

Hebrews

A Word of Encouragement

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Introduction

A note about the author: No one is certain about who wrote the book of Hebrews. He does conclude the book by calling it a “word of exhortation” (Hebrews 13:22; also translated “word of encouragement”). We learn from Luke that this was how the Jews referred to a sermon in their synagogues (Acts 13:15); the book of Hebrews was likely a sermon. Due to the lack of certainty about the author, inspired by this distinction, throughout the study we will simply refer to the author as “the encourager.”

1. Jesus is better than _____. If you were to try to convince someone how great it is to serve Jesus, how would you fill in the blank? Create a list of ten things.

2. According to the verses below, how did the encourager fill in that blank?

1:4

2:2

3:3

7:19

7:22

8:6

9:23

10:34

11:16

11:26

11:40

3. You likely didn’t answer the first question with things that you didn’t find valuable. If the encourager chose these Old Testament figures to use in comparison to Jesus, what must he believe about the Old Testament?

4. The following themes can be traced throughout the book. They were themes because the original audience needed to hear them. Why do modern American readers need the same themes?

Faith (4:1-3; 6:1, 12: 10:22, 10:39-11:1; 12:2; 13:7)

Suffering (2:9-10; 10:32; 11:36-38; 13:12-13)

Confidence (3:6, 14; 4:16; 10:19, 35)

Hebrews 1:1-2:18

1. In class, diagram the argument utilized in these chapters. (1:1-2; 2:1-4)

1. What life situation would you use to illustrate the principle, “If you do it right, you only have to do it once”?

The encourager will use the same logic throughout the book (1:1-2; 4:8; 7:23-25; 10:11-14).

3. The following seven descriptions of Jesus are meant to show his greatness (1:2-4). Which description do you find most impressive? Explain your answer.

Heir of All Things

Creator of the World

Radiance of the Glory of God

Uphold Universe by His Power

Sat Down at God’s Right Hand

Superior to Angels

Better Name than Angels

4. The encourager uses seven quotations from the Scriptures to affirm his claims about Jesus. Try to match the quotations (1:5-13) to the descriptions (1:2-4).

Psalm 2:7 (1:5a)

2 Samuel 7:14 (1:5b)

Deuteronomy 32:43 (1:6)

Psalm 104:4 (1:7)

Psalm 45:6-7 (1:8-9)

Psalm 102:25-27 (1:10-12)

Psalm 110:1 (1:13)

5. What does it mean to “pay much closer attention” (2:1) in the life of a Christian?

6. The encourager is still defending that Jesus is greater than the angels but seems to be addressing an underlying objection (2:5-18). Read between the lines. What objection is he answering?

Hebrews 3:1-4:33

1. In class, diagram the argument utilized in these chapters. (4:6-10)
2. The quotation from Psalm 95 (3:7-11) refers to what happened at Meribah. Read Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:2-13, where those events are first recorded. Use three words to describe the people of Israel in those stories.
3. What similarities did the encourager see between the Israelites at Meribah and the dangers facing his audience? (cf. 3:12-4:3)
4. The encourager seized on the word “Today,” because in it he finds opportunity and hope (3:13). What can a Christian do to best utilize “today” in their relationship with God?
5. How are you going to apply the exhortation to “strive to enter the rest”? (4:11)

Hebrews 4:14-5:10

1. The encourager's main assertion is that Jesus is our high priest (4:14). He then offers a description of high priests according to the Levitical tradition (5:1-6). In what ways is Jesus similar to the Levitical priests, and in what ways is he different?
2. Rewrite 4:15 in your own words.
3. How does Jesus' experience (5:7-9) help to affirm the encourager's assertion in 4:15?
4. How does Jesus' role as the sympathetic high priest help you draw near to the throne of grace with confidence (4:16)?

Hebrews 5:11-6:12

1. The encourager is disappointed with the Hebrews' failure to mature (5:11-14). From this section, what attributes should define a mature Christian?
2. There is some debate about whether the elementary principles (repentance from dead works, faith, instructions about washings, laying on of hands, resurrection, and judgement) stem from the Jewish Scriptures or exclusively New Testament teachings. What clues from the text tip the scales?
3. The encourager paints a sad picture of those who fell away, despite their full Christian experience (6:4-6). How does the land analogy (6:7-8) help to explain the situation?
4. The Hebrews are heading down a dangerous path, but the encourager states that he is confident of "better things" for them (6:9-12). How could he be so confident that they would turn around?

Hebrews 6:13-7:28

1. Count the number of times the encourager uses the word “oath” in this section (6:13-7:28). Summarize the argument being made about God’s oath.
2. What is the Christian supposed to do in response to the encourager’s motivating speech in 6:18-19?
3. In what ways is Jesus’ priesthood similar to that of Melchizedek (7:2-3)?
4. In class, diagram the argument concerning the tithes (7:1-10).
5. Some use the phrase, “Well God didn’t tell me not to...” to reason that silence grants permission. Imagine that an astute person used 7:14 to bolster the argument. How would you respond to such an assertion?

Hebrews 8:1-13

1. What is qualitatively better about the ministry of Christ (8:6)?
2. According to the encourager, what was the fault in the first covenant?
3. Jeremiah prophesies that the new covenant will be different than the first (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:8-12) in three ways. How are these attributes unique?
 - The covenant will be written on their hearts.
 - All those under the covenant will know God.
 - Their sins will be remembered no more.
4. Imagine these attributes were your sales pitch. How would you describe your experience of these things to a person who isn't a Christian?

Hebrews 8:1-7; 9:1-24

1. List the descriptions throughout the section (8:1-7; 9:1-24) that differentiate the first tent, Moses' tabernacle, from the place that Jesus ministers.
2. From the encourager's description (9:1-5), diagram the layout of the tent and its contents.
3. According to the encourager (9:6-14), what was the purpose of the Levitical priests' ritual duties?
4. The tabernacle was surrounded by unclean people; their spiritual filth contaminated God's holy place. Once a year, the high priest would sprinkle everything with animal blood to purify the space (Leviticus 16:16). How does this picture illustrate your conscience and the power of Christ's blood?

Hebrews 9:23-10:18

1. Count the number of times the word “once” is used in this section. What point is the encourager trying to make?
2. What is the purpose of Christ’s second coming?
3. How does the use of the quotation from Psalm 40:6-8 (10:5-10) point to something new and better?
4. Christ’s sacrifice brings forgiveness, once for all. Still many Christians still wrestle with feeling forgiven. What would cause that doubt and uncertainty?

Hebrews 10:19-39

1. How might a Christian put into practice the commands to:

Hold fast the confession of our hope (10:23).

Stir one another up to love and good works (10:24).

Not neglecting to meet together (10:25).

Encouraging one another (10:25).

2. The repercussions for those who “go on sinning deliberately” (10:26) are “much worse” (10:28-29) than those who sinned under the Law.

3. The Hebrews already have a history of perseverance under extreme pressure. What did they experience during the “former days” (10:32-35)?

4. In what ways should a Christian exude confidence (10:19-35)?

5. Imagine that you were experiencing the difficulties facing the Hebrews. How might the quotation from Habakkuk (10:37-38) help you to continue in the faith?

Hebrews 11:1-40

1. The encourager states that God was “not ashamed to be called their God” (11:16). What might lead some to believe that God would be ashamed to be called “their God”?
2. Compare the lives of Abel (11:4), Moses (11:23-28), and those unnamed at the end of the chapter (11:33-38). What was similar about their faith?
3. What aspects of Abraham’s life would have been very similar to the lives of the Hebrews?
4. What does the encourager mean when he says concerning the faithful, “or whom the world was not worthy” (11:38)?

Hebrews 12:1-29

1. Think of a time in which you competed, whether athletic or otherwise. What motivated you to finish or what caused you to quit?
2. According to 12:3-11, what is the roll of discipline in the life of a Christian?
3. If you were going to put into practice the exhortations in 12:12-17, what steps would you take?
4. What point is the encourager trying to make by comparing the two mountains (12:29)?

Hebrews 13:1-25

1. How is the commandment for brotherly love thematic for all of the practical exhortations found in 13:1-7?
2. The encourager pleads, “Therefore, let us go outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured” (13:13). What aspects of the Christian’s life mark the believer as an “outsider”?
3. Multiple times the encourager promotes good relationships with the leaders of the church (13:7, 17). Society is suspicious of leaders and those in positions of authority. How can we keep this trend from contaminating our church environment?
4. How is the final prayer (13:20-21) a culmination of the entire message to the Hebrews?