NT 730 Hebrews

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This course involves a detailed study of the development of thought in the Book of Hebrews, with an emphasis upon the structure of the book, its christology, its conception of the relation between the old and new covenants, and its significance for a biblical understanding of the Christian life.

I. Course Objectives.

A. Content. The student should be able to:

1. Think through the contents of the book without recourse to the printed text, especially to trace the main lines of thought development within the book;
2. Describe thoroughly the meaning and development of major themes in the book, citing individual passages and other specific data to support conclusions;
3. Identify the most significant passages in the Book of Hebrews and interpret them contextually;
4. Demonstrate an acquaintance with some of the major commentaries and other scholarly works on the Book of Hebrews;
5. Demonstrate a general knowledge of the critical problems surrounding the Book of Hebrews, including the issues of date and authorship, the sociological, religious, philosophical, and theological matrix out of which the book arose, and the relationship of the Book of Hebrews to other New Testament writings;
6. Identify the major contributions of this book to Christian thought and life.

B. Methodology. The student should be able to:

1. Employ various kinds of relevant evidence including that which involves exegetical use of the Greek text in a process of inferential reasoning for the interpretation of individual passages within the book, as well as for the book as a whole;
2. Trace development of thought (in epistolary material) in an analytical fashion, showing how an understanding of thought development illumines the meaning of individual passages, major themes and the book as a whole;
3. Raise various kinds of interpretive questions, and answer these questions based on the use of exegetical determinants;
4. Synthesize the interpretation of units of various lengths, such as the paragraph, the segment, the section (division), and the book as a whole;
5. Use aspects of methodology that are especially relevant for epistolary material;
6. Evaluate and apply truths that emerge from the interpretation of the material.

C. Attitude. The student should:

1. Appreciate the value of the Book of Hebrews for faith, experience, understanding, and ministry;
2. Desire to make the Book of Hebrews the object of continued serious study throughout life;
3. Intend to employ seriously the Book of Hebrews in preaching and teaching within the context of the church.
II. Course Texts.

A. Required Texts:

B. Collateral Texts:
- New Testament Introduction, by Donald Guthrie
- The New Testament as Canon, by Brevard S. Childs

III. Course Requirements.

A. The completion of the following lessons in writing, unless otherwise indicated by the instructor.
   All lessons are to be handed in at the end of the class period on the day designated. No late papers will be accepted save in cases in which permission is granted by the instructor based on emergency.

B. Punctual attendance at all class sessions. Because of the importance of class attendance, and because of government regulations regarding student loans, a record of attendance will be taken at each class session. Absence at more than two class sessions will result in grade penalty, and absence at more than four will result in loss of credit for the course. Exceptions may be granted based on emergency, in consultation with the instructor.

C. Careful reading of the assigned portions of the required and collateral texts.

D. A final examination based on the objectives of the course.

IV. Course Evaluation.

A. Assignments - 75%
B. Final Exam - 25%

V. Lessons.

Lesson 1. Survey of the Book as a Whole.
Read the entire book through at one sitting several times.

1. Identify the general and specific materials of the book;
2. Locate the main units and sub-units in the book, and identify the major structural relationships operative in the book as a whole;
3. Ask a few interpretive questions regarding each major structural relationship observed;
4. Identify the key verses and strategic areas which provide insight into the book as a whole. Give reasons for each selection in terms of structural significance;
5. Note date bearing on such higher critical questions as the author, place and date of writing, recipients, provenance, unity of the book, etc.
6. Note other major impressions relating to the book as a whole.

A. Survey. Read 1:5 - 2:18 rapidly at one sitting. Survey this section by following these steps:
   1. Give a brief title to each paragraph;
   2. Locate the main units and sub-units of the section, and identify the major structural relationships operative in the section as a whole;
   3. Ask a few interpretive questions regarding each major structural relationship observed;
   4. Identify the key verses which provide insight into the section as a whole. Give reasons for each selection in terms of structural significance.
   5. Note other major impressions.

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A. Interpretation of 2:1-18. Interpret this segment (or a portion of it) on the basis of one or more structural relationships, interpretive questions, major issues, or strategic areas identified in your survey. Or answer one or more of the following interpretive questions:

1. What is the meaning of the exhortation in 2:1? What motivations for obeying this exhortation are mentioned in 2:2-4, and how does each substantiate the exhortation? How is 2:1-4 related to ch. 1 (note especially the full meaning of the "therefore" in 2:1)?

2. Trace the thought of 2:5-18. In light of the development of the argument, answer the following questions:
   a. The meaning and implications of 2:5-9a?
   b. What are the main assertions made regarding Jesus in 2:9b-18? Meaning and implications of each? In light of these assertions, why is it "fitting" that Jesus should be made "perfect through suffering" (v. 10)?

3. What problems of the readers are suggested by the emphases of this segment? How does 2:1-18 address, and attempt to solve, these problems?


1. Summarize the teaching of this segment regarding (a) christology, (b) anthropology (i.e., doctrine of humanity), and (c) atonement. How are these three concerns related to each other in an overall theology of the segment?

2. How are these theological emphases relevant for Christians today, i.e., how should they specifically affect Christian thinking and behavior?


A. Survey. Using the suggestions in Lesson 2.A., survey this section.

B. Interpretation of 3:1-19. Interpret this segment (or a portion of it) on the basis of one or more structural relationships, interpretive questions, major issues, or strategic areas identified in your survey. Or answer one or more of the following interpretive questions:

1. What is the meaning of the contrast between Jesus and Moses in 3:2-6a? How does this contrast substantiate and illumine the exhortation in 3:1? Elucidate the meaning of the "therefore" in 3:1.
2. What exhortations are found in this segment, and what is the meaning of each? How is each exhortation supported by the argument of the segment (note especially the flow of the argument, and key terms, e.g. "faithful," "confidence," "unbelief," "rebellion")? In your own words, paraphrase each exhortation and the author's support of it.

3. Examine the quotation from Psalm 95 in light of its original context and Numbers 14:1-35. Analyze Israel's sin as set forth in this quotation. What does this analysis reveal regarding the dangers the readers were facing?

   1. Explore the relationship between the individual exhortations in this chapter. What main concern lies behind all these exhortations? How does the comparison between Israel and the readers underscore this main concern?
   2. What dangers in the contemporary church are reflected in this segment? How does this segment speak to these? Be specific.

A. Interpretation of 4:1-16. Interpret this segment (or a portion of it) on the basis of one or more structural relationships, interpretive questions, major issues, or strategic areas identified in your survey. Or answer one or more of the following interpretive questions:
   1. Trace the argument of 4:1-10. Keeping in mind the use of Ps. 95 here, and the references to creation and Joshua, what is meant by the "rest of God?" How does one enter that rest?
   2. What is the meaning of the exhortation in v. 11? How does it result from the argument in vv. 1-10? What assertions are made regarding the word of God in vv. 12-13, and how do they substantiate the exhortation of v. 11?
   3. How do the exhortations in 4:14-16 relate to chs. 3-4? What is said regarding Jesus' role as high priest, and what is the meaning of this description? How does this description of Jesus as high priest substantiate and illumine the exhortations in this paragraph?

B. Synthesis and Application of 4:1-16.
   1. Summarize the teaching regarding the "rest of God" in chs. 3-4.
   2. Explore specific ways in which the author's discussion of the "rest of God" may be applied to contemporary Christian living.

B. Interpretation. Interpret this segment (or a portion of it) on the basis of one or more structural relationships, interpretive questions, major issues, or strategic areas identified in your survey. Or answer one or more of the following interpretive questions:
   1. What qualifications for a high priest are set forth in 5:1-4? What is the meaning of each? According to 5:5-10, how does Jesus meet these qualifications? Analyze and interpret 5:7-10.
   2. What is the meaning of the exhortation in 6:1-3? How does the description of the readers in 5:11-14 illumine this exhortation, and how does this exhortation flow from this description?
   3. How does 6:4-8 substantiate the exhortation in 6:1-3? Interpret 6:4-6. What are the implications?
   4. What is the meaning of 6:9-12? How does it relate to 5:11 - 6:8?
   5. Trace the argument of 6:13-20. How does the author reach his conclusion? How is this paragraph related to the preceding?
B. Interpretation. Interpret this segment (or a portion of it) on the basis of one or more structural relationships, interpretive questions, major issues, or strategic areas identified in your survey. Or answer one or more of the following interpretive questions:
1. What is the meaning of the description of Melchizedek presented here? How does Genesis 14:17-20 illumine this description?
2. In what ways is Melchizedek contrasted to the sons of Levi? Why this contrast? Implications?
3. Trace the logic of 7:11-28. What main points does the author make? How does he support these main points?
C. Synthesis and Application.
1. Summarize the differences between the priesthood of Jesus and the Levitical priesthood.
2. How does Christ's high priesthood, as presented here, affect in specific ways Christian living and thinking?

B. Interpretation of 8:1 - 9:10. Interpret this segment (or a portion of it) on the basis of one or more structural relationships, interpretive questions, major issues, or strategic areas identified in your survey. Or answer one or more of the following interpretive questions:
1. Trace the argument of 8:1 - 9:10. What main contrasts are found here? What is the meaning of each? How is each supported? Why does the writer stress these contrasts? How are these contrasts related? Implications?
2. Examine 8:8-12 in its original OT context. How does this passage function in the argument of 8:1 - 9:10, and how does its original OT context inform its use and meaning here? How does OT background inform the meaning and function of 9:1-10?
1. Summarize the main truths of 8:1 - 9:10. How do these truths relate to the preceding argument in Hebrews?
2. Explore specific ways in which the main truths in 8:1 - 9:10 can be applied to contemporary Christian living.

A. Interpretation of 9:11 - 10:18. Interpret this segment (or a portion of it) on the basis of one or more structural relationships, interpretive questions, major issues, or strategic areas identified in your survey. Or answer one or more of the following interpretive questions:
2. How does the writer prove the superiority of Jesus' sacrifice in 9:23 - 10:18? How do the OT quotations function in this argument? Implications?

1. Summarize the ways in which Jesus and his sacrifice are superior to the Levitical priesthood and the old covenant.

2. How does the superiority of Jesus and his work inform present-day Christian thinking and experience?


A. Survey. Using the suggestions in Lesson 2.A., survey this segment.

B. Analysis.

1. Explore the meaning and significance of the "therefore" in 10:19. How does this relationship with the preceding material illumine 10:19-39?

2. What exhortations are given in this segment? What is the meaning of each? How is each supported? How are these exhortations related? Why these exhortations?

C. Synthesis and Application.

1. State the main truths of this segment in a paragraph.

2. Explore some precise ways in which the exhortations of this segment may be applied to you and to those under your care.

Lesson 11. Hebrews 11.

Do an original study of this unit. Identify the steps followed, and your findings regarding each step. On the basis of your study, develop a series of questions that could be used to lead an adult Bible study group on this passage.


Apply the suggestions under Lesson 11 to this unit.


Apply the suggestions under Lesson 11 to this unit.


Synthesize the Book of Hebrews by answering the interpretive questions raised under one major structural relationship identified in the survey of the book. Be as thorough, analytical and integrative as possible.

VI. Bibliography.

A. Monographs and Articles:


Johnson, William G. "The Cultus of Hebrews in Twentieth Century Scholarship." Expository...


B. Commentaries


Lang, G. H. **The Epistle to the Hebrews.** London: Paternoster, 1951.


**NOTE:**  German commentaries by Braun, Feld, Grässer, Hegermann, Schlatter, Strathmann, Strobel, Weiss, and Windisch, and French commentaries by Bénétreau, Bonsirven, Hérins, Hugédé, and Spicq.