

FOLLOW THE LEADER

ELEVEN STUDIES IN HEBREWS

(PART 1-5)

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Week 1: God's Last Word (Hebrews 1:1-2:4)	3
Week 2: The Royal Family (Hebrews 2:5-18)	5
Week 3: Listen Up! (Hebrews 3:1-4:13)	7
Week 4: Our Great High Priest – Part 1 (Hebrews 4:14-5:10)	9
Week 5: A Dire Warning; A Certain Hope (Hebrews 5:11-6:20)	11

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." ¹

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

WEEK 1: GOD'S LAST WORD (HEBREWS 1:1-2:4)

Ice Breaker: What was the last thing you started but never finished (eg. book, task, film, etc.)? What was your reason for giving up?

Read Hebrews 1:1-2:4

1. Compare v1 with the first part of v2. What are similarities and differences?

2. Take look at v1-4, what do we discover about Jesus identity and mission?

3. A strap-line for Hebrews could be 'Jesus is greater'. Consider v5-14, in what ways is Jesus greater than the angels?

Hebrews is filled with serious warning about the dangers of drifting away from Christ (e.g. Hebrews 2:1-5). These warnings are not to make us worry about whether we can lose our salvation, but to spurn us on in perseverance and obedience. Like a danger sign by cliff edge, we are supposed to heed the warning and act, not ponder whether the drop will kill us.

4. Why might the author have waited 15 verses before giving us his first warning?

5. What exactly does he want us to realize about the gospel compared to the Law of Moses (2:2-4, cf. Galatians 3:19)? Knowing this, why is it vital that we take his warning seriously?

6. For the letters first readers, drifting away meant returning to Judaism as a response to persecution. What might drifting away from Christ look like for us? How can we help one another guard against these dangers?

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

WEEK 2: THE ROYAL FAMILY (HEBREWS 2:5-18)

Ice Breaker: "If the only information that we had about Jesus was Hebrews 1, we would still have an accurate portrait of his life and work." Discuss.

Read Hebrews 2:5-18

In Hebrews 2:6-9, the writer returns to the subject of angels, this time with a quote from Psalm 8:5-6. At first it appears that he is talking about humans (v8), but it soon becomes clear he is talking about Jesus (v9).

1. Look at verse 9-10, what was the result of Jesus being 'made a little lower than the angels'?
2. The first readers were a collection of Jewish Christians facing persecution (Hebrews 10:33-34). How might Hebrews 2:6-9 have encouraged them to keep going? How might it be a help to us when things get tough?
3. According to He 2:14-18, why did Jesus have to become human? In your own words, summarise the reasons below:

5. Given all that we've seen so far in chapters 1-2, why is it necessary for Jesus to be both fully divine and fully human? What would be lost if he were merely the perfect human?

6. Verse 11 says that Jesus is not ashamed to call us his 'brothers and sisters.' What are the practical implications of Jesus being our older brother? Be specific.

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

WEEK 3: LISTEN UP! (HEBREWS 3:1-4:13)

Ice Breaker: How can you be sure that some is listening to what you are saying?

Read Hebrews 3:1-19

1. In chapter 3:1-6, we are encouraged to fix our thoughts on Jesus rather than Moses. Though Moses was a great man, Jesus is greater. How might you go about helping a Jewish person to understand this difference between Jesus and Moses?

2. What would it look like for us to fix our thoughts on Moses rather than Christ? How might we avoid making this mistake?

In 3:7-11 we're given a quote from Psalm 95:7-11. This Psalm alludes to two occasions when the Israelites rebelled against Moses and suffered the consequences for their unbelief (Ex 17 and Numbers 14).

3. Hebrews 3:7-19 contains a very serious warning. Outline the main points of the warning in a couple of sentences:

4. To ensure that we heed this warning, we are commanded to encourage one another *daily* (v12-13). What steps might we take to keep this command? Be practical in your answers.

Reading Hebrews 4:1-13

Whilst the promise of rest was taken away from those who rebelled against Moses, it remains open to us (Hebrews 4:1-2). However, this Sabbath-rest is not the rest God enjoyed at Creation (v5, cf. Genesis 2:2-3), nor resting in the promised land (v8). It is something far better!

5. So what is this Sabbath-rest for God's people, and how do we enter it? How can we be sure?

6. In verses 11-13, we're given one final reason to take these warnings seriously, what is it? What might we need to do as a result?

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WEEK 4: OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST – PART 1 (HEBREWS 4:14-5:10)

Ice Breaker: Imagine, you've been arrested for a crime you did not commit. If you could have a fictional character represent you in court, who would it be and why?

Read Hebrews 4:14-5:10

1. Once again we are encouraged to fix our eyes on Jesus (4:14). What motivations are we given to look to Jesus this time?

2. Look at Hebrews 5:1-6, here Jesus work as High Priest is compared to the Israelite high priests. What are the similarities and differences? *Note: Melchizedek was a priest-king who appeared to Abraham in Genesis 14:18-20. We'll look at him in greater detail when we reach Hebrews 7.*

3. If Jesus never sinned (4:15) why did he need to be made perfect? How are we to understand this apparent contradiction?

4. How, then, might 5:7-10 encourage us to be obedient and pursue the perfection that will one day be ours in eternity?

5. Scan back through 4:14-5:10. Share any of Jesus' qualities and characteristics that you see:

6. This Jesus is the person who is your representing *you* before God the Father! To what extent does this encourage us to pursue a more honest and confident prayer life?

7. Spend a moment reflecting on what we've seen so far. What is one practical improvement that you can make to your prayer life this week?

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WEEK 5: A DIRE WARNING; A CERTAIN HOPE (HEBREWS 5:11-6:20)

Ice Breaker: Have you ever done something completely reckless? What was the result?

The writer begins by telling them that he is hesitant to move on with his discussion about Jesus and Melchizedek because of their Spiritual state. Although they should be mature believers by now, they are still infants in the faith.

1. Look at verse 11-14. What did spiritual immaturity look like them for them? Based on this, what might it look like for us?

The author tells us that Christian maturity means the ability to instruct others (v12); being 'acquainted with the teaching about righteousness' (v13); and 'trained... to distinguish good from evil' (v14). His goal is not for them to all become preachers in the church!

2. So, what is his desire for them? And how can we practically pursue a similar level of Christian maturity?

3. Hebrews 6:4-8 contains one of the strongest warnings in the book, if not the New Testament, against abandoning Christ. Look at 6:1-3, and v9. In what ways, might these verses help us understand the author's motive in giving this warning?

4. At first glance, Hebrews 6:4-8 seems to be saying that a Christian can lose their salvation. However, other passages seem to say that this is impossible (John 6:39-40; Romans 8:32-39; Phil 1:6). How are we to resolve this apparent contradiction?

5. In what ways, do verses 9-12 help us heed the author's warning and provide some assurance that our faith is genuine?

Finally, the author, referencing the offering of Isaac in Genesis 22, introduces Abraham as an example of someone worth imitating (v12-13).

6. Look at v13-20, to what extent is Abraham a good example for us to imitate? Why might we be able to have even greater confidence in God than Abraham?

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