The book of Hebrews may be what scholars call a “homiletic midrash” on Psalm 110, meaning that it may be a sermon that uses Psalm 110 as its inspiration. Whether or not that thesis is correct, the themes are certainly similar. It might be useful to read that psalm before reading Hebrews and to keep it in mind as you read the book.

Most contemporary scholars, including some LDS scholars, do not believe that Paul wrote this book. It is last among the letters of Paul because those compiling the New Testament (in the early third century AD) were not sure that Paul had written it. There are a variety of reasons for these doubts, but the most significant is that the language of Hebrews is quite different from that of the rest of Paul’s letters. (However, the content and occasion of the letter are also different, and that might account for the difference in language.)

Notice also that, though the title traditionally given to this book is “Letter to the Hebrews,” it doesn’t have the form of a letter. Some who do not believe that Paul wrote Hebrews believe it may have been written by Apollos, one of Paul’s followers. In the end, however, it doesn’t matter whether Paul, Apollos, or someone else wrote the book of Hebrews. The message of Hebrews is Pauline, even if Paul didn’t write it. Christians have accepted this book as
scripture for 2,000 years and modern-day prophets have confirmed that it is scripture.

These notes will refer to Paul as the writer of Hebrews because it is conventional to do so, not because I am taking a position one way or the other on the question of who wrote the book. As with other lessons, the study notes will not cover everything assigned.

The Bible Dictionary has a good outline of Hebrews. Here is another.1 These may help you better understand what you read by giving it a context.

I. God’s contemporary revelation in Jesus Christ: the Son is in the image of the Father and, having purged our sins, sits at the right hand of God (Hebrews 1:4–2:18).

II. The Son is higher than the angels, though he condescended to take human form (Hebrews 1:4–2:18).

III. The Son is higher than Moses, for three reasons:
   A. He is a Son rather than a servant.
   B. Unlike Moses, he will lead his people into their rest.
   C. He is the Great High Priest (Hebrews 3:1–4:16).

IV. What it means to say that Jesus is the High Priest (Hebrews 5:1–10:39).
   A. He was appointed by God and perfected in obedience (Hebrews 5:1–10).
B. We must teach first principles first, and we must continue to reiterate those principles (Hebrews 5:11–6:12).

C. God’s promises; the Abrahamic covenant (Hebrews 6:12–20).

D. Melchizedek was superior to Levi; the Melchizedek priesthood is superior to the Levitical (Hebrews 7:1–28).
   1. The perfect priest, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7:20–28).

E. The old and the new worship (Hebrews 8:1–9:28).
   1. Old worship: Christ’s earthly ministry, the first covenant, and the temple (Hebrews 8:1–9:10).
   2. New worship: Christ’s sacrifice, the covenant of blood, the heavenly ministry (Hebrews 9:11–28).

F. The superiority of the new worship: the atonement can only be effective in the second (Hebrews 10:1–18).

G. Since these things are true, we must be faithful (Hebrews 10:19–39).
   1. If we are not, then the atonement has no effect in our lives (Hebrews 10:26–31).
   2. We must remember what Christ has done for us (Hebrews 10:32–35).
3. The time is short until the Son returns (Hebrews 10:36–39).

V. The faith of those who came before Christ (Hebrews 11:1–12:39).

A. The testimonies of the Saints who came before (Hebrews 11:1–40).

B. Those testimonies mean that we must live Christian lives (Hebrews 12:1–13:17).


Hebrews 1

Verses 1–4: What does it mean to say that, prior to Jesus’s incarnation among human beings as the Son of God, the Father had spoken “at sundry times and in divers manners”? Were those different from the way that he spoke at those times through his Son, Jehovah?

Why is it important for us to know that the world was created through the Son?

Why is it important that we know that Christ has “the brightness of [the Father’s] glory” and that he is in “the express image of his person”?

What does it mean to say that the Son upholds all things by the word of his power? The Greek word translated *upholding* means “carrying,” “bearing,” “brining forth,” “causing to continue.” Does one of those make the passage more meaningful than the others?
Verses 4–14: Why is it important that we know that the Son is higher than the angels?

In verses 7–8, what is the difference between God’s angels and ministers on the one hand and his Son on the other?

Hebrews 2

Verses 1–4: What are “the things that we have heard” (verse 1)? What is Paul afraid will happen if we don’t pay heed to the things he has pointed out in chapter 1?

The word *them* in verse 1 is in italics because the translators inserted it in the text. There is nothing in the Greek original corresponding to that word, but they thought it was needed in order for the translation to make sense in English. Try ignoring that word. If you do, what does it mean to say “lest at any time we should let slip.” (The Greek word translated “let slip” means “glide by.”)

These verses warn against apostasy, and that warning occurs regularly in Hebrews. Are these warnings against individual apostasy or against the apostasy of the Church as a whole? What kind of apostasy does Paul have in mind?

How are those warnings related to the main theme of Hebrews, namely, the nature of Christ and his work?

What witnesses does Paul say the early Christians have of the gospel (verses 3–4)? What witnesses do we have?

What is the significance of “according to his will” at the end of verse 4?

Verses 9–11: What is the overall point of these verses?
Christ has said, “Follow me” (e.g., Matthew 16:24), and we have seen that Paul teaches that we are to imitate Christ (e.g., Romans 12:1–2). What do these verses teach us about what it means to follow or imitate Christ? For example, why did he suffer death, and what does that suggest about our obligation as Christians?

Why does Paul remind us that dying made Jesus a little lower than the angels (verse 9)? Why did it? How are his dying and his glorification connected? Does that teach us anything about our own possibility of being glorified?

What does it mean to say that Jesus is the captain, in other words the leader, of our salvation?

**Verse 15:** Of what bondage is Paul speaking? (See verse 14.)

Whom is he speaking of in this verse?

He seems to be saying that the fear of death puts us into bondage. What does he mean?

**Hebrews 3**

**Verses 1–6:** What makes us holy (verse 1)?

What makes us brothers and sisters to Christ, as implied by verse 1? Is it our spirit birth before mortality, or is it something that happens in virtue of his sacrifice?

In verse 1, what is “our profession”? Another translation is *confession*. The Greek word means “assurance,” “promise,” “admission,” and “concession.” Which of those fits the context best?
What makes Christ the Apostle of our profession or confession? What makes him its High Priest?

Why does Paul compare Jesus to Moses in verse 2?

What is Paul saying when he describes Christ as “a son over his own house” (verse 6)?

**Verses 7–19:** In these verses Paul is speaking to the Israelites. How did ancient Israel err?

Why would these verses have been important to the early Christians? Why are they important to us?

**Hebrews 4**

**Verses 1–2:** Do these verses give an answer to the previous question? Explain Paul’s warning in your own words.

Why did the Israelites refuse to enter the promised land? (See Numbers 14:1–38.) What parallel to this is there in our own lives?

Paul is using the promised land as a figure of God’s rest. What does “God’s rest” mean to us?

**Verses 9–10:** What does it mean to say that those who have entered God’s rest have ceased from *their own* works? Do they do someone else’s works? If so, whose? Is this an answer to the hoary faith vs. works problem? If so, explain how.

How do we labor in order to enter into rest (verse 10)?

Does this chapter have implications for how we understand the Sabbath?

**Verses 14–16:** Why do we need a Great High Priest (verse 14)?
What does it mean to say that because we have that High Priest we should “hold fast our profession” (verse 14)? (*Profession* translates the same word we saw in Hebrews 3:1.)

Jesus taught that to look on a woman with lust in one’s heart is to sin (Matthew 5:28; 3 Nephi 12:28). That seems to mean that if we desire to do something we ought not, we sin. If that is true, how can it also be true that Jesus “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin”? What must it mean to be tempted? What must it *not* mean?

The Greek word translated *tempted* here is the same one used in the Greek version of the Old Testament at Genesis 22:1 and Deuteronomy 8:2; 20:20. Do those verses help explain what it means to be tempted?

**Hebrews 5**

**Verses 1–3:** Can you put the point of verse 1 in your own words?

In verse 2, on whom does the human high priest have compassion? Why is he able to deal gently with them? “Those that are out of the way” should be understood literally: those who are no longer on the path.

To what does “by reason hereof” refer? Why is it that the high priest ought to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people and himself?

**Verses 4–10:** What would it mean to take the office of high priest on oneself?

What does it mean to be “called of God, as was Aaron” (verse 4)?
Verse 5 quotes Psalm 2:7 and verse 6 quotes Psalm 110:4. Psalm 110:1 is often quoted in reference to Jesus, but verse 4 is quoted only here. Why do you think that is?

Verse 7 explains why Jesus was able to have compassion on sinners. How is the motivation for his compassion different from that of the merely human high priest (verse 2)?

In verse 8 the word translated *suffered* is *paschō*. It means “to experience,” but almost always has a negative sense. How did the Lord learn obedience through negative experience? Wasn’t he already obedient to the Father?

Verse 9 tells us that the Son was *made* perfect. Wasn’t he always perfect? In what sense was he made perfect? The word *perfect* translates a Greek word (*teleioō*) that means “to be complete,” “to be finished.” Does that give meaning to the teaching of this verse?

What is the connection between Jesus’s suffering and his being made perfect?

Why did Jesus have to endure suffering in order to save us?

**Verses 11–14:** What is Paul telling us about the teaching of Hebrews?

**Hebrews 6**

**Verses 17–20:** Who are “the heirs of promise” (verse 17)?

In verse 17 the phrase “the immutability of his counsel” might be better translated “the irrevocability of his plan.” To what plan is Paul referring here?

What are the “two immutable things” (verse 18)?
From what do we seek refuge (verse 18)?

What hope has been set before us (verse 18)?

Paul uses a mixed metaphor in verse 19: hope is an anchor to the soul, and it takes us into the holy of holies in the temple. Explain each of those metaphors.

When did Jesus enter the holy of holies on our behalf (verse 20)? In what sense did he do so as a forerunner for us?

**Hebrews 10**

**Verses 1–2:** We have here an explanation of why the law cannot perfect us. Can you explain that explanation? (A better translation than “very image” in verse 1 might be “actual form.”)

**Verses 3–4:** Paul’s argument seems to be this: the fact that we are reminded of our sinfulness every year when the sacrifices are made proves that they don’t perfect us. If they did, we would only have to offer them once. So it isn’t possible for blood sacrifice to take away our sins. What might a non-Christian Jew of Paul’s time have said in response?

Is there any relevance of what Paul says about sacrifice to our own lives today? We don’t offer blood sacrifice. What might have a similar standing in our lives as Latter-day Saints?

**Verses 16–18:** In verses 16–17 Paul quotes scripture again, Jeremiah 31:33–34. Then in verse 18 he concludes that sacrifices for sin no longer need to be offered. What justifies that conclusion?
**Verses 19–25:** Verses 19–21 rehearse the conditions that have been given us: we have confidence (boldness in the King James Version) that it is possible to enter into God’s presence, a way has been consecrated for us to do that, and we have a High Priest, namely Jesus Christ. Verses 22–25 tell us three things that follow from those three conditions. In your own words, what are they?

**Verses 26–27:** What is Paul’s warning to those who sin after learning the truth of Christ? Since we are all human beings and continue to be subject to the vicissitudes of human weakness (as Paul recognizes quite vividly in Romans 7), what does this warning mean in practical terms? Is this about ongoing judgment or about how our lives will be measured in the judgment at the end of time? Is it relevant that there are no sacrifices in the Hebrew Bible to atone for sins committed knowingly, only for those committed in ignorance? Does that help answer the previous question? What kinds of sins do these verses have in mind?

**Verses 32–39:** Verses 32–34 describe the suffering that those reading this sermon have experienced. What is the advice and promise in verses 35–36? In verses 37–38 Paul quotes from the prophet Habakkuk (Habakkuk 2:3–4). What were Habakkuk’s circumstances when he wrote those verses? What was happening to Israel when he wrote? What is Habakkuk’s admonition in verse 38, an admonition that is central to Paul’s understanding of the gospel?
Hebrews 11

Verses 1–2: Having introduced the idea that the righteous (“the just”) must live by faith, Paul tells us what faith is. What does the word *substance* mean here? (See the footnote in the LDS edition of the scriptures.) The Greek word used (*hypostasis*) is complicated. It can mean “essence” or “underlying structure of reality.” It can also mean one’s plan of action as well as “realization” and “assurance.” Which of those meanings seems best to fit the context?

How is faith the substance of/underlying structure of/plan of action for/realization of/assurance of the things we hope for?

The word translated *evidence* could also be translated *proof*. How is faith in God, in other words trust in him, a proof of things that we can’t see, that we can’t know?

What does it mean to say that the elders (those of ancient times) “obtained a good report”? A good report from or approval from whom?

Verses 3–39: The long list of examples of faith are followed by verse 39: “Even though these were all approved because of their faith, they did not receive the promise.” What promise?

Verse 40: Those who came before, “the elders,” showed great faith in their lives and in the difficulties of those lives. But God had provided something better for us, so that they could not be perfected without us. Why would he have postponed their blessing? Why is our perfection necessary to theirs?
Hebrews 12

Verse 1: What witnesses was Paul referring to? (Don’t forget what we just saw in Hebrews 11.)

Why does he refer to them as a cloud? What does that metaphor convey?

What are the weights he wishes us to lay aside?

Another translation of *easily beset* is *cling*. How does sin easily beset or cling to us? What might Paul have meant by saying that sin clings to us?

Explain the metaphor of the race.

Verse 2: Another translation of the Greek word translated *author* is *leader*. Two others are *originator* and *first one*. This is the same word translated *captain* in 2:10. If we translate the first sentence of the verse with *leader* instead of *author*, then Paul is continuing the metaphor of the race. How do the other translations affect its meaning? How is Christ the leader in the race we find ourselves in? If, instead, we translate the word as the King James translators have done, *author*, how is Christ the author—creator—of our faith? Is Paul continuing the metaphor according to that translation?

What does it mean to say that Christ is the finisher, the one who brings the race to a successful conclusion?