

# FOLLOW THE LEADER

ELEVEN STUDIES IN HEBREWS

(PART 6-11)

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## INTRODUCTION

*"Imagine that early this morning the government issued orders to begin persecuting Christians in your local community. Before the day is over, you have witnessed a group of Christians beaten up by a mob in a nearby town centre; you've been spat upon by a colleague; you've been told about a close friend, evicted from her home because of her Christian faith; the building where your church meets has been vandalised; on TV news you have watched angry citizens make vicious threats towards Christians and curse the name of Jesus; and you have heard rumours that anyone caught attending a church service on Sunday will be arrested.*

*"What would you do? How would you respond? Who would you look to for help? Many years ago, a community of Christians in the Roman Empire didn't have to imagine such persecution—they experienced it. These believers didn't pretend to answer questions about how to respond—they were forced to. And forced to think about who they could turn to for help. The author of Hebrews gave them an answer: Jesus, God's Supreme Son." <sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Justin Buzzard, *Hebrews: Consider Him*, Tim Chester (ed.), NP: Justin Buzzard/The Good Book Company, 2010, 7

## WEEK 6: OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST - PART 2 (HEBREWS 7:1-28)

**Ice Breaker:** If you could be related to a famous person, living or dead, who would it be and why?

*Read Hebrews 7:1-28*

Picking up where he left off in Hebrews 4:14-5:10, the author turns his focus back to Melchizedek. Peppered throughout this passage are multiple allusions and quotations from Psalm 110:1-4, which helps form the basis for his later argument for the superiority of Jesus as our great high priest.

1. Look at Hebrews 7:1-10, what is it about Melchizedek that should make us sit up and take note of him? In your own words, outline the author's reasons below:

2. In your opinion, which of his reasons do you consider most noteworthy, why?

3. Our author tells us candidly that perfection (the necessary qualities required to approach God, e.g. righteousness, holiness, etc.) could not come through the work of Levitical priests. Why was the Old Testament sacrificial system so unable to achieve this 'perfection' for us?

**4. "All this talk of Melchizedek seems unnecessarily complex. Surely, Jesus could have simply been born from parents descended from Levi, and become a high priest that way, couldn't he? " Using what we've seen so far, how would you respond to this questioner?**

**5. Reread Hebrews 7:15-26, how does Jesus' role as high priest compare to the Old Testament priests? For what reasons can we have more confidence in Jesus' high priestly ministry than in those he came to replace?**

**6. Remember that the author's audience was a group of Christians tempted to return to Judaism because of the persecution they are facing. Why might Hebrews 7:25-28 be encouraging for Christians facing difficulties generally, and persecution in particular?**

**7. Consider everything we've read in this passage. In what way do you think the author wants us to be changed by his discussion of Jesus and Melchizedek? What leads you to this conclusion?**

*End by praying about something from today's study which you are thankful for, or has challenged, or encouraged you in some way.*

## WEEK 7: THE BETTER COVENANT – PART 1 (HEBREWS 8:1-9:14)

**Ice Breaker:** "A covenant is no different to a contract." Discuss.

*Read Hebrews 8:1-9:14*

Hebrews 8:1 might imply that the author is coming to the end of his discussion, but this is not the case. Hebrews 8:1 does not signal the start of his conclusion, but the climax of his letter!

1. Take a look at Hebrews 8:1-6. What reasons does the author provide to justify his claim that Jesus ministry is 'superior' to those who came before him?

With this new high priest and his superior ministry comes a new covenant with superior blessings. Our author begins to introduce this idea in Hebrews 8:7-13 with a quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34.

2. What does this 'new covenant' offer that makes it superior to the one that came before it? Why was a 'new covenant' even necessary?

3. Quoting Jeremiah 31:34, Hebrews 8:12 says that the Lord will forgive our sins and no longer remember them. If God no longer remembers our sins, why do we need to confess them to him?

Next, the author describes the setup and the content of the Tabernacle during the days before the Temple was constructed (Hebrews 9:1-5). He then turns his attention to the priests, and particularly the high priests, who served in it.

**4. Consider the author's summary of the Tabernacle and Temple ministry in Hebrews 9:6-10. How does his description help to illustrate the problems with the Old Covenant?**

**5. Finally, consider the description of Jesus' work in Hebrews 9:11-14. How does it compare to that of the earthly priests in v6-10? What are the practical results of Jesus' high priestly ministry?**

*End by praying about something from today's study which you are thankful for, or has challenged, or encouraged you in some way.*

## WEEK 8: THE BETTER COVENANT – PART 2 (HEBREWS 9:15-10:18)

**Ice Breaker:** When is 'new' better? When is it not?

Last week, the author outlined the superiority of the New Covenant introduced by Jesus, compared to the Old Covenant given through Moses. Now he wants us to help us fully understand why a New Covenant was *necessary*, and its life-changing implications for the God's people.

*Read Hebrews 9:15-10:18*

1. According to Hebrews 9:15-22, what problem was the New Covenant intended to resolve? How might this help us understand the relationship between the covenants?
2. Look at Hebrews 9:23-26. Compare and contrast the author's description of the New Covenant with that of the New Covenant. Summarise your findings below:
3. In what ways does Christ's incredible sacrifice on our behalf transform how we view both the present and the future?

**4. Hebrews 10:1-4 says that the law cannot 'make perfect those who draw near to worship', neither can 'the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.' Why is this?**

**In Hebrews 10:5-10, the author uses a quotation from Psalm 40:6-7 to illustrate the reason why Jesus came to earth. Not to offer sacrifices according to the law, or to bring restoration to the Old Covenant (v5-6, 8). Rather, he came to do God's will, to offer himself as a perfect sacrifice that would make God's people holy once and for all time.**

**5. Once again the author's reflection on the superiority of Jesus sacrifice causes him to look to the future. Consider Hebrews 10:1-13, in what ways can we look to the future with a hope that those under the Old Covenant never could?**

**6. According to Hebrews 10:14-17, what are the benefits of living under the New Covenant? How might these benefits encourage us to pursue a life marked by dependence on God and obedience to his will?**

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## WEEK 9: NO TURNING BACK (HEBREWS 10:19-39)

**Ice Breaker:** What is the difference between confidence and arrogance? How can you be sure?

Hebrews 10:19-39 marks the end of the author's extended discussion on Jesus' sacrificial work. Here he draws out some practical applications to us by way of a strong encouragement to press on and a sharp warning against giving up. His main point is simple: for the Christian, there is no turning back.

*Read Hebrews 10:19-39*

**1. Hebrews 10:19-20 tells us that we can confidently enter the Most Holy Place because of Jesus' death and resurrection. But what is this 'Most Holy Place' and what does it mean to enter it?**

**2. Verse 22 reminds us that it is important to come to God with sincere motives. What might it look like to approach God with insincere motives? How can we seek to avoid these pitfalls?**

**3. Verse 24 encourages us to 'spur one another on towards love and good deeds', and verse 25 to 'not give up meeting together'. Practically speaking how does remembering to meet together help us to 'spur one another on towards love and good deeds'?**

**4. In Hebrews 10:26-31, we are once again presented with a powerful warning, much like the one in Hebrews 6:4-8. How are we to understanding this new warning? And how might Hebrews 10:36-39, help us to heed it?**

**5. Consider the author's description of his readers' past approach to suffering in Hebrews 10:32-34 To what extent do you share their attitude towards suffering? Why/Why not? Why do you think it is?**

**6. How often do you compare your passion and Christian maturity now, to your past self? Why/why not? How might the help us to better pursue Christian godliness?**

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## WEEK 10: A LEAP IN THE DARK? (HEBREWS 11:1-12:3)

**Icebreaker:** “You cannot know whether a chair will support your weight until you sit on it.” Discuss.

*Read Hebrews 11:1-12:3*

- 1. In verse 1 the writer tells us that faith is “confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” Does this mean that faith is a leap in the dark? Why/why not?**
- 2. Next, he tells us that is by this kind of faith that that Old Testament saints 'won God's approval' (CSB). How might this help us respond to the common misconception that believers under the Old Covenant by works?**
- 3. Consider the authors summary in Hebrews 11:13-16. How might the example of these Old Covenant believers encourage us to press on in our Christian life? Be practical in your answer.**

**4. Theologian John Frame describes faith as consisting of knowledge, belief, and trust. What is the difference between knowledge of God and belief in God? To what extent do we see John Frame's description of faith (knowledge, belief, trust) in this chapter? Provide examples from the passage where possible.**

**On the 15th April 1992, Professor Richard Dawkins told those attending *Edinburgh International Science Festival* that "Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence."**

**5. Given everything that we've seen in Hebrews 11, how would you respond to Professor Dawkins? Be prepared to justify your answers from the passage.**

**6. Finally, the author points us to Jesus in Hebrews 12:1-3. In what ways is Jesus the ultimate example of faith? In practical terms, how would looking to Jesus example help us to 'run with perseverance'?**

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## WEEK 11: FAITH AT WORK (HEBREWS 12:4-13:25)

**Ice Breaker:** What is the difference between discipline and punishment?

Hebrews 12:4-13:25 forms the final section of the author's letter. Here he helps us discover the practical outworking of our faith in Jesus Christ.

*Read Hebrews 12:4-13:25*

**1. Look at Hebrews 12:4-11. In what ways might a Christian misunderstand this section? What is the author *actually* telling us?**

**2. With this in mind, what might it look like to "endure hardship as discipline" (v7)? Be practical in your answer.**

Having given some advice on pursuing Christian godliness,<sup>2</sup> the author then begins his final warning of the letter<sup>3</sup> by comparing the giving of the law<sup>4</sup> with the Heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> Whilst the events at Mount Sinai were glorious, they brought further separation between God and the people.<sup>6</sup> The events at Mount Calvary are more glorious for they have given us free access to the Heavenly Jerusalem (i.e. the presence of God) (v22-24). Nevertheless, this access should be taken for granted.

**3. Consider Hebrews 12:25-29. How might we break the author's warning down into its main parts? What would it look like to heed the author's final warning?**

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<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 12:14-17

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 12:18-29

<sup>4</sup> Ex 19-20; Deut 4-5

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 12:18-24

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 12:19-21

**4. Consider the author's advice for godly Christian living in Hebrews 13:1-6 and Hebrews 13:15-18. To what extent are these a logical outworking of his reflections on Jesus Christ in chapters 1-11? How might this provide the key to remaining motivated in our pursuit of Christian maturity?**

**5. Think of your church leaders (Cf. Hebrews 13:7 & 17). Spend a few moments sharing some of the qualities that you most appreciate most about them. Which of these qualities would you most like to imitate and why? What could you do this week to show your gratitude for their service in speak God's word to you week in week out?**

**6. Look at Hebrews 13:8-9. How remembering that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (v8) help us guard against "all kinds of strange teachings" (v9)?**

**7. Finally, reflect on the last 11 weeks. In what ways has your view of Jesus changed or deepened due to studying Hebrews? What practical change should you expect as a result?**

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