

From Shadow to Reality

Hebrews



**10 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS & INDIVIDUALS**

From Shadow to Reality

Hebrews

by Joshua Ng



matthiasmedia

From Shadow to Reality

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How to make the most of these studies

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

These ‘interactive’ Bible studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. The studies will take you through Hebrews, pointing out things along the way, filling in background details, and suggesting avenues for further exploration. But there is also time for you to do some sight-seeing of your own—to wander off, have a good look for yourself, and form your own conclusions.

In other words, we have designed these studies to fall half-way between a sermon and a set of unadorned Bible study questions. We want to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do a lot of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of ‘interaction’—interaction with the Bible, with the things we’ve written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The format

Each study contains sections of text to introduce, summarize, suggest and provoke. We’ve left plenty of room in the margins for you to jot comments and questions as you read. Interspersed throughout the text are three types of ‘interaction’, each with their own symbol:



For starters

Questions to break the ice and get you thinking.



Investigate

Questions to help you investigate key parts of the Bible.



Think it Through

Questions to help you think through the implications of your discoveries and write down your own thoughts and reactions.

When you come to one of these symbols, you'll know that it's time to do some work of your own. Each study also concludes with some suggestions for prayer.

3. Suggestions for Individual Study

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in Hebrews and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it. You may be spurred to pray again at the end of the study.
- Work through the study, following the directions as you go. Write in the spaces provided.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the *Think it through* sections. It is important to think about the sections of text (rather than just accepting them as true) and to ponder the implications for your life. Writing these things down is a very valuable way to get your thoughts working.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you've learnt.

4. Suggestions for Group Study

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and threesomes. Get together with a friend/s and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don't need the formal structure of a 'group' to gain maximum benefit.
- It is *vital* that group members work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how side-tracked you get!), but only if all the members have done the work and are familiar with the material.
- Spend most of the group time discussing the 'interactive' sections—*Investigate* and *Think it through*. Reading all the text together will take too long and should be unnecessary if the group members have done their preparation. You may wish to underline and read aloud particular paragraphs or sections of text that you think are important.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining important sections of text to emphasize, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of Hebrews, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

1

Overview: from shadow to reality

The second century heretic, Marcion, was infamous for deleting the Old Testament from his Bible. To him, the just and vengeful God of the Old Testament bore no comparison to the merciful and loving God of the New. The Old Testament had nothing worthwhile to say to Christians at all, and so Marcion simply got rid of it. He also deleted parts of the New Testament which either quoted or echoed the Old. We can imagine that he would have loved the Bible on computer—it would've made cutting and pasting so much easier!

We might regard Marcion's attitude as crude and mistaken, but many modern Christians are Marcionites in practice. They aren't really sure what to do with the Old Testament, and so they basically ignore it. A 'New Testament with Psalms' is the only Bible they need to carry with them.



For starters

1. Have a quick glance through the letter of Hebrews. How much of Hebrews do you think would be left after Marcion's scissors had finished their snipping?
2. What can we conclude about the relevance of the Old Testament for Christians, as far as the writer of Hebrews is concerned?

3. How does this compare with your attitude to the Old Testament? Are you a Marcionite in practice? What are your main difficulties in reading the Old Testament?

The whole argument of Hebrews is founded on the truth and relevance of the Old Testament for us today. The ancient word of God still speaks (Heb 3:7); it is “living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword” (Heb 4:12). And yet for the writer of Hebrews, the Old Testament is to be read through the glasses of God’s further revelation in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is a pointer to Jesus, and can only be fully understood in his light.

In fact, the key way in which Hebrews applies the Old Testament to us, through Christ, is through the imagery of ‘shadow’ and ‘reality’. People, objects, institutions and events spoken of in the Old Testament are but the ‘shadows’; the ‘realities’ are found in Christ.

In Hebrews 10:1, the writer explicitly says that the Law of Moses “is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves”. The Law spoke of a sacrificial lamb that would take away sin. This was but a shadow (which couldn’t really cleanse us from sin) pointing forward to Jesus, the real lamb who does cleanse us finally from our sin. Throughout these studies, we will see again and again how this and many other Old Testament shadows point to, and yet are surpassed by, the New Testament realities.

On the stage of God’s unfolding plan, the shadow comes on the scene first. Like a scene from a Hitchcock movie, we initially only see the shadow coming around the corner. From its shape and size we know something of what to expect of the figure beyond the shadow. And yet when the figure finally emerges, we know clearly at last! Often there is a twist to the reality, a surprise. And so it is with the New Testament realities—they are even greater than the Old Testament shadows might have led us to expect.

This movement from shadows to reality, then, forms the foundation and framework on which the book of Hebrews drives home its exhortations and warnings. As we study Hebrews in detail

