

# Hebrews



*Such a Great Salvation*

ARPC Term Grow Studies 2013

PART 2



# Introduction to Hebrews

*How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?*

- Hebrews 2:3

Hebrews is the great letter at the end of the New Testament that digs deep into the nature of what Jesus has done for us – the ‘great salvation’ not to be ignored. We have the opportunity in term GROW to wrestle with the way in which Jesus’ life and death and resurrection is steeped in the Old Testament Scriptures, which is fulfilled in Him. We get to answer the call to recognise Jesus as God’s last Word on life, in which part of that recognition is the call for unqualified personal commitment, unflagging perseverance and even a willingness to suffer.

Despite the encouragement waiting to be dug up in the book of Hebrews, some of it can be hard going. Old Testament stories and allusions that we might not be familiar with, the writer flicking back and forth between Israel and present day Christians, as well as the hard to understand passages on ‘falling away’ which may all puzzle us. So even while some parts of Hebrews tells us this stuff is baby food (5:12-6:3), we’re going to find a bit of gristle to chew on along the way. But it’s worth it. Because through the exercise, we come to grow in our understanding of Jesus on *His* terms, and come to a better understanding of our task as His followers.

Something that’s a little different with this term’s material is the *personal reading and exercises*. They are there for you to prepare before hand – it is designed for anything from a train ride to lengthy quiet time. The goal of studying the Bible in Growth Groups is partly to develop a lifestyle and habit of reading God’s word regularly and frequently – so what better way of doing that than spending your quiet times in the passage covered in the week’s study? So please take the time to do it and remember that you – and the rest of your group – will get far more out of these studies and the talks if you prepare beforehand.

I pray for our term *Grow* that we’ll benefit greatly together as we study Hebrews together!

**Weber**

April 2013AD.

# Some Background to Hebrews

## The Structure of Hebrews

Before you start any book of the Bible, it's good to know how it fits together. This is particularly important with Hebrews. While this book has an argument that runs through from start to finish, it has repetition and alternation – that is the flicking back and forth between doctrine (biblical truth) and application (what that truth means for life). Look out for that as you work your way through.

Here's how we're going to be breaking up Hebrews and working through it:

1:1-2:4 -	Simply Supreme
2:5-18 -	Just like us. All for us.
3:1 - 4:13 -	The word that will save your life
4:14-5:10; 7:1-8:13 -	The Go-Between
5:11-6:20 -	Warning!
Ch. 9 -	Nothing but the blood of Jesus
Ch. 10 -	Getting personal
11:1-12:3 -	Running the Race
12:4-29 -	Ultimate Worship
Ch. 13 -	Finishing Strong

Some FAQs about Hebrews:

### Who wrote Hebrews?

The short answer is that we're not sure.

The author doesn't identify themselves (as Paul, Peter & James do at the start of their letters) and while some claim Paul wrote it, the difference in vocabulary and style of writing isn't consistent with how we see Paul writing elsewhere. On top of this, it would be odd for Paul to say that he heard the Gospel not from Jesus, but from "those who heard him". (Hebrews 2:3 cf. Galatians 1:11-12).

So while those who first received the letter knew who wrote it, we don't. Most likely it was a second generation Christian (Hebrews 2:3 reference), who had a good education (it's high brow Greek), and who relied on Greek Old Testament for his quotations.

### When was it written?

Again, hard to know. Most commentators suggest that since the writer talks about Jewish practices that still seemed to be going on in his day (i.e. 8:13, 10:1-2), most likely the letter was written before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70AD.

### Who was it written to?

You'll be getting sick of this answer...but again we're unsure. With no writer identifying himself, and no destination or audience mentioned, we really can't be sure. What we *can* know though, is that this group of people has an understanding of Jewish temple worship and face the temptation of returning to Judaism.<sup>1</sup> The audience, then, are probably Jewish Christians the author is writing to in order to encourage them in the face of persecution as well as the tendency to relapse into Judaism. What has been said though, is recognized by the early church as being valuable for Christians everywhere for the understanding God's purposes in Jesus and encouragement to persevere in Him.

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<sup>1</sup> Judaism was an officially sanctioned religion by the Roman Empire, unlike Christianity which saw at least 4 great Empire-wide persecutions in less than 3 centuries. One temptation for Christians would be, under severe persecution, to pass themselves off as being Jews to avoid persecution.

# Personal Preparation

## Week 1 - Hebrews 1:1-4 - Simply Supreme

### Day 1 – Read Hebrews 1:1-4

#### Consider

- According to vv. 1-2, what has God done? What does that look like?
- Why is it important to the author to announce Jesus this way at the start of this letter?

#### Exercise

The beginning of Hebrews contrasts the whole of God's revelation from 'In the past...' to '... but now'. This is the core of Hebrew's argument regarding the supremacy of Jesus, God's last Word. Try to read through Hebrews in one sitting. As you do so, try and see those aspects that are 'In the past' to the 'but now...', as well as the contrast between Jesus the Son, and other agents of God's previous dealings with His people (e.g. Angels, Moses, Joshua etc.) Don't worry if you don't get all the details, this is just an exercise to get the view of the 'whole' before diving into the parts of Hebrews.

#### Pray

- Give thanks for the way in which God has decisively spoken through Jesus.

### Day 2 -

#### Consider

- Read Hebrews 1:1-14, then read 2 Samuel 7:1-17 & Psalm 2. Who in the OT is the 'Son of God'?

#### Reflect

- How has Jesus' life confirmed that he is the Son of God – the Messiah or King of Israel? (using your general knowledge of the Bible)
- What relevance is the King of Israel to the rest of the world?

#### Pray

- Ask God to grant us understanding of the Old Testament in order to read Hebrews well.<sup>2</sup>

### Day 3 -

#### Consider

- Read a selection from among the following references from Genesis and Exodus: Genesis 16:7-12; 19:1-15; 22:1-18; Exodus 3:2; 14:19; 23:20-23. – What role do angels play in God's plans? In what way is Jesus different / superior to Angels from this passage of Hebrews?

#### Reflect

- Think about people you know who follow other religions (and therefore consider other 'gods' superior). How does *what* you worship dictate *how* you live?
- Would someone writing your autobiography report that your lifestyle is in step with a belief that Jesus is supreme?

#### Pray

- Thank God for the supremacy of Jesus in who He is and what He's done. Ask, in keeping with Hebrews 2:1-4, that Jesus would provide the reason and the drive for the way we live.

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<sup>2</sup> A great resource to get an overview of the OT is Graeme Goldsworthy's Gospel and Kingdom (available at Koorong)– Why not supplement your quiet time in Hebrews this term with this short book?

# Week 1 - Hebrews 1:1-2:4 - Simply Supreme

Like an overture to an opera, Hebrews 1 gives us an overview and a taste of what we'll get in the rest of the book. It is chock full of ideas and themes which will be teased out in the rest of the book - and it all revolves around the fact that Jesus is simply supreme.

**To start:** How do people you know find out who 'god' is and what he/she/it thinks?

**Read Hebrews 1:1-2:4**

Main Discussion	Further discussion (if required)
<p><b>From v.1-2, how has God's method of speaking to people changed?</b></p>	<p>What is being compared in these verses?</p> <p>How does God speak now? What does that mean for us?</p>
<p><b>Categorise what is said about the Son in vv.2b-4 below according to:</b></p> <p><b>Who the Son is:</b></p> <p><b>What the Son has done:</b></p>	<p>Explain in your own words what each of those statements mean.</p> <p>How does who Jesus is and what he's done qualify him for being the way we find out about God?</p>
<p><b>What's the comparison being made between the Son and Angels in the Scripture quotes in 1:5-12?</b></p>	<p>The quotes come in pairs. What is the point of the comparison between the pair of quotes in:</p> <p>v.5</p> <p>vv. 6 – 7</p> <p>vv. 8 -12</p>
<p><b>What is the warning in Hebrews 2:1-4?</b></p>	<p>What does 'therefore' mean in verse 1?</p> <p>What is the message spoken of by Angels? (cf. Gal 3:19) Is it part of God's speech?</p> <p>What is God's message 'in these last days' (1:2)?</p>

## Bringing It Home:

How should Jesus' supremacy as God's word affect how we relate to God?

What does 'drifting away' look like for Christians? How does it happen? What's the solution?

# Personal Preparation

## Week 2 - Hebrews 2:5-18 - Just like us. All for us.

### Day 1 – Read Genesis 1:26-31, Psalm 8

#### Consider

- What was the purpose behind God creating humans?
- From Psalm 8, how does God relate to humans?

#### Reflect

- In what ways do you see us fulfilling God's purpose for mankind?
- In what ways do we fail to live up to God's purposes for mankind?

#### Pray

- Thank God for the dignity he has created us with.
- Ask that we would live as Christians in such a way as to point to God's original purposes in creation.

### Day 2 – Read through Hebrews 2:1-9

#### Consider

- According to v.5-9, what is God's plan for the 'world to come'?
- Is this a reality now? Why or why not?
- What does this passage tell us about the relationship between
  - o Humans and angels?
  - o The Son (Jesus) and humans?
  - o The Son and angels?

#### Reflect

- How would you answer someone who says that God has lost control (or is not interested) in this world?

#### Pray

- Thank God for the fact that he has not abandoned his original plan to rule through humans, first through Jesus Christ, then eventually through all who are 'in Christ'.
- Thank God that He sent Jesus who tasted death on everyone's behalf

### Day 3 – Read through Hebrews 2:9-18

#### Consider

- Why is it fitting for Jesus to suffer? (v.10)
- How does Jesus destroy the devil? (v.14)
- Why is it necessary for Jesus to be made like his brothers in every way? (v.17)

#### Reflect

- Why was it necessary for Jesus to be a man?
- How does it help us when we're suffering to know that Jesus himself suffered? (v.18)

#### Pray

- Thank God that Jesus was fully man, that he could suffer and die for us as our faithful and merciful High Priest.

## Week 2 - Hebrews 2:5-18 - Just like us. All for us.

So far in the book of Hebrews, we've been comparing the Son (Jesus) and Angels, and it's easy to feel a bit left out as humans... but this part of Hebrews tells us that the whole reason why the Son came as Jesus, a human like us, is because God had a plan for us...

**To start:** How do our friends & neighbours see the role and impact of humans in our world?

**Read Hebrews 2:5-18**

Main Discussion	Further discussion (if required)
<p><b>In 2:5-8, what is God's plan for humanity, past, present &amp; future?</b></p>	<p>According to Psalm 8, what's the relationship between God, man and the world?</p> <p>What is the problem raised in Hebrews 2:8?</p> <p>What went wrong?</p>
<p><b>In 2:9-15 what role does Jesus play in restoring us to where God intended?</b></p>	<p>What is Jesus' role in these verses? (Compare this to Adam, the other father of 'the children')</p> <p>What had to happen to solve the problem? (vv. 9-10, 14-15, 17-18)</p> <p>So why did Jesus have to be human?</p>
<p><b>Let's play Jeopardy. If 2:16-18 is a summary answer to 'the question', what would that question be? (Check by seeing if the passage answers your question!)</b></p>	<p>Jesus role as priest was foreshadowed in 1:3 and will be the main topic of discussion in chapters 5-10. But for now, how is the priests role described?</p> <p>What difference would it make if the High Priest was unmerciful and/or unfaithful?</p>

### Bringing It Home:

Is it hard to believe that God has such lofty ambitions for humans? Would it be hard to convince your friends who aren't Christians? Why?

Is God's strategy to send his eternal Son to become man an obvious solution? If you were God faced with the problem of a rebellious creation, what would you have done?

How important is it for Jesus to be not only fully God, but fully man? How does it help in suffering?

# Personal Preparation

## Week 3 - Hebrews 3:1-4:13 - The word that will save your life

### Day 1 – Read through Hebrews 3:1-6, Numbers 20:2-13, Deuteronomy 32:48-52

#### Consider

- Who is Jesus being contrasted with in vv.1-6?
- What's the contrast between God's 'house(hold)' under Moses and God's house under Jesus?

#### Reflect

- How does Jesus' career and Moses' career compare?
- Why is it important that we are led by the right leader?

#### Pray

- Give thanks that we are led by the builder of the church – the One who leads us by virtue of having died for us as our faithful and merciful High Priest.

### Day 2 – Read through Hebrews 3:7-19, Psalm 95 (& Numbers 13:26-14:35 for some history!)

#### Consider

- What lesson does Hebrews draw from Israel's history here?
- How do Christians keep unbelief & sin's deceit at bay? (v.12-13)
- What's the clearest sign that someone knows and serves Jesus? (v.14)

#### Reflect

- In what ways might Christians be tempted to 'harden their hearts'?
- How can we help one another so that this doesn't happen?

#### Pray

- Thank God for the warning that we have in the OT about being unbelieving and hard hearts.
- Pray that God will show us where we are blind to our own unbelief and hardness of heart, and that His Spirit will challenge us to listen to His word, and encourage one another to listen.

### Day 3 – Read through Hebrews 4:1-13

#### Consider

- How do we know from the Old Testament that God's "rest" exists? (v.3-5)
- Is that "rest" still available today? (v.6-8)
- How do we enter that rest? (v.1-2, 9-11)
- What role does God's Word play in diagnosing our response to God? (v.12-13)

#### Reflect

- Do you think people are searching for "rest" today? What might be another word for it?
- What would it look like for you now to make every effort to enter God's rest?

#### Pray

- Pray that we would seek rest with God, and not rest in the world.
- Pray that we would subject ourselves to God's Word and God's scrutiny.



## Week 3 - Hebrews 3:1-4:13 - The word that will save your life

The great salvation, won by the man Jesus for humans, is a breathtakingly generous gift from God. It is a travesty to ignore (2:3), but amazing acts of salvation haven't always been followed by obedience... In this part of Hebrews, we're asked to learn from Israel's history, from which our journey lead by Jesus is compared with Israel's journey lead by Moses.

**To start:** What would the 'dream retirement' look like for Aussies? Is it the same for Christians you know as opposed to non-Christians?

Main Discussion	Further discussion (if required)
<p><b>Read Hebrews 3:1-6 How are Moses and Jesus compared?</b></p>	<p>Read Exodus 32:1-14. How was Moses a faithful 'servant' in preserving the house (the people of Israel)?</p> <p>In comparison, how was Jesus a 'builder' of the house (the Church) so far in the book of Hebrews?</p>
<p><b>Read Hebrews 3:7-19 &amp; Psalm 95. What is the writer of Hebrews warning against?</b></p>	<p>What attitude is condemned in Psalm 95?</p> <p>What is the NT parallel to the 'works' (v.9) that God did in the Exodus?</p> <p>What causes 'falling away'? (v.12-13)</p> <p>What can followers of Jesus do to prevent that from happening?</p>
<p><b>Read Hebrews 4:1-13. What is God's rest, and how do we know if we're going to enter it?</b></p>	<p>What's the point of comparing OT Israel to Christians today? (v.1-3)</p> <p>What does true 'rest' look like? If it wasn't entering the promised land, then what is it?</p> <p>How does God's Word help? (v.12-13)</p>

### Bringing It Home:

In what way is living as a Christian like 'journeying towards the Promised Land'? What would happen if Christians lost sight of this and made this world home?

What practical things can we do to encourage one another not to harden our hearts towards God?

# Personal Preparation

## Week 4 - Hebrews 4:14-5:10 & 7:1-28 - The Go-Between

This week we're looking at one idea in Hebrews that's split over two passages. The idea is that of a *mediator*, and how Jesus fills this role perfectly. But there's some tricky & unfamiliar ideas in the passage, so we're going to break it up a little.

### Day 1 – Read Hebrews 4:14-5:10

4:14-16 is a transition section of the book between what we've seen about Jesus, and what we're going to talk about now - his role of mediation.

#### Consider

- In 4:14-16, there are 2 descriptions of Jesus (14a, 15), two encouragements to Christians ("Let us...") and one motivation ("so that..."). Identify them and see how they fit together.
- What does the normal role of High Priest look like, and what are its strengths and weaknesses? (5:1-4)
- What are the similarities between Jesus as a high priest, and that description? (5:5-10)

#### Exercise

- What would be the problem with not having a mediator between us and God?
- What would be the problem with having the wrong type, or a bad, mediator?

#### Pray

- Give thanks that in Jesus we have someone who both understands our struggle, but hasn't given into it so that he can actually help us.

### Day 2 - Genesis 14 & Psalm 110

#### Consider

- At this point in God's plan to restore the world, what role is Abraham (or Abram) playing? (You might want to flick back to Genesis 12:1-3).
- So he's pretty important. But compared to how Abram reacts to the King of Sodom, how does he behave towards this strange king Melchizedek?
- How is Melchizedek described, and what does his name mean?

#### Exercise

- If Abraham is the central figure in God's plan to restore humanity, what conclusions can we draw about this strange figure Melchizedek?
- How does Psalm 110 picture Melchizedek as a person and his role?

### Day 3 - Read Hebrews 7:1-28

#### Exercise

- From Hebrews 7:1-10, as well as the last personal prep, what do we learn of Melchizedek?
- In 7:11-22, why did Jesus need to be a different type of priest to the normal "Levitical" priest? (See Exodus 25-30 for a description of the setting up of the Levitical Priesthood if you're keen!)
- From 7:23-28, what are the benefits of Jesus as a High Priest / Mediator in this better covenant?

#### Consider

- What role does a mediator have in regards to guilt, justice & forgiveness?

#### Pray

- Give thanks that we can have confidence in God's presence because of Jesus. Week 2 - Hebrews 5:11-6:20 - Warnings

## **Week 4 - Hebrews 4:14-5:10 & 7:1-28 - The Go-Between**

*There's no getting around it, this is a tricky passage. Not only in what it's about (Melchizedek?!?), but also in how it relates to us. But there's a big payload with this stuff, so hang in there.*

**To start:** For some disputes/conflict in our society we call in mediators. Describe what they are supposed to do. Describe the effects if the mediator is uninterested, corrupt, bias or incompetent.

*We're at a turning point in the letter to the Hebrews here. This new section lasts all the way up until 10:18, and deal with what the implications are that Jesus is God's ultimate High Priest.*

### **Read Hebrews 4:14-5:10**

In 4:14-16, Jesus is twice described as a High Priest (14a, 15a). Before we take a look at what that means, what are the two encouragements ("let us...") and the motivation ("so that...") found in these verses because he's such a great high priest? (You might want to also chat about what a high priest is!)

From 5:1-4, what did a normal high priest in the Old Testament look like? Pros/Cons?

How does Jesus as a high priest contrast to this in 5:5-10?

*So...in 5:10 here, we're introduced to our friend Melchizedek. He's exactly like batman. We don't really know his true identity, and he pops up to help when you least expect him, then fades back into the night. OK, maybe not exactly, but there are some similarities. What we need to do now, is have someone from your group who did the personal prep describe for the group who Melchizedek was. (If no-one can, you can have a look at Genesis 14 & Psalm 110 to build a picture.)*

### **Read Hebrews 7:1-28**

What picture does Hebrews 7 build of Melchizedek? (Particularly 7:1-10)

In Hebrews 5 we had the normal ("Levitical") priesthood described. From 7:11-22, what was the need for a change in the type of high priest?

So what are the benefits of this new high priest (mediator) and the new covenant (agreement)?

**So what we need to grasp is how this changes the way we relate to God AND how God relates to us.**

Discuss what role guilt & forgiveness (or lack thereof) play in your life. What change does Jesus as a new type of mediator make for these things?

What indicators would there be in your life to show that you haven't understood, or don't believe that Jesus is the type of mediator of a new way of relating to God that we see in this passage?

# Personal Preparation

## Week 5 - Hebrews 5:11-6:20 - Warning!

### Day 1 – Read Hebrews 5:11-6:12

#### Consider

- The letter takes an aside from Melchizedek in the middle of this explanation. Why? (5:11-6:3)
- What is the warning in 6:4-8, and what do you think the authors reason for giving it is?<sup>3</sup>
- But what is the encouragement and confidence the writer has about his readers in comparison? (6:9-12)

#### Reflect

- What are the things that disturb / encourage you about this passage?
- According to this section, how can we our hope in Jesus sure?

#### Pray

- Pray that we might understand the depths of God's goodness towards us in Jesus, and so never go looking elsewhere.

### Day 2 – Read Hebrews 6:13-20

#### Consider

- At the end of the last passage (6:11) the readers were called to make their hope sure by persevering in faithfulness. How is Abraham an example of this? (6:13-15)
- According to 6:16-20, what does the hope of Christians rely on?
- How is this related to him being a high priest / mediator of a different type? (6:20)

#### Exercise

- How is it comforting for our standing before God that Jesus is faithful even when we are not?
- Would you describe your trust in God as "certain hope"? Why or why not?

#### Pray

- Give thanks that God in Jesus is greater than our weakness.

### Day 3 – Assurance

The passage we're looking at this week can be difficult to understand, and many feel nervous after reading it that if they were to ever drift away from God that would be the end of it. So it's always good when we deal with difficult passages like these to remind ourselves what the big picture is.

Read these verses and write down what they have to say about our relationship with God.

**John 6:37-40**

**John 10:28-29**

**Romans 8:29-30**

**Philippians 1:4-6**

**1 Corinthians 1:8-9**

**1 Thessalonians 5:23-24**

**Hebrews 7:25**

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<sup>3</sup> Note that in these verses it's third person "those who", instead of the second person he uses elsewhere when talking about his readers, "we" / "you".

## **Week 5 - Hebrews 5:11-6:20 - Warning!**

We come one of the most challenging questions in the book and in our faith. Sandwiched in between writers' outline of a new mediator in Jesus is a warning for God's people not to fall away.

**To start:** Share what you know and understand the Bible to say about the danger or the possibility of having known God, but falling away from following him. How does this stack up with your experience as a Christian?

### **Read Hebrews 5:11-6:19**

From 5:11-6:3, why does the writer break in the middle of his talk about mediators? What is his critique of his readers? How do you know whether you're an infant or not in the Christian faith?

*It's these next verses (v.4-6) that people find particularly troubling. Details are important, so as we read it, notice how he moves from talking directly to his readers ("we/you") to talking about an undefined group of people ("those who"). So it's worth starting off by noticing that he doesn't think his readers fall into this category. He states his warning first (6:4-8), and then his encouragement (6:9-12).*

What are the things in 6:4-5 that people fall away from? What do you think "falling away" means here?

Why would it be impossible for them to be brought back? How does his analogy (6:7-8) drive home his warning?

How does this warning contained in these verses fit with your experiences in life? How do we reconcile them?

These verses may be confronting, but the writer doesn't want the reader panicking. What's his encouragement? What would it look like to make your hope sure? (6:11)

*There's no getting around it, this passage is troubling. But the writers hope is not that his readers would panic...but that they would be driven to Jesus so that they would have even greater certainty & hope.*

How is Abraham an example of trusting and hoping in God? (6:13-15)

Abraham had God's Word. Looking at how this section fits into the surrounding passage, where is certainty and hope supposed to exist for Christians today? (6:16-20) Is that where you are looking for certainty & hope in life?

**Far from being a passage meant to panic people, it's meant to be a warning to avoid pitfalls and an encouragement that certainty and hope is achievable.**

In light of this passage, how should we view those who are struggling, or seem to have "fallen away"?

Describe the ways this passage would encourage us to have certainty and hope?

# Personal Preparation

## Week 6 - Hebrews 8:1-9:28 - Nothing but the blood of Jesus

### Day 1 – Read Jeremiah 31:27-37 & Hebrews 8

#### Consider

- (Review) What's the point about high priests the writer has been making in the last few chapters?
- What's the difference between Jesus service as a high priest, and those that served within Israel? (8:1-6)
- The writer says that Jesus introduced a "new covenant". What does this quote from Jeremiah 31:31-34 tell us about the differences between the old covenant and the new covenant? (8:7-13)

#### Reflect

- What does it mean to have the law written on minds and hearts? (8:10)
- What does the passage mean when it says that people would "**Know** the Lord"?

#### Pray

- Give thanks that God did not let mankind's unfaithfulness do away with his plans for us.

### Day 2 – Read Hebrews 9:1-10

#### Consider

- Describe how people approached God in the Old Testament?
- According to 9:8-9, what was the Holy Spirit showing in this, and what did it mean for our conscience? (9:1-10)

#### Pray

- Pray that our standing before God might always be based on Jesus blood and not our own performance.

### Day 3 – Read Hebrews 9:11-28

#### Consider

- How did Jesus approach God? What does this mean for our consciences? (v.11-14)
- Memorise Hebrews 9:15. Do it. It's worth it.
- According to 9:15-28, what's the different effect Jesus' blood has compared to the blood of animals?

# **Week 6 - Hebrews 8:1-9:28 - Nothing but the blood of Jesus**

Having built the case for Jesus being a new type of high priest and mediator, the writer is now going to describe what this means for the new agreement (covenant) for God's people. It's a big passage, but it's all about one important passage in the Old Testament - Jeremiah 31.

**To start:** Many Australians don't like "organised religion", no matter what flavour it comes in - Christianity, Islam, Mormonism etc. What criticisms have you heard levelled at "religion"? Do you agree?

## **Read Hebrews 8**

What's the difference between Jesus service as a high priest, and those who came before? (8:1-6)

There's not only a problem with the mediators between man and God, there's also a problem with the people. Before we look at this passage from Jeremiah 31, someone give a (very) quick history of how Israel has gone in the Old Testament at being the people of God.

So God called a spade a spade. He knew the first covenant couldn't work because of the people (as the writer says in 8:7), so he promised another one. Work through the quote from Jeremiah 31 in this passage, and talk about what differences there will be between the old covenant and the new.

If you were to implement the new covenant in your life, describe the benefits.

## **Read Hebrews 9:1-10:18**

Describe the old (first) covenant (9:1-10). What was the problem with it for us according to 9:8-10?

Hebrews 9:11-28 talks a lot about blood. What's the importance of blood in our relationship with God? What effect does Jesus blood have that nothing else does?

**While many look at Christianity as a set of rules (perhaps a modernised version of Old Testament Israel?), what this passage tells us is that with Jesus' arrival and death God has made a fundamental change in the way He relates to people, and in the way they relate to Him. Eternal forgiveness is on offer, and we can have new hearts that are inclined towards God not away from Him.**

What do you think it looks like to have God's law written on our hearts? What doesn't it look like?

Discuss what 10:14-15 means in day to day life for those who don't know Jesus, and those who do.

# Personal Preparation

## Week 7 - Hebrews 10:1-39 - Getting personal

### Day 1 – Read Hebrews 10:1-18

#### Consider

- What was all Old Testament law and sacrifices according to 10:1-4?
- What was it the Jesus offered, that hadn't been offered before? (10:5-10)
- And what was the different outcome achieved by Jesus that hadn't been achieved before? (10:11-15)
- What remains for sin, guilt & those who know Jesus?

#### Reflect

- How should Christians deal with guilt in light of Jesus sacrifice and achievements?
- What does this passage say about how God sees those who trust in Jesus?

#### Pray

- Pray that we might understanding of our own sin, our past failures and our future destination might all be seen in the once for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

### Day 2 – Read Hebrews 10:19-25

#### Consider

- 10:19-21 give us the reason for what he's going to tell us next. What is it?
- In verses 22-25 there are three "let us" encouragements based on the above reason. What are we encouraged to do because of this reason?<sup>4</sup>
- What should be one of the motivations for doing these things according to 10:25?

#### Reflect

- Do you tend to draw near God when you feel you're struggling or away from him?
- Do you value the people God has placed around you to encourage you in the truths of the gospel?

#### Pray

- Pray that we might be people who hold to the truth, and call those around us to do the same.

### Day 3 – Read Hebrews 10:26-39

#### Consider

- This is a pretty confronting passage. At its heart, what's the warning?
- Why does God seem to get so upset about this particular issue?
- What does it mean when it says to "fall into the hands of the living God"? (10:31)

#### Reflect

- Do we take Jesus too lightly? Identify examples in your own life where this might be the case.
- Is this speaking to those who know Jesus or those who don't? Why is it so much more serious for those who do?

#### Pray

- Pray that we would never take for granted the incredible sacrifice and gift God has give us in the blood of His Son.
- That we would persevere in Jesus so that we would receive what God has promised us.

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<sup>4</sup> In the NIV it looks like there's another 2 in verse 25, but there actually isn't in the original. It doesn't make a massive difference, but it's nice to be accurate!



## Week 7 - Hebrews 10:1-39 - Getting Personal

*We come to the final passage in this bracket of Hebrews. The writer has just finished a long argument for Jesus as a new high priest of a better covenant - and all that means - and he's going to finish up by calling his readers to persevere in this truth, because nothing else will save them.*

**To start:** What is it that makes persevering at anything hard? What about persevering as a Christian?

### Read Hebrews 10:1-18

What did Jesus offer as high priest that hadn't been offered before? (10:1-10)

In all this discussion of laws, sacrifices, blood and forgiveness - what is the end result of Jesus offering Himself for us? (10:11-18)

### Read Hebrews 10:19-39

What reasons do we have for confidence according Hebrews 10:19-21? In light of these things, what are we encourage to do in 10:22-25? Describe what these look like.

Looking through the warning in 10:26-31, why does he encourage his readers so strongly to hold on to Jesus? Why is rejecting Jesus such a serious offence according to God?

We live in a society where tolerance and relativism<sup>5</sup> are promoted and encouraged. How should Christians approach these issues both inside and outside the church?

*The author was writing to an audience that had obviously experienced persecution after their initial acceptance of the Gospel, of a type that we will (most likely) never have to face. But he doesn't see this as a bad thing necessarily, just another reason to hold on to Jesus.*

What was the early experience of the Hebrew Christians? (10:32-34) How was this a positive experience for them?

Is that how you would have seen it? What type of persecution do you think you face? Do you see it as a good thing?

According to 10:35-36, what is the observable marker that someone has received what God has promised them?

***It's easy to consider what the Bible says about Jesus to be nothing more than interesting fact or theory. But the writer to the Hebrews doesn't see it that way. He see it as life bringing, giving truth, and necessary to be held to if God's promises for us into eternity are going to be realised.***

What role does the Christian community play in the individual's perseverance? Have you bought into that? How can you tell?

What are your methods of persevering & dealing with "persecution"?

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<sup>5</sup> Relativism: "The doctrine that knowledge, truth, and morality exist in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and are not absolute."

# Personal Preparation

## Week 8 - Hebrews 11:1-12:3 -By faith

Since this passage in Hebrews features a LOT of characters from the Old Testament, we will follow the person of Abraham who is most prominent in Heb 11. Don't feel you need to come up with an 'answer' as such, but rather just follow the feel of the narrative and get a 'feel' for the characters (Abram, Sarai etc.) and their predicament. For those with time, choose ONE other OT figures to read up on!

### Day 1 – Read Hebrews 11:1-40 & Genesis 12 & 15

#### Consider

- What is faith? (11:1)
- If you use the NIV, consider the ESV translation of 11:1 – does this change the meaning significantly?  
<sup>ESV</sup> **Hebrews 11:1** Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen

#### Reflect

- What is Abraham commended for?
- Consider passages that doesn't cast Abraham in a good light (e.g. Gen 12:10-20), what does this tell us about Abraham's faith?

#### Pray

- Give thanks for the example of the faith of those who've gone before us.

### Day 2 – Read Genesis 16-18

#### Reflect

- What is Abraham's example for us?
- Consider passages that doesn't cast Abraham in a good light (e.g. Gen 16), what does this tell us about Abraham's faith?

#### Pray

- Pray that our trust in Jesus would stand the test of time, especially as we await his return.

### Day 3 – Read Genesis 20-22

#### Consider

- What is Abraham commended for?
- Consider passages that doesn't cast Abraham in a good light (e.g. Gen 20), what does this tell us about Abraham's faith?

#### Pray

- Pray that we could fix our eyes on Jesus (Heb 12:1-3), spurring on and spurred on by one another.

## Week 8 - Hebrews 11:1-12:3 - By faith

We already learned from chapter 10 that Christ's eternal high priesthood and perfect sacrifice at the cross can bring us a full assurance of faith. Now we come to a chapter about faith.

**To start:** How do you think the average Australian would define faith?

### Read Hebrews 11:1-3

How would the Christian define faith? (11:1)

How can someone have assurance of something unseen? How do Hebrews 1:3 and Colossians 1:15 fit with this verse?

### Read Hebrews 11:4-40

Verses 4-38 talk about lots of characters from the Old Testament. What is the writer saying is common to them all?

What did Abraham and Sarah trust in? (11:8-12) What was their incentive for doing so? (11:10-11)

How would you feel if God commanded you to put to death your greatest earthly hope? Would that test your faith? (v.17-19)

What (and who) was Moses looking to, so as to ignore the treasures of Egypt? (11:23-28) How was this similar to Abraham?

Gideon is listed as one of the faithful men who time would fail to mention (v.32). Read Judges 6:36-40. Does this sound like a hero of faith to you?

*The writer's inclusion of the untrusting Gideon, the libido-driven Samson, Rahab the prostitute and the adulterous David (to name a few) reminds us that God doesn't work through people because of their moral uprightness or strength of character. Instead he calls sinful, broken people to act in faith to fulfill his purposes and promises on earth.*

From reading the chapter, what do you think a faithful person looks like?

### Read Hebrews 12:1-3

How do 12:1-2 follow on from chapter 11? What practical applications does the writer draw from the example of the "cloud of witnesses"?

In 12:1-3, why compare the Christian life to a race? Do you feel like that?

12:2 says that Christ endured the shame of the cross because of the "joy set before him." What joy do Christians have set before them? (2 Timothy 4:7-8 could help)

**Great encouragement in our Christian walk can be found when we know our brothers and sisters across time and space are fighting for the same faith as we are. And together with them, we will be perfected in Christ when He returns!**

How encouraging is it to know that the biggest names of the OT faced many of the same struggles that we do, and many of the same weaknesses that we have, yet remained faithful?

How is sin an impediment to running the Christian race? Do you lose heart when struggling with sin?

# Personal Preparation

## Week 9 - Hebrews 12:4-29 -Ultimate Worship

### Day 1 – Read Hebrews 12:4-13

#### Consider

- What does the author of Hebrews relate suffering as Christians to?
- What is the Fatherhood of God like?

#### Reflect

- Is it always possible to relate suffering to discipline from God? How should suffering as 'discipline' fit into our thinking about suffering?
- What seems to be the point of discipline (v.11)? How might this affect parenting or relating to those who are immature?

#### Pray

- Give thanks for God's fatherhood.

### Day 2 – Read Hebrews 12:14-24

#### Reflect

- What is the solemn warning?
- What is the great hope we look forward to?

#### Pray

- Pray that we would remember daily that we are coming to the Heavenly Jerusalem even as we live in our fallen world.

### Day 3 – Read Hebrews 12:25-29

#### Consider

- How does the warnings of this chapter relate to God's fatherly discipline earlier on in the chapter?
- What might 'reverent awe' look like in our lives?

#### Pray

- Pray that we would live lives that are worthy and in awe of our God who is 'a consuming fire.'

## **Week 9 - Hebrews 12:4-29 - Ultimate worship**

*Those faithful witnesses in chapter 11 are headed by Jesus, whose life, death and resurrection is great encouragement for us to endure and great example to follow. This is all the more important as we encourage one another to look to Jesus' return for our motivation and comfort.*

**To start:** Where do you look to when you're feeling discouraged?

### **Read Hebrews 12:1-13**

Compare the sufferings of Christ in 12:2-3, and the sufferings of the Hebrew church in 12:4. What's your reaction when facing hardship? (Compare with 12:4-7)

Many of us had fathers who were either absent physically or absent emotionally. How do you think this affects our attitude towards the discipline of our heavenly father? (12:9-10)

Does v.11 ring true from your own experience?

What do 12:12-13 (particularly the end of v. 13) mean for the individual? For the church?

*If God is our Father, and as Romans 8:28 tells us He is working for the good of His people to make them like Jesus, then hardship in this life takes on a whole different meaning.*

What trials/hardships are you facing? Are you trying to do it alone, or with God in community?

Can you think of a time when God has disciplined you, which seemed "painful at the time," but in hindsight you can see how you've grown spiritually as a result of it?

### **Read Hebrews 12:14-29**

If we have faith in the work of Christ, we already have peace with God and are seen as holy before Him. Why then does the writer encourage us to strive for both? (12:14)

Verse 15 alludes to Deuteronomy 29:18, which warned against idolatry in Israel, calling it a root of "bitter poison". What kinds of idolatry do we struggle with today?

What are we supposed to learn from Esau? (12:16-17)

In the following verses we see what we're supposed to cling to, instead of going back to. What is the contrast between what was (12:18-21) and what is now (12:22-24)? (Read Exodus 19:16-23 for some background)

In 12:29, the writer quotes Deuteronomy 4:23-24 - have a read of that passage. What is the connection between worship, reverence and idolatry here?

*It would seem much easier with a massive burning mountain standing in front of us, and people stoning cows all around us, to remember God's holiness and covenant to us. But while that covenant seemed to have more flash and bang, the covenant God has made with us now is far superior.*

Do you find it easy to be blasé about what God has done for you in this new covenant? How do we avoid complacency?

What certainty is there that God can do what's promised here? Does this truth affect your life and decisions?

When are you most inclined to neglect the word of God, prayer & fellowship? Do you struggle more with God's holiness or His grace?

# Personal Preparation

## Week 10 - Hebrews 13 - Finishing Well

### Day 1 – Read Hebrews 13

#### Consider

- How does 12:28-29 prepare us for the applications in this chapter?
- List these applications and make a note of anything unusual or that you don't understand.

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#### Reflect

- How is this chapter an appropriate conclusion to the book of Hebrews?
- What areas may we as a) individuals b) Growth Groups c) the entire church at ARPC listen to the encouragements contained in this chapter?

#### Pray

- Pray to God for help to apply His Word.

### Day 2 – Read Hebrews 1-6

#### Reflect

- How would you summarize the flow of the letter/sermon that is Hebrews 1-6?
- What were the highlights in these chapters for you?

#### Pray

- Spend time simply praising God for the majestic Son who is Supreme in every way, as God's last word, as our brother, our captain and our High Priest.

### Day 3 – Read Hebrews 7-13

#### Reflect

- How would you summarize the flow of the letter/sermon that is Hebrews 7-13?
- What were the highlights in these chapters for you?

#### Pray

- Pray that we would continue to hear the warnings of Hebrews to stick by Jesus, and that we would spend the rest of our lives encouraging others to do the same.

## Week 10 - Hebrews 13 - Finishing Well

*We come now to the final part of the Letter to the Hebrews, where the writer is going to give his final encouragement to his readers. It would be easy to think that this chapter is a bit of an afterthought, but it's not. It's the natural conclusion to his argument in Hebrews, as well as being the way he finished the last chapter (12:28-29).*

**To start:** What do you think worshipping God acceptably looks like? What doesn't it look like?

### Read Hebrews 13:1-6

These first few verses contain some general encouragements for Christians in the way they live & worship God, beginning with the v.1 encouragement - "Keep on loving each other as brothers/sisters". The following 5 verses flesh out what this means. List what those practical encouragements are, and discuss what living lives like this looks like for us as individuals, but also for us as a community.

V.2 -

V.3 -

V.4 -

V.5-6 -

In connection with 13:6, in what ways does our doubt that God is enough shape the way we live our lives and make decisions?

### Read Hebrews 13:7-19

This section is bracketed by instructions about leaders (13:7,17-19). Having a look at what's in this section, why do you think that is?

What role should leaders be playing in the church community?

Why is Jesus as being the same 'yesterday today and tomorrow' placed next to the instructions about leaders here? (v.8)

The middle section (13:10-16) is broken into two parts - verses 10-12 and verses 13-16. What's being described in 13:10-12?

What are the encouragements found in verses 10:13-16 ("let us...do not forget...") and how do they relate to 13:10-12?

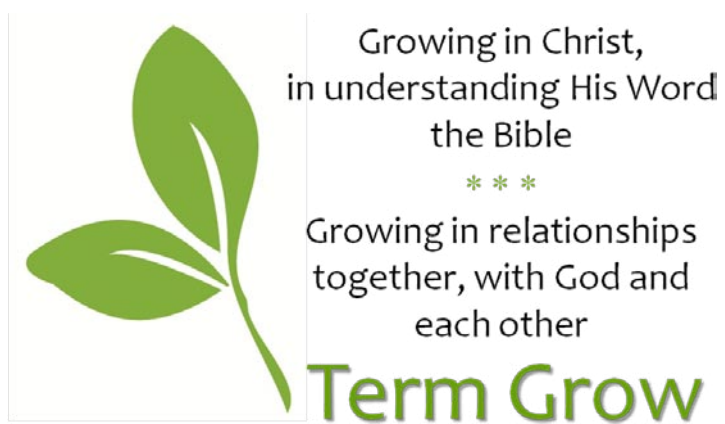
What are the two aspects of praise in 13:15-16 Christians are called towards? Can you have one without the other?

Hebrews is a massive book. And it's hard to get our heads around everything in it. If you were to sum up the message of the book of Hebrews in one sentence, what would you say?

How does 13:20-21 provide a fitting ending to the themes, ideas and encouragements raised in the book?

*Spend some time praying for each other about the encouragements 13:20-21 finishes on. Pray that we would hold to Jesus, not stray from the shepherd, who would be used by God to equip us to live productive lives that honour Him to His glory.*

## **Additional Prayer Points & Notes**



Please direct any feedback on the material to [weber@arpc.org.au](mailto:weber@arpc.org.au)