



Bible Study Guide

10 Studies On Hebrews

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Introduction

Hebrews is a bit of a puzzle. We're told neither who the human author was, nor who the intended readers were. It's also hard to classify the genre – the final greetings make it seem like a letter, but it opens without a greeting and reads more like a well-crafted sermon than a letter. The writer himself refers to his work as a 'short word of exhortation' (13:22), which is a modest description. In the end it's probably best if we perhaps think of Hebrews as a written sermon, made into a letter, and quite unique!

In structure Hebrews alternates between sections that are mostly expositional or doctrinal, and sections that are warnings and encouragement.

The expositional sections are largely a **comparison** between the **past** (in the Old Testament) and **now** (in Christ).

Meanwhile, the warning sections are a warning not to develop a hard heart, not to grow unresponsive to God's word, **not to go back** to the shadow, because if you follow that course you run the unthinkable risk of not persevering. Commentators identify the five 'warning passages' as Hebrews 2:1-4; 3:12-4:2,11-13; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:25-29.

Reading Hebrews provides us with enormous encouragement to persevere with our trust and hope in Jesus. We are told to fix our eyes on Jesus, and fix our thoughts on him and the future rest he has planned for us. As we read we come away with a much richer understanding of how Jesus fulfils the Old Testament. Jesus is greater in every respect. There are also significant implications for the way we read the Old Testament, the way we worship, and the way that we encourage one another to persevere to the end.

Greater than Angels

Hebrews 1:1 – 2:4

An Introduction to Hebrews

Read Hebrews 1:1-4 and Hebrews 13:22-25

- What is Hebrews? Is it a letter, or a book, or a sermon?

Read Hebrews 1:1-4

- How does the passage compare the way God has spoken through His Son, with the way He has spoken in the past?

- What can you learn about God's Son, from these verses alone?

- What is God like?

- How might you respond to someone who tells you they will believe God exists "if he would show himself" to them?

Read Hebrews 1:5-14

- List some of the ways Jesus is superior to angels.

- Why might it be important to show Jesus is greater than angels?

Read Hebrews 2:1-4

- What was the message “spoken by angels?” (perhaps compare Acts 7:53, Gal 3:19, Deuteronomy 33:2) How has this message “we have now heard” been both confirmed and testified to?

- How might someone “drift away?”

- How can you tell if they are starting to?

- What danger is there that each one of us might drift? Discuss.

Greater than Man

Hebrews 2:5 – 18

Last week we saw the first cycle of teaching followed by warning in Hebrews. The expositional section (1:1-14) compares the way God spoke in the past (many times and various ways, using prophets and angels etc.) – with the way God has spoken in these last days (in Jesus). Then the warning section (2:1-4) exhorts us not to drift from what God has spoken through his son - the salvation that we have in Jesus.

The rest of Hebrews repeats that same cycle, sort of! However the expositional sections get longer and more detailed as Jesus – the reality – is compared with the shadow of the old covenant, the earthly tabernacle, the Levitical priesthood, etc.

What we are looking at in this study is another section of teaching which builds towards a second warning (in 3:12ff). The writer tells us more about Jesus, and you'll notice that angels are on the agenda as they are in chapter one. There are a number of themes intertwined, so lets see if we can **keep the big picture clear**.

Read Hebrews 2:5-8a

- Under whose authority did God place his creation?

- Now read Psalm 8 (it's only short). Who does the Psalm say God has placed over all creation?

Read Hebrews 2:8-10

- Hebrews 2:8b says 'Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him'. Who is the writer talking about? How permanent does this situation sound?

- In contrast we have Jesus – crowned with glory and honour. Presumably that means we see Jesus with everything placed under his feet. What did Jesus go through to gain that position?

- Can you see a glimmer of hope for the rest of mankind in these verses?

Hebrews 2:10 says Jesus was made perfect through suffering. At first glance that seems disturbing – wasn't Jesus always perfect? A better translation would be that Jesus was made complete, or as the NASB version says "... to perfect the author of their salvation..". In other words – Jesus was made our perfect/complete **saviour**, through suffering.

That's amazing. And what's just as amazing is the beginning of verse 10 which assumes that Jesus is going to make us like him too... and it just gets better as we read on.

Read Hebrews 2:11-18

- If you stop and think about Jesus being our brother, many ideas come to mind. But what particular point is the writer making in these verses?

- Why did Jesus have to be made like his brothers in every way?

- What benefit does that give us?

Not only are we headed towards the fulfilment of Psalm 8 – being with Jesus and having everything under us. But along the way we have Jesus as our merciful high priest – who understands everything we go through.

Greater than Moses and Joshua

Hebrews 3 – 4

Understanding Hebrews requires familiarity with the Old Testament because the writer compares what Jesus has achieved for us, with how Israel was to approach God. One of the key comparisons is between Jesus' priesthood and the Levitical priesthood.

Jesus' priesthood is of a completely different order. In Hebrews 4:10 we're told Jesus is a priest of the order of Melchizedek rather than the order of Aaron. Then in Hebrews 7 we're told the significance of this.

If we're really going to appreciate the benefits of having Jesus as our high priest, we need to have another look back into the Old Testament.

Read Hebrews 3:1-6

- How is Jesus compared to Moses?

- What are we encouraged to do?

- How does the argument progress as the writer continues towards the second major warning in 3:12 and following?

- What hope do we share as Christians?

- When we find things hard in this life, how can these verses encourage us?

Read Hebrews 3:7-18

- How does the author use the history of God’s people to issue a warning to Christians? How are they to avoid falling into the same trap?

Read Hebrews 4:1-13

- How does the author compare God’s creation rest with the rest the Israelites were supposed to have in the Promised Land? What is the rest we should aim to enter into in verse 11?

- Why is verse 12 there? How does it follow from the previous passage?

Read Hebrews 4:14-16

- How is Jesus a “greater” high priest for us?

Greater High Priest

Hebrews 5 and 6

What was the role of the high priest under the Old Covenant (Old Testament)? What were the limitations of what the high priest could or couldn't do?

Read Hebrews 5:1-10 and 7:1-10

- What does Melchizedek's name mean? (Hebrews 7:2)

- How is Melchizedek's priesthood compared to Levi's? (Hebrews 7:4-10)

Read Hebrews 5:11-6:3

- What do these verses tell you about the people Hebrews is written to? What is the concern of the author?

- As Christians, how do we go on to maturity? What stops us doing this?

Read Hebrews 6:4-12

- Why do you think “it” is impossible? (verse 4)

- How do we make our hope “sure”? (verse 11)

- What is the concern of the author for the readers in verse 12?

Read Hebrews 6:13-20

- What do these verses tell us about God? His character, his nature, his personhood...

- How is Jesus a greater high priest?

Greater than Melchizedek

Hebrews 7:11-28, 8:1-6

Read Hebrews 7:11-28.

- Make a list of the similarities and differences between Jesus' priesthood and the Levitical priesthood.

Similarities

Differences

- What signs were there that the Levitical priesthood was somewhat inadequate?

- What makes Jesus far more effective as a priest?

- In what ways do you think Christians may tend to fall back to the Levitical way of doing things, rather than holding onto the benefits that are ours in Jesus?

Some background to clarify...

We've got the big picture sorted out – now for some background. I'm not an artist or photographer but I know that the right background in a picture will make the foreground stand out. Similarly, understanding the Levitical priesthood of the OT gives the background for seeing Jesus more clearly in the NT. So let's take a look at the role of priests in the OT.

Open your Bible to Exodus 20 – the Ten Commandments at Mt Sinai. Read just the 'section headings' in your bible (if you have them) to the end of chapter 27. What sorts of things are covered? After all that – we come to the priests.

Read Exodus 28:1-5.

- Who were to be made priests? (also read Exodus 29:29-30)
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There are a lot of instructions regarding the priests and the tabernacle in the rest of Exodus (and a great deal of repetition too). We find the completed picture in chapter 40. The OT books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy also include many instructions for the priests (Numbers 3-4, 8-9, 18 are good places to look). Here's a very brief list of some of the things we find. Have a read of as many of the passages as you have time to.

- one of the **offerings** that were prescribed - Read Leviticus 6:24-30.
- the **standards** they had to keep – Read Leviticus 21:1ff
- their job involved **more than offering sacrifices** – Read Numbers 3:1-10
- they **needed sacrifices offered for them** to make them holy – read Numbers 8:5ff
- they were not to **have their own inheritance** – Read Deuteronomy 18:1ff / Joshua 21:1ff

Read Hebrews 8:1-6

- What further comparisons are made between Jesus and the old High Priests?
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- What continuing themes do we see so far in Hebrews?
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Greater covenant

Hebrews 8:7-13, 9:11-28

Hebrews is a long letter/book, and it is easy for us to forget that it all hangs together. But if we are going to make proper sense of it all, we need to read it as a whole. That means being able to cover large sections like we will in this study. It is all one 'argument'. For example, 8:1 is a reminder that the writer is still talking about the same person as he was back in chapter 1:3 – Jesus, who is sitting at the right hand of the majesty in heaven and crowned with glory and honour (2:9). And he is still talking about Jesus as our high priest, as he began to do in chapter 2:17.

In chapters 5-7, we saw how Jesus' priesthood is of a completely different order to the Levitical priesthood. Now we see the tabernacle he serves in is different too, and the covenant that sits behind it has also changed.

Read Hebrews 8:6-13

1. What was 'wrong' with the first covenant?

2. How is the new covenant different?

3. Now that there is a new covenant, what happens with the old?

In chapter 9, the writer compares the use of the old tabernacle with the true tabernacle.

The Tabernacle and the Temple

God saved the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. He gathered them around Mount Sinai and gave them the Ten Commandments. God renews his covenant with Israel. Then God instructs Moses to build a sanctuary – the tabernacle or 'tent of meeting' (more details are in Exodus 25:1-9).

During their wandering through the desert, the Israelites moved the tabernacle around with them. This continued as they made their way into the Promised Land – with a few glitches of course, like losing the Ark of the Covenant! Later, King David wanted to build a temple to replace the tabernacle (2 Samuel 7). God said David couldn't, but that his son would – Solomon then built a Temple (2 Kings 6-9).

Solomon's temple was destroyed and rebuilt – a couple of times. When Jesus came into Jerusalem he cleared-out money-lenders and traders. When Jesus died, the curtain in the temple tore from top to bottom symbolising the end of the usefulness of the temple. 30-40 years later the temple was destroyed – again!

When we come to John's vision of heaven as a great city, recorded for us in Revelation, we're told there was no temple to be seen! It is no longer required.

“I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Revelation 21:22 NIV).

Read Hebrews 9:1-10

- What does the writer say the Holy Spirit was teaching and illustrating through the ceremony that took place in the Tabernacle each year?

Read Hebrews 9:11 -15

- verse 15 – for what reason is Christ the mediator of a new covenant?

Read Hebrews 9:16-28

- Outline the metaphorical use of the “will” in this passage.

- What is the importance of blood in the sacrificial system?

- How is Christ’s covenant greater?

- What else does this passage tell us about the future coming of Jesus?

Greater Sacrifice

Hebrews 10:1 – 31

Read Hebrews 10:1-18

- What is the purpose of a sacrifice under the old covenant? (1-4)

- Why is Jesus not satisfied with sacrifices, even though the law required them to be made?

- Why is Jesus' sacrifice greater than past sacrifices?

Read Hebrews 10:19-25

- How does the writer summarise the benefits that are ours in Christ? What are we encouraged to do in the light of that?

- What does it mean to 'enter the Most Holy Place'?

- What does it mean to 'draw near to God'? (22) Has it got anything to do with 'meeting together'? (v25)

- What should it feel like to have a conscience that is not guilty?

- How can we spur each other on to love and good deeds?

- Are there any sacrifices left for us to offer God?

- How does 'worship' take place under the new covenant?

Greater Faith

Hebrews 11:1-12:3

On our way through Hebrews we have highlighted the **negative warnings**. The warning not to drift. The warning not to become hard-hearted. The warning not to be sluggish of hearing and responding to God's word. In this study we'll focus on the **positive encouragement** to keep going. In the passage (11:1-12:3) we have a long list of people held up as examples for us, and we are encouraged to join them in persevering.

Setting the scene

Read Hebrews 2:5-10 and 4:1.

- What do we have to look forward to as Christians?

Read Hebrews 6:11-12.

- We're taught how important it is not to become sluggish in hearing and responding to God's word. Have another look at the encouragement in Hebrews 6:11-12. Who are we to imitate?

- Read 12:1-3 This will give us the context for thinking about chapter 11.

- Understanding the context, how would you expect the people in chapter 11 are supposed to motivate us?

The cloud of witnesses

- Read Hebrews 11 and complete this table as you go. Stop as often as you need along the way – and feel free to talk 'off the topic' about things you find interesting.

Person/people	What they hoped for	How they demonstrated faith	What they received/ did not receive

- Discuss these statements:
 - a. “These people (in Hebrews 11) received the shadow, but continued to hope for the 'reality’” How well does this statement express verses 13-16?

- b. About verses 39-40: “Hebrews 11:1 is not so much a 'definition' of faith, as a description of what faith will 'look like' in someone's life”

- How is what we hope for the same as what the OT people hoped for?

All of the people we have looked at had an 'active' faith in God. Their trust (faith) in God's promises and their dependence (faith) on God's faithfulness meant that they endured great hardship, rather than give up. Each of them only saw part of the fulfilment of what God had promised – yet they longed for more. Not only are we encouraged to have the same sort of active faith they had – but we have our hope in the same things – Jesus, the forgiveness of sin and the prospect of eternal 'rest' and 'rule'.

Greater Mountain

Hebrews 12:4-24

Talk about this statement. Do you agree or disagree, why?

“Indifference is worse than punishment”

Last week we were exhorted to actively persevere in trusting God. As we read on into chapter twelve you might add 'even when things are hard'. At the beginning of chapter 12 Jesus is held up as an example for us to follow – in our struggle against sin.

Read Hebrews 12:4-13

- How does God discipline? Does the passage say? Is it referring back to some of the things in chapter 11? Or are we being disciplined every time something goes wrong in our life? What do you think?

- How does God's discipline demonstrate his love?
(what might it be like if God were 'indifferent' towards us?)

- Why does this passage say God disciplines those he loves? (verse 10)

Read Hebrews 12:14, in the light of v4 and v10.

- How does verse 14 continue in the same vein as the exhortation to strive against sin? Is verse 14 implying that we need to be 'good enough to see God' (that is, by our own merit?)

Read Hebrews 12:15-17

- In our struggle for peace with others and for holiness before God – we are told to make sure no-one misses the grace of God. How could someone miss the grace of God?

- How might a person's bitterness defile many?

- Why do you think sexual immorality is mentioned in this context? How was Esau 'godless' in dealing with God's promises (his birth right)?

Read Hebrews 12:18-28

- What IS Mount Zion? And how is it possible that we have come to it?

- What does verse 26 tell us about what to expect at the end times?

We are **still** being encouraged not to drift away from the salvation that we have in Jesus. Previously we have been told not to be 'sluggish' in hearing God's word. This time we are being encouraged that God loves us enough to 'discipline' us – to keep trusting God even when things get tough.

- Read 12:18-27 and fill-in this table comparing the 'shadow' and the 'reality' which we find in these verses.

	Shadow	Reality
Mountains		
Warnings		
'Shakings'		

Greater Life

Hebrews 13:1-25

Read Hebrews 13:10-16

- What sort of sacrifices should we be offering to God?

We are being urged to worship God, and to offer such sacrifices as these. Let's go back to the beginning of the chapter and consider what a life of worship and sacrifice could look like.

Read Hebrews 13:1-4

- What do these verses say about how we should treat people?

Note: the reference to angels is often discussed. In the New Testament, the word “angel” actually means messenger. Hence it is often translated as “saints” or “believers”. Is the writer talking about a heavenly messenger – an angel? Or is it a reference to human messengers – God’s people – Christians? What do you think?

Read Hebrews 13:5-6

- What should our attitude be towards money? Why? What does it say about our relationship with God when we begin to love money?

Read Hebrews 13:7-9 and 17-19.

- What do we learn about the role of leaders and our attitude to them?

- How are these attitudes to our leaders appropriate for people who worship God?

Read Hebrews 13:20-25

- What do these final words tell us about:
 - the writer?
 - the people receiving this letter?
 - the Church at the time?

One final question for discussion:

- What is the biggest theme that you have found repeated throughout Hebrews? How does that affect your life as a Christian?
