of the Main Points

A. The Encouragement

Now let's review the main points of our study this week. Our author knows and points to where the Word of

truth is: it is spoken in Jesus, the Son. What reception will the Word meet? Our author earnestly warns against hearing with a hard heart; he encourages receiving the Good News with faith, with a trusting and believing and obeying heart.

B. The Biblical Basis for the Encouragement

This encouragement rests on some careful reading of three sections of Scripture. Genesis 2:2 and Psalm 95:8–10 (which recounts Exodus 17) tell us that the rest offered to us will take place in heaven, not on this earth. They earnestly urge us to hear God’s Word with faith. They describe God’s Word to us as alive and active, exposing belief and unbelief and dividing all those who hear it into believers and unbelievers. Scripture underlines the urgency of receiving this Word now, “Today,” when the opportunity is still ours.

4 Implications for Today

A. The Sword of the Word

Like the Israelites of the exodus and the first readers of Hebrews, we also have had the Good News proclaimed to us. And hearing that Good News is a lot different from hearing the evening news on TV. You can switch off the TV news and not be the worse for it. But when the Gospel of God’s work in Jesus Christ is proclaimed, everyone who hears it is put in a crucial position. Jesus said of those who had heard the Gospel but had rejected it that a “verdict” had been reached in their case. He explained, (John 3:18) “Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.” The Word of God is always active and effective. If it is not saving, it is condemning. There is no neutral ground with the Gospel.

B. Faith Alone

The first section of Hebrews taught Christ alone and Scripture alone; this section teaches faith alone. The Word of truth is out there. But faith is necessary to receive the benefit of the Word, the eventual entrance into the heavenly rest. Where does that faith originate? Faith comes from hearing the Word of God.

By nature all hearts are hard and dull. In some—and it is a mystery why in some and not in others—the power of God overcomes the hardness and creates faith. It is also true that Christian persons, baptized believers, can resist the Holy Spirit, harden their hearts, and lose their faith. This, too, is a mystery and a tragedy. It happens as a result of the deceit of sin and long neglect of the means of grace.

How can we be sure it’s not happening to us? First, we must know that it can happen, so that we do not become complacent. Second, we can pray to be kept in the faith. And third, we can continue to listen to the Word, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the source of all our strength. In that way we are kept safe through the trials and temptations we meet in this world until we reach our heavenly home.

C. The Heavenly Rest

In our study this week we have learned the true meaning of the Sabbath-rest. The command to rest on the seventh day of the week was based on God’s resting after six days of creating the universe. Sabbath-keeping was meant to teach and remind the Israelites that there is another world, the kingdom of God.

What the Jewish Sabbath pointed forward to arrived in Jesus. Christians enter that life of the new age. All time and all godly callings are sanctified as we worship God and offer our whole selves as living sacrifices. No longer are we bound to observe the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament that pointed ahead to the coming of the Savior. For the Savior has come. We gather together on Sundays and at other times to listen to the Son and so be strengthened and preserved in faith and brought to the pilgrim’s goal, heavenly rest.

Closing Activities

Make any necessary announcements and distribute study leaflet 3. Ask whether participants are enjoying the enrichment magazine.