

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

JESUS IS **BETTER**

Part 3 | Hebrews 11-13

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A reminder of where we're up to...

Hebrews was written because of an urgent problem: its readers are on the verge of apostasy. Apostasy is the opposite of conversion; it's 'falling away from' or 'throwing away' Christ (3:12, 4:11, 5:6, 10:35). That is the 'sin' in Hebrews, and the 'temptation' they face is 'drift' (2:1). But their drifting is surprisingly not into irreligion, but back into the Jewish faith from which they had converted. The main argument to warn them against this drift is that in Jesus, God has spoken his **final word** (1-4) and completed a **finished work** (5-10): so why go back to the 'shadow'?

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Note: At the end of each study, you will see the following box:

Faith • Hope • Love

This is to remind us that as we pray for each other to grow in spiritual maturity, we should pray that we will grow in these ways:

- **Faith:** That we will learn to trust God in every situation and in all things
- **Hope:** That we will grow to set our hearts on the treasure that we have in Jesus
- **Love:** That we will grow in self-giving love—that puts others before ourselves

Study One

Hebrews 11:1-40

A non-Christian says to you: "I wish I had your faith". What do you think they might mean by that?

Read Hebrews 11:1-40

1. By way of context, flick back to Hebrews 10:35-36. What concern does the writer have about those he's writing to?
2. Why do you think he devotes a whole chapter to the 'faith' of Old Testament believers? How might it fit into the flow of the letter?
3. Skim through verses 1-40 again and fill in this table as you do:

<i>Person/People</i>	<i>What they hoped for</i>	<i>How they demonstrated faith</i>	<i>What they received / didn't receive</i>

4. How is what we hope for similar/different?

5. How would you summarise the effect of faith in God and his promises upon the lives of the people referred to in these verses? (hint: check out vs1)
 - a. How might verses 13-16 further add to our understanding of this?

6. *“All these... did not receive what had been promised”* (vs39). What questions does this chapter raise regarding God’s faithfulness? How does it answer them?

7. How would this passage have helped Jewish Christians who were tempted to return to the more physical Jewish religious practices for assurance?

⇒ *Do you think it’s easier or harder for us to exercise the kind of trust these OT folks had? Why?*

⇒ *Hebrews has described the promise that we can draw near to God right now through Jesus’ sacrificial death, and one day enter God’s heavenly ‘rest’. Why is this still a matter of faith for us today?*

⇒ *If we’re going to ‘stir up one another’ about these things, what will we be encouraging one another to do/be?*

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Study Two

Hebrews 12:1-13

“What kind of God would allow suffering?” - How would you answer that question? Would *“a loving one”* form part of your answer? Why/why not?

Read Hebrews 12:1-13

1. Recall the ‘heroes of faith’ from Hebrews 11. According to the passage, how is Jesus more than just an example of faith?

2. What does verse 4 tell us about the situation the Hebrews were in? What was their *“struggle”*? What had they forgotten?

3. Two common responses when people suffer are:
 - a. God must not be in control.
 - b. God is not for me.

What alternate conclusion does this passage offer?

4. How would you expect a good parent to respond when their kids declare: *“If you loved me, you wouldn’t make me do my homework, eat my vegetables or get up early!”*?

5. How is this notion of Fatherly discipline or training helpful in hard times?

6. What would it say about God if those times never came to us?

7. What might it be like if God were 'indifferent' towards us instead?

8. How would you summarise the nature of the Christian life from these verses?

⇒ *Are there situations in your life that make you “weary” of God’s discipline/training? What do we need to remember?*

⇒ *Charles Spurgeon once said: “I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages”. Does this reflect your attitude to hard times? Why/why not?*

⇒ *Verse 2 says that Jesus was able to endure the cross because of “the joy set before him”. How does our wonderful future hope help you to keep going?*

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Study Three

Hebrews 12:14-29

“Worship is so much more than what you do on a Sunday at church”. Do you agree? Why/why not?

Read Hebrews 12:14-17

1. 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 to the Hebrews encourage them (& us) to strive for these things?
2. What is the ‘bitter root’ of verse 15 referring to? (hint: you’ll want to look up Deut 29:18-19). How does that struggle manifest itself for us today?
3. In our struggle for peace with others, and for holiness before God, we are told to make sure no-one misses the grace of God. How could someone miss the grace of God?
4. Verse 16 says Esau was ‘godless’ in dealing with God’s promises (his birth right). How was Esau an example of *not* striving for holiness?
5. What does Esau missing out on the inheritance remind you of, from earlier in Hebrews? What is the practical warning for us?

Read Hebrews 12:18-29

Complete the table over-page that compares and contrasts the ‘shadow’ with the ‘reality’ from vs18-29:

	Shadow	Reality
Mountains		
Warnings		
'Shakings'		

6. On the *reality* side of the comparison, which things have already taken place, and which things are still to come?

7. What is the essential contrast between Mt Sinai and Mt Zion? How does that difference affect our relationship with God?

8. What similarities are still there between coming to Sinai and coming to Zion?

9. How does the writer use all he has said (v18 onwards) as motivation to worship?

⇒ *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 is promised here? How does this truth affect your life and decisions? How should it?*

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Study Four

Hebrews 13:1-10

"When love for Christ fades, love for his people tends to fade too". Do you agree? Why/why not?

Read Hebrews 13:1-6

1. In pairs, list the commands/practical instructions given to the Hebrews regarding their behaviour towards Christians and non-Christians (try to match the commands with the reasons that are given for them).
 - a. Think of a practical example of what each one might look like in our context.

 2. What are some of the differences between the way God and our society view:
 - a. Marriage?

 - b. Money?

 3. What should our attitude be towards marriage? Why? What does it say about our relationship with God when we deviate on this?

 4. What should our attitude be towards money? Why? In what ways could our attitude towards money affect our relationship with Christ?
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5. Read Luke 12:15-21. How do these verses help us obey the command of Hebrews 13:5?

Read Hebrews 13:7-10

6. What do these verses teach us about the role of leaders and our attitude toward them? How does verse 17 add to this understanding?

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

8. Why do you think the description about Jesus being the same “*yesterday and today and forever*” is placed next to the instructions about relating to leaders?

9. What would it look like to for our hearts to be “*strengthened by grace*” rather than being carried away by “*strange teachings*”?

⇒ *What “strange teachings” might point us away from God and His Word in our context? How can we encourage one another look to God’s grace through His Word instead?*

⇒ *Consider the commands of this passage. Are there any in particular that you struggle with? What might need to change?*

⇒ *Based on this chapter, what would you say Christian maturity looks like?*

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Study Five

Hebrews 13:11-25

Hypothetical: The writer to the Hebrews has asked for your input to conclude his letter. If you had been given the opportunity to shape the conclusion of Hebrews, what would you have included? Why?

Read Hebrews 13:11-16

1. How does the writer encourage the Hebrews to keep trusting and following Jesus whatever suffering it might entail? (hint: concentrate on verses 12-14).
2. What are the two aspects of praise in Hebrews 13:15-16 that Christians are called to?
3. Do you think you can have one without the other? Why/why not?
4. What do you think a sacrifice of praise (verse 15) would look like in our context?

Read Hebrews 13:17-25

5. What motivation does the writer give his readers for submitting to the leaders that God has placed over them? How might it be to our benefit to do this?
6. What do you think it means for God to *“equip you with everything good”* (verse 21) ?

7. What do these final words tell us about:

a. The writer?

b. The people receiving this letter?

8. How do verses 20-21 provide a fitting end to the themes, ideas and encouragements raised in Hebrews?

⇒ *What has been the most significant theme for you as we've worked through Hebrews together? How has it impacted your life as a Christian?*

⇒ *It is difficult to keep our heads above water during times of adversity unless Jesus fills our horizons, sharpens our priorities and dominates our experiences. At St Mark's, how can we encourage one another in difficult times?*

⇒ *As a group, have a go at trying to sum up the message of the book of Hebrews in one sentence.*

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