



Study Guide on the book of Hebrews

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***Reveal Study Guide***

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## Introduction

The goal of this study guide is to provide a richer understanding of our series *Reveal*.

The series is based on Hebrews; a New Testament book written to people who were evaluating Jesus and struggling with this new faith. The message of this book and its relevance in our own lives will be the focus of our community on Saturdays from February 28<sup>th</sup> until June 27<sup>th</sup>.

The study guide is meant to serve as an introduction to Hebrews and to help you explore the main themes of this book as we move through the series on Saturday nights as well as in our small group discussions. There is also a section to help in your personal spiritual journey, guiding you through the book of Hebrews on your own or as a couple to help you better understand this book of the Bible.

This is not an exhaustive study guide. On the last page, you will find a list of books and resources to take additional steps in studying the book of Hebrews.

\*All scripture references are from the book of Hebrews unless otherwise noted.

## The Who/What/When of Hebrews

Hebrews was written to a group of new Christians who were experiencing intense persecution and were struggling to continue following Jesus (its author is writing about replacing the Old Testament systems of sacrifice and relating to God). It was written before A.D. 70, which is when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. This point is evident because the author does not mention this significant event and the destruction of the temple would have served as a sign to the people of Israel that the old system was no longer needed. Because of this observation, most historians believe Hebrews was written between A.D. 40 – 50.

The original audience is never identified so we have to infer whom it was written to by the content, tone and style. The specific group was predominantly Jewish Christians; perhaps a house church or network of house churches in Rome (13:24) that is opting out of relationships with the larger Christian community for a variety of reasons (10:25; 13:7, 17).<sup>1</sup>

Many of the original audience wondered if it was worth the effort to continue following Jesus. The trials they experienced seemed to be too much to handle (10:35 – 39). The writer of Hebrews writes to them, encouraging them to not quit, to not go underground with their faith, to not deny Jesus, but to endure. The way he does this is by holding up Jesus, who He is, the power Jesus has, and what He has done. The author then finishes his letter (chapter 11 & 12) by pointing out the legacy of following Jesus (10:35; cf. 2:1; 4:14), those who have gone before us and how they endured and the prize that awaited them for their faithfulness.

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<sup>1</sup> *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*. Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, p. 390, *Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews*. William L. Lane, p. liii

The original audience, in the view of the author, was in serious spiritual danger. He feared they may “drift away” by “ignoring such a great salvation” (2:1, 3), that they may “harden their hearts” and so “fall short” of the “rest promised to the people of God” (3:7 – 4:11), that by “falling away” they may “crucify the Son of God all over again” (6:4 – 6) and “trample the Son of God under foot” (10:29), that by “refusing the one who speaks from heaven” they will not escape judgment (12:25 – 26).

This striking sequence of “warning passages” combined with the repeated exhortations to them to “persevere” and not “shrink back” to “hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first,” to “enter in with confidence,” to “make every effort” and to “hold unswervingly to the hope we profess” suggests their continued allegiance to Christ was in doubt, and the author was seriously worried they might give up their Christian profession altogether.<sup>2</sup>

It is unknown who wrote the book of Hebrews as no one took credit for it. Some believe that it was the apostle Paul, although this is debated because it is unlike any of the other books of the New Testament that he wrote. We do know that he was a second generation believer (2:3), a skilled preacher and interpreter of Scripture, with an excellent command of Greek (it came into the canon among Paul’s letters, but definitely not by him).<sup>3</sup> In antiquity, the names of Paul, Barnabas, Luke and Clement of Rome were mentioned as the author of Hebrews. In current scholarship, Apollos, Silvanus, the deacon Philip, Priscilla and Aquila, Jude, Aristion have been mentioned.<sup>4</sup>

It seems fitting that we don’t know who wrote the book of Hebrews since the point of Hebrews is to exalt Jesus and to hold him up as our Messiah, the author and perfecter of our faith. By not knowing the author, we are able to stay focused on Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

While it is helpful to know who wrote a book of the Bible, it is okay if we don’t, as some don’t have identified authors (Esther and Jonah for example).

Some of the major themes in the book of Hebrews are:

- Jesus is fully God and fully man (1:1 – 14; 2:5 – 18)
- Jesus as Son of God reveals God the Father, is the agent of creation, and sustains all creation (1:1 – 14)
- Jesus serves as the eternal high priest, who as a man sympathizes with human weaknesses, and yet who offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin (1:3; 2:10 – 18; 4:15 – 16; 9:11 10:19)
- Jesus is superior to angels, to Moses and the Mosaic covenant, and to the earthly temple and its priesthood (1:4 – 2:18; 3:1 – 6; 5:1 – 10; 7:1 – 10:18)

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<sup>2</sup> *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews – Revelation*. R.T. France, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*. Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, p. 390.

<sup>4</sup> *Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews*. William L. Lane, p. xlix

<sup>5</sup> *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews*. John MacArthur, p. x.

- All humanity faces eternal judgment for sin (4:12 – 13; 9:27 – 28; 10:26 – 31)
- Faith is necessary to please God and to participate in His eternal salvation promises. Faith requires conviction about the unseen realities of God and His promises. Such faith produces perseverance (4:2 – 3; 6:1, 12; 10:22, 38 – 39; 11:1 – 40)
- Perseverance is necessary in the Christian life, and church participants are warned against a lack of endurance (2:1 – 4; 3:7 – 4:13; 5:11 – 6:12; 10:19 – 39; 12:1 – 29)
- God’s promises are trustworthy, including His promise of eternal salvation (6:13 – 20)
- With the advent of Jesus Christ, the last days have begun though they await consummation at his return (1:2; 2:5; 4:9 – 11; 9:9 – 28; 12:22 – 29) <sup>6</sup>

Another thing that the writer of Hebrews hits on, by pointing to Jesus, is the area of *revelations* or what some call *words from God*. Many in our culture today, especially the Christian culture, want the latest and greatest; the newest thing. This cultural attitude gets taken into the church and applied to our relationship with God. Too many Christians are so focused on getting a *new* word from God that they miss the word that has already come. The book of Hebrews points out that God has spoken his absolutely final word in his Son, Jesus.

## Outline <sup>7</sup>

- I.** Jesus is superior to angelic beings (1:1 – 2:18)
  - a.** The supremacy of God’s Son (1:1 – 14)
    - i.** Introduction: Summary of the Son’s person and work (1:1 – 4)
    - ii.** Evidence of His status as Son (1:5 – 14)
  - b.** Warning against neglecting salvation (2:1 – 4)
  - c.** The founder of Salvation (2:5 – 18)
  
- II.** Jesus is superior to the Mosaic Law (3:1 – 10:18)
  - a.** Jesus is greater than Moses (3:1 – 6)

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<sup>6</sup> *ESV Study Bible*, p. 2358.

<sup>7</sup> *ESV Study Bible*, p. 2359.

- b.** Warning: a rest for the people of God (3:7 – 4:13)
  - i.** The failure of the exodus generation (3:7 – 19)
  - ii.** Entering God's rest (4:1 – 13)
- c.** The high priesthood of Jesus (4:14 – 10:18)
  - i.** Jesus the great high priest (4:14 – 5:10)
  - ii.** Pause in the argument: warning against apostasy (5:11 – 6:12)
  - iii.** The certainty of God's promise (6:13 – 20)
  - iv.** Return to the main argument: the priestly order of Melchizedek (7:1 – 10)
  - v.** Jesus compared to Melchizedek (7:11 – 28)
  - vi.** Jesus, high priest of a better covenant (8:1 – 13)
  - vii.** The earthly holy place (9:1 – 10)
  - viii.** Redemption through the blood of Christ (9:11 – 28)
  - ix.** Christ's sacrifice once for all (10:1 – 18)

### **III.** The call to faith and endurance (10:19 – 12:29)

- a.** The full assurance of faith (10:19 – 39)
  - i.** Exhortation to draw near (10:19 – 25)
  - ii.** Warnings against shrinking back (10:26 – 39)
- b.** By faith (11:1 – 40)
- c.** Endurance until the kingdom fully comes (12:1 – 29)
  - i.** Jesus, founder and perfecter of faith (12:1 – 2)
  - ii.** Do not grow weary (12:3 – 17)
  - iii.** A kingdom that cannot be shaken (12:18 – 29)

#### IV. Concluding exhortations and remarks (13:1 – 25)

- a. Sacrifices pleasing to God (13:1 – 19)
- b. Benediction (13:20 – 21)
- c. Final greetings (13:22 – 25)

#### **Does Hebrews Matter to Me?**

This is a question many of us ask when it comes to specific books of the Bible. Does it matter? Does it make a difference?

Many of us are not experiencing persecution to the point that we might lose our life. However, we all struggle with embarrassment of our faith at some point. We all have doubts. We all wonder if we are “okay” with God. We all wonder where we stand with God.

We ask questions like: Can I lose my salvation? Can I earn salvation? Why did Jesus die on the cross? How can I get through this situation in my life? What happened to my loved one who passed away recently? What happens when I die?

Hebrews matters to us because it helps us to know that we can have confidence in the work and person of Jesus. It helps us to know that we can have assurance in our salvation and to know that our eternal destiny is secure. It helps us to know that no matter what we are going through, we can get through it because of what Jesus has done and what those who have gone before us have done. It helps us to know that we are part of a larger picture of following after God. Hebrews is our letter of encouragement to not quit, to not give up, and to continue following Jesus.

The purpose of Hebrews is to strengthen, encourage, and exhort the tired and weary members of a house church to respond with courage and vitality to the prospect of renewed suffering in view of the gifts of and resources God has lavished upon them. The writer’s intention is to address the sagging faith of men and women within the group and to remind them of their responsibility to live actively in response to God’s absolute claim upon their lives through the gospel. He urges his listeners to hold loyally to their confession of Jesus as the sole mediator of salvation in a time of crisis and warns them of the judgment of God they would incur if they should renounce their Christian commitment.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews*. William L. Lane, p. c.

## Jesus and \_\_\_\_\_

The original audience who received the letter of Hebrews was Jewish Christians. As such, they held Moses in high regard. The struggle for many of them was reconciling Jesus with Moses. In the first century, it was popular to hold up and believe in Jesus and Moses, Jesus and Angels, Jesus and animal sacrifices.

In our world we have the same problem although not with Moses, angels or animal sacrifices. For us, it is Jesus and Buddha, Jesus and postmodernism, Jesus and Mohammed, Jesus and money or perhaps Jesus and crystals. In the pluralistic, tolerant world that we inhabit this makes sense and many of us would say “What’s wrong with that? If it works for you, that’s great.” The writer of Hebrews would say to us that “It is Jesus and nothing.”

Hebrews is written to show us that all we need is Jesus: no one and nothing is else needed because of what Jesus has done.

Hebrews begins by looking at what Jesus did. In Hebrews 1:3 it says that after making purification for sins, Jesus sat down. A priest in Jewish culture annually would make atonement for sins on the Day of Atonement. When he was done, he would sit down signifying he was finished and that there was no more atoning needed. For the writer to say that Jesus sat down, he is saying, “Jesus did it all. There is nothing left. There is no one else. It is Jesus and nothing.”

Many of us want to bring Jesus to the religious buffet; take a little of this and a little of that, sprinkle some Jesus on top and we have our religious belief system. The problem is that the Bible has no room for this approach. This is a struggle for many of us to understand, let alone explain to someone else, but this is one of the main thrusts of Hebrews. To use the popular analogy: there is only one way up the mountain, not many.

What Hebrews makes clear is that *it is about Jesus, it is only about Jesus, it is always about Jesus*. He is all we need to be right with God. We can’t do anything to add to our salvation. We can’t do anything to earn it. We can’t lose it. It was bought by the blood of Jesus on the cross; it was sealed with his death and resurrection.

In Hebrews, Jesus is the eternal Son of God (a title Hebrews introduces dramatically in 1:2 and deploys throughout to emphasize Jesus’ superiority to all other mediators), the agent of creation (1:2 – 3, 10 – 12), honored above even the angels (1:4 – 14), in whom God’s essential nature is to be seen (1:3); in contrast with human priests He is sinless (4:15; 7:26 – 28) and eternal (7:3, 23 – 25) and exercises His ministry in heaven (4:14; 8:1 – 5). Yet, that same Jesus has been made lower than the angels (2:9), sharing our humanity (2:10 – 17; 5:1 – 3) and our suffering and temptation (2:18; 4:15; 12:2) as our elder brother (2:11 – 12); in a remarkable passage Hebrews graphically describes Jesus’ “loud cries and tears to the one who could save Him from death,” His “reverent submission” and “learning obedience” through suffering so as to be “made perfect” as our Savior (5:7 – 9).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews – Revelation*. R.T. France, p. 31.

For the writer of Hebrews, Jesus is our high priest (4:14 – 7:28). This is important because in Psalm 110:4 we are told the Messiah will be a priest “in the order of Melchizedek.” For Jesus to be the Messiah, He needs to fulfill all of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, being a priest is one of them.

### **Jesus’ Death on the Cross <sup>10</sup>**

Books upon books have been written on this topic. Why did Jesus die on the cross? Did He have to die on the cross? Some authors have even referred to Jesus’ death on the cross as “divine child abuse,” <sup>11</sup> missing the point of why Jesus had to die on the cross and what He accomplished.

The book of Hebrews is written to Jewish Christians who have been taught to wait for the Messiah (this is what the Old Testament saints were doing, looking forward to the Messiah) but who also believe that Jesus *is* the Messiah. They are trying to reconcile reading the Old Testament through that lens.

Hebrews was written 15 – 40 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The amazing thing is that at this point people were already struggling with how to wrap their minds around this idea that the Messiah had come. People were already adding things to salvation instead of moving forward with Jesus as the Messiah; the only One they needed.

The author shows that Jesus’ sacrifice in our place is “better” than, and renders obsolete, all the animal sacrifices that take up a large part of the Old Testament laws (9:11 – 10:18). He pays particular attention to the ritual of the Day of Atonement as the single annual sacrifice to remove sin that most clearly prefigured Christ’s self-offering, no longer annual but once-for-all (7:27; 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10). For the modern reader to whom this is unfamiliar ground, the insistent focus on bloodshed in these verses is likely to be alienating rather than attractive. But to the original readers of Hebrews this was a vital and liberating message and for the emerging Christian church, it provided the essential basis for breaking away from the Jewish temple so that Jews and Gentiles together, wherever they might be in the Roman world, could rejoice in the one perfect sacrifice that has made full salvation from sin available to all God’s people forever. <sup>12</sup>

Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross completely reveals to us the love of God the Father. For the God of the Bible to send His Son, His only Son, to earth in the form of a human, take our sin on Him, die in our place and rise from the dead so that we can have a relationship with Him is unfathomable, unexplainable.

What makes all of this important is that it is what makes Christianity unique. No other major world religion claims this reconciliation and salvation. No other world religion believes this about Jesus. But as a follower of Jesus, this is what we believe the Bible teaches to us. In the book of Hebrews, it is one of the major themes.

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<sup>10</sup> For more information on this topic, check out Mark Driscoll’s book *Death by Love* & John Piper’s book *Fifty Reasons why Jesus Came to Die*.

<sup>11</sup> *The Lost Message of Jesus*. Steve Chalke & Alan Mann (this is not a book that I would recommend as it completely misses the point of Jesus and the cross).

<sup>12</sup> *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews – Revelation*. R.T. France, p. 31.

## **Pain and Suffering**

The main thrust of Hebrews is that in the midst of doubts, hardships, pain and persecution, don't quit. Some of the early church was tempted to quit following Jesus, give up, head underground, deny Christ. The writer implores them to continue the journey.

He does that by pointing to Jesus.

The reality is that all of us encounter difficulties. All of us go through times of pain and suffering. We ask why it is happening to us and wonder how we will get through it. The problem for us and for the original audience of Hebrews is that because we are human, we are very shortsighted and ask questions concerning how we are affected (our lack of comfort, the stress, the difficulty, the inconvenience, the pain). What the writer argues is that we need to look at why this is happening from the perspective of what God is trying to accomplish in us through the challenges that we face.

What the writer does in constantly pointing us to Jesus is to hold Jesus up as *all we need*. For many Christians, following Jesus is about us and what we get from it. Suffering is about us and what we endure. What the writer of Hebrews does is to show us that it is about God, our suffering is for God.

Read that last line again.

Did you catch that? Our suffering is for God.

This is an important distinction because it affects our view of God and our view of what God is doing in our world. It shows us that if our suffering is for God, if God is for His glory and works all things together for His glory (Romans 8:28 – 29), then our pain and suffering is not wasted, is not a mistake, but is for God.<sup>13</sup>

## **Faith**

The most famous chapter in the book of Hebrews is chapter 11.

It comes after a lengthy argument about Jesus being all we need, greater than us, Moses, angels and any other gods.

It comes after pointing to Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection as all that is needed to secure salvation.

In chapter 11, the author points to those who came before Jesus and speaks about the faith they had in the coming of the Messiah. He points out that they looked forward to the Messiah coming, waiting, hoping, and believing that he would come and that they received God's approval because of their faith since they had not yet received what God had promised.

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<sup>13</sup> For more on this topic check out *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God* by John Piper.

We live after the Messiah has come. We can look back and see that God *has* fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament and sent the Messiah to be a living sacrifice for our sins. Shouldn't we have even more faith than those who came before Jesus and looked towards Him?

So what does that kind of faith look like and how do we reconcile that faith with our own doubts or what other religions and belief systems say about how we should live our lives?

### **Use of the Old Testament**

It is important for us to understand the role of the Old Testament. Many Christians don't know why it exists; what's the point of the Old Testament? Is it just a bunch of stories with some history thrown in to make the Bible longer or more interesting? The Old Testament is there to show the history of God and His people, but more importantly, the Old Testament is there to point to Jesus.

For many of us, the Old Testament is a mystery. It is an essential part of the Bible but few of us know why. We just know it is there. The book of Hebrews makes reference to the Old Testament more than any other New Testament book.<sup>14</sup> The reason is that it is written to a Jewish audience. The Old Testament is the Hebrew Bible. From a young age, Jews would have the Old Testament memorized and hear it every week at the Temple. They knew it and all of the prophecies it contained. It was their guide to life and how they related to God. To make a case to Jewish Christians that Jesus is the Messiah the author of Hebrews makes a lot of use of the Old Testament to site the foretelling of this moment.

The author doesn't just point back to the Old Testament. He reads the Old Testament through the lens that Jesus fulfilled everything in the Old Testament. He shows that the passages in the Old Testament point beyond their own context to something "better" still to come.<sup>15</sup> The Old Testament is not just filled with stories to inspire us or to show us how to live but to show us Jesus, revealing that Jesus is the one God has send to help us find our way back to Him.

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<sup>14</sup> *The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews*. George H. Guthrie, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews – Revelation*. R.T. France, p. 27.

## Reading Schedule

During this series, I want to challenge you to read the passage that was preached on in our gathering. During the week after our Saturday gathering read it as often as possible. My challenge is for you to do this exercise 3 – 4 times a week. To help stay on-track, we've made a book mark you can put in your bible to keep your place. You can find this bookmark at our next steps table in the church lobby or download one from our website [www.tucsonrevolution.com](http://www.tucsonrevolution.com).

After reading through the passage each time, ask these questions:

1. What jumps out?
2. Why is this here?
3. What is God saying to me through this?
4. What questions do I have that I need to do some research on to find the answers?

Feb. 28 – Mar. 6: Hebrews 1

Mar. 7 – 13: Hebrews 2:1 – 4

Mar. 14 – 20: Hebrews 2:5 – 18

Mar. 21 – 27: Hebrews 3:1 – 6

Mar. 28 – Apr. 3: Hebrews 3:7 – 4:13

Apr. 4 – 10: Hebrews 4:13 – 5:10

Apr. 11 – 17: Hebrews 5:11 – 6:12

Apr. 18 – 24: Hebrews 6:13 - 20

Apr. 25 – May 1: Hebrews 7

May 2 – 8: Hebrews 8

May 9 – 15: Hebrews 9

May 16 – 22: Hebrews 10:1 – 18

May 23 – 29: Hebrews 10:19 – 39

May 30 – June 5: Hebrews 11

June 6 – 12: Hebrews 12:1 – 2

June 13 – 19: Hebrews 12:3 – 17

June 20 – 26: Hebrews 12:18 – 29

June 27 – July 3: Hebrews 13

## **Resources and Commentaries to check out on Hebrews**

[\*Fifty Reasons why Jesus Came to Die\* by: John Piper](#)

[\*In my Place He Stood Condemned: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement\* by: J.I. Packer](#)

[\*Seeing & Savoring Jesus Christ\* by: John Piper](#)

[\*Death by Love\* by: Mark Driscoll](#)

[\*The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews\* by: George H. Guthrie](#)

[\*Hebrews for Everyone\* by: N.T. Wright](#)

[\*The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews – Revelation\* by: Tremper Longman & David Garland](#)

[\*How to Read the Bible for all it's Worth\* by: Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart](#)