

Bible Study and Quizzing for Youth

Discovering HEBREWS 1 & 2 PETER

By Jim Wilcox

Discovering

HEBREWS
1 & 2 PETER



DISCOVERING HEBREWS AND 1 & 2 PETER

BIBLE STUDY AND QUIZZING FOR YOUTH

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CONTENTS

| SESSION | PAGE |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| USER'S GUIDE FOR DISCOVERING HEBREWS AND 1 & 2 PETER..... | 7 |
| GUIDE TO DISCOVERY GROUPS..... | 8 |
| LESSONS | |
| 1. YOUR ADOPTION PAPERS ARE READY..... | 10 |
| 2. TRUST ME ON THIS..... | 17 |
| 3. MERCY, MERCY ME!..... | 24 |
| 4. GOD'S RANSOM NOTE..... | 32 |
| 5. YOU GOTTA HAVE FAITH..... | 40 |
| 6. THE OLYMPICS OF CHRISTIANITY..... | 47 |
| 7. KEEP ON KEEPING ON..... | 55 |
| 8. ALIENS ARE US..... | 62 |
| 9. BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS..... | 70 |
| 10. PUT ON SOME CLOTHES..... | 79 |
| 11. FEELING THOSE GROWTH PANGS..... | 87 |
| 12. A TRUE/FALSE QUESTION..... | 95 |
| 13. ON GUARD..... | 103 |
| BIBLE QUIZZING – A PERSPECTIVE..... | 110 |
| HOW TO ORGANIZE A WEEKLY BIBLE TEAM MEETING..... | 112 |
| ORGANIZING A QUIZ COMPETITION TOURNAMENT..... | 114 |
| RULES FOR YOUTH BIBLE QUIZZING..... | 115 |
| STUDY TIPS..... | 120 |
| QUIZZING PRACTICE AND COMPETITION QUESTIONS..... | 127 |
| QUIZZING SCORING SHEET (To make copies of)..... | 154 |

USER'S GUIDE

FOR DISCOVERING HEBREWS AND 1 & 2 PETER

DISCOVERING HEBREWS AND 1 AND 2 PETER is best used in a “Discovery Group” setting. A Discovery Group is a group of youth committed to growing in God’s Word, meeting regularly for a set period of time to study and share. The use of Discovery Groups is described in more detail in the next section of this guide. It also serves as a great group study workbook for youth involved in Bible quizzing.

Here are some guidelines to help facilitate your use of Discovering Hebrews and 1 and 2 Peter:

- This study is divided into 13 Study sessions, and then the Bible quizzing. Each Group Study lesson is written to take approximately 45-60 minutes. This Bible study is meant to be only a part of a total session that includes you and your youth sharing insights from your personal study plus events and activities of the week and ending with prayer. A meeting of an hour to an hour and a half will provide adequate time for these components.
- Each Group Study session covers a specific section of Hebrews and 1 and 2 Peter and also identifies a key verse for you and your participants to memorize.
- This leader’s guide gives you a complete session plan for the entire Bible study portion of your weekly meeting. Each session contains the following elements designed to assist you in your preparation and presentation.

TEACHING AIMS and **PERSPECTIVE**--these will help you gain an understanding of the “main points” of the lesson.

BIBLE BACKGROUND--this extensive section will provide you with additional information that will broaden your understanding of the passage being discussed.

- The actual group study time is designed to take place through the structure of the session activities. After you’ve prepared yourself through studying the Purpose, Perspective, and Bible Background, read through the session activities to develop an understanding of what to expect from the coming group study time. Make sure you understand exactly what is intended to happen through each activity; remember, also, that these activities are here to assist you. Feel free to adjust them as necessary to fit your group environment, resources, and/or time frame.
- Regarding the group activities, you will find specific instructions that actually say, “Say, ...” or are printed in bold italics. This does not mean that you must quote this information word for word to your students. We’ve included this material only as a guide for you regarding what we recommend to be communicated to your group.
- Each session provides you with four activities; each one intended to bring your students

into an encounter with the Scripture through a certain perspective. These activities are: Engage the Word, Explore the Word, Apply the Word, and LIVE THE WORD. The session activities are intended to give you strong teaching options without neglecting your own creativity. Adapt and tailor the sessions to meet the individual needs and personalities of your group.

- Occasionally, you will find sections entitled “Terms/People to Know.” These brief sections will give word definitions, explanations about terms or people, etc. that will help your class members better understand the passage being studied.
- Students are encouraged to keep personal notebooks as they read and study during the next several weeks. During the group sessions, they will often be asked to reflect in writing. Encouraging each youth to have a “notebook-type” journal will keep you from having to provide blank notepaper each time.

The first place to start on your journey through Hebrews and 1 and 2 Peter is with the Word itself. Read through Hebrews and 1 and 2 Peter entirely before you begin your Bible studies. Then look through this leader’s guide and acquaint yourself with the contents.

GUIDE TO DISCOVERY GROUPS

An effective small-group Bible study ministry for youth in the local church begins with Discovery Groups. Discovery Groups are important in: communicating acceptance, teaching by example, building personal relationships, modeling discipling in a real-life setting.

There are many ways to start a Discovery Group in your church. The best way is to invite all of

your youth to be involved. Use posters and promotional announcements beginning three or four weeks in advance to spread the word about the group. Personally contact those persons whom you feel would especially benefit from the study. Also, make personal contact with those whom you think will be involved in quizzing in the coming year, encouraging them to be involved in the group.

There are at least two ways to form a Discovery Group. One is to hand-pick those already strongly committed to becoming all God wants them to be. These hand-picked, highly motivated youth will usually respond more eagerly to discipling than others would. This approach to discipling is called for when a major purpose of the discipling is training for leadership, as in Jesus’ training of the Twelve.

At the same time, every Christian needs to be disciplined. Every Christian needs to belong to a warm, accepting fellowship that calls out the best in him. In the loving fellowship, the half-hearted disciple can begin to catch a vision of his potential; he can taste the excitement of growth.

In many churches, all the youth will fit into a single small group. If you need more than one group, provide different groups for those with different levels of commitment. You may want to hand-pick a group for in-depth discipling, then provide other groups for those not yet ready for the intense commitment expected of the first group. Rather than dividing the youth arbitrarily, you may want to set specific conditions for membership in the more in-depth group. These conditions might include disciplines of attendance, spiritual journaling, Bible study, accountability, and so on.

Any Discovery Group member must have some level of commitment. An obvious minimum

commitment is to attend the group regularly. To build mutual trust in the group, members have to get to know each other. If one group member drops in only occasionally, he will be a relative stranger to the rest of the group, at least at the level of sharing expected in the Discovery Group. The presence of a relative stranger will immediately reduce the trust level in the group, limiting the openness of sharing. Of course, some absences are inevitable. The needed commitment here is for each group member to make group attendance a very high priority so that attendance is regular. A discussion of the priority of group attendance can be helpful in the early weeks of the group.

What's the best time for a Discovery Group? Again, it depends upon your goals and the personality of your group.

How long should we continue the Discovery Group? As long as the youth involved can stay committed. There have been groups who continued year round. Once they finished the 13-week study, they worked chapter-by-chapter on other Bible books or started on a new workbook. It is generally best to run the group for 13 weeks. After the study has finished, there may be other youth who want to be a part of the Discovery Group who did not sign up before. If so, arrange for a leader for them. Some of the youth in the original group may want to continue, while others focus more on other activities. If you cannot continue to serve as leader, be sure another adult leader is there to carry on.

How do I facilitate the Discovery Group Bible study? To facilitate means to "make easy." A small-group facilitator, then, is a person who makes it easy for the group to relate. He or she keeps the group moving, nudges it back on track when it starts to stray, encourages participation.

The leader's role is to help group members discover for themselves what the scripture means, how they can apply it to their lives, and then encourage them to follow through with obedience. The group leader's role is not to be a resident authority who tells group members what the scripture means and how they are to apply it to their lives. He must resist the temptation to lecture.

The Discovery Group leader is not authoritarian but an authority. This authority, though, is a spiritual authority, flowing out of an authentic life. Youth follow this leader, not because they are forced to, but because of the kind of person the leader is.

This book has been created with the prayer that the Word of God will find a place in the heart and mind of you and your students so that you will all be equipped to be effective disciples of Jesus Christ in the midst of the contemporary pagan culture you face each day.

YOUR ADOPTION

PAPERS HAVE ARRIVED

STUDY SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 1- 4:13

KEY VERSE: “For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your father’? Or again, ‘I will be his Father, and he will be my Son?’” (Hebrews 1:5).

TEACHING AIMS:

To help the learners:

1. Discover the proper relationship between God, angels, Jesus Christ, and human beings.
2. Know that despite the pressures and fears they face every day, God, through His Son, Jesus Christ, understands and cares.
3. Strengthen their faith in their Heavenly Father and His Church people.

PERSPECTIVE:

We all have our weak points that cause us to trip and stumble just about every day. For some it’s temptation; for some it’s rebellion; for others it’s complacency. For the Early Church, it was fear: fear of hostility, fear of alienation, fear of being wrong.

Youth today can identify with all of that—in their schools, in their homes, perhaps even in their churches. And they’re searching for ways both to understand and to cope with those anxieties. What if I’m wrong? What makes the

church think it’s right? Why do wrong things feel so good? Why don’t I fit in at school if I fit in at church, and why don’t I fit in at church if I fit in at school? And what about my par-ents?

This lesson will outline the hierarchy of relationships from God to today’s teen-agers. It will help them to identify their own haunting questions and begin to build a foundation that will sustain them through their doubts.

BIBLE BACKGROUND:

This Bible Background, and the ones that follow, will cover the entire Study Scripture—although only a portion of that scripture is actually used in the Discov-ery Group session. This is done so that the leader understands the context surrounding the passages and is prepared to help their students.

It would be wise at the beginning of the study of Hebrews to explain some of the unique characteristics of the book. Although it is called in many versions of the New Testament “The Letter to the Hebrews,” it is more homiletical than it is episto-lary; that is, it is more accurately labeled a sermon than a letter. It lacks most charac-teristics associated with a letter (no salutation, no opening greeting, and as impor-tantly, no signa-ture), but it does contain the outline of an emo-tional exhortation and argument.

It was, until the Reformation of the 17th century, believed to have been born from the pen of Paul, but has since been attributed to either Barnabas or Apollos, both colleagues and followers of the apostle Paul. Both Barnabas and Apollos share the characteristics attributed to the author of the book, in that both were intellectual Hebrew Christians well versed in the Old Testament. Barnabas was a Jew of the priestly tribe of Levi (Acts 4:36) who became a close friend of Paul after Paul's conversion. The church at Antioch commissioned Barnabas and Paul as evangelists, and they went together on the first missionary journey (13:1-4). Apollos, as well, was a noted orator. Born in Alexandria, he is described by Luke in Acts 18 (v. 24) as "a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures."

Because it is not a letter, some problems of interpretation or hurdles to understanding may exist. First, who was the specific audience targeted by the writer? Critics today believe that they were Jewish Christians who lived in the Lycus Valley, where Colosse was located. The book shares several characteristics with Paul's letter to the Colossians, though in style and tone contrasts significantly with Paul and the writers of other New Testament letters. For instance, both Hebrews and Colossians discuss outsiders' criticism of food, regulations of the body, cultic activities, and angels, among many topics. It would, therefore, stand to reason that the audience of Hebrews also shared many of the problems faced by the church at Colosse. T. W. Manson concluded that Hebrews is "the Epistle of Apollos to the churches of the Lycus Valley."

A second concern, then, is that the Book of Hebrews is one side of a communication, like listening to only one speaker in a telephone conversation. Without the typical salutation in which a letter writer might address the spe-

cific problems in question, Hebrews starts with a rather abrupt exhortation: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe." Not the smoothest of introductions. Had the writer just received a letter from one of his friends or a relative perhaps, describing a crisis in the church? Did a messenger burst into his tent with an emotional plea to "come quick," whereupon he sat down with pen in hand and dashed off this remarkable speech? And what was this crisis, this pressure, being faced by the intended audience?

William Lane, in his book *Hebrews: A Call to Commitment*, suggests that the church who received this sermon was afraid of hostilities it might face in light of its newfound Christianity. Alienated from the Jewish community in which they had been raised and trained, aware of the persecutions taking place in Rome following the great fire of A.D. 64, they were huddled in their "home missions," afraid that the God of the Old Testament revealed to them in the person of Jesus of Nazareth had abandoned them at the moment of their greatest need. Remember that this was a time when being religiously different was punishable by imprisonment or even death. It can be most closely compared in recent historical perspective to the Nazi annihilation of Jews in Europe. Just as it was lethal in the 1930s and 1940s to admit you were a Jew, you lived in the shadow of the executioner in the first century if you were a Christian.

The first four verses are the writer's assurances that God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, has spoken His final word through His Son, Jesus. Though in the past God used other messengers and means to communicate to His

people, He has now sent the ultimate Messenger to deliver the ultimate message. The next 10 verses (5-14) indicate the spiritual proof that Jesus is superior to the angels who were never called sons of God. No, it was the angels themselves who were the first to recognize the deity of the Christ child of Bethlehem and to fall down and worship Him.

This Son of God, Jesus, is made like His brothers, according to chapter 2, verses 5-18. It is imperative that the student understand this connection, for it lies at the very base of the new covenant. God revealed himself through Jesus, yet Jesus shared our humanity, making us His brothers and sisters, which is how He refers to us in verse 12, a quote from Psalm 22:22. And if we do indeed suffer persecution in this life, it is only because God himself, in His Son, Jesus, also suffered persecution in this life on earth only to conquer death and live eternally in God's

Rest (Hebrews 4:1) and was "tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (v. 15).

Most of this introduction to Hebrews seems to be based on a premise that the readers were tempted to believe that the kingdom of God that was to come would be governed by angels. In Judeo tradition, it was angels who had delivered the law at Mount Sinai, God's greatest revelation, so angels were particularly sacred to the Jew. The Dead Sea Scrolls support this lofty position given to angels by naming an archangel, Michael, as the supreme ruler in the new kingdom.

Others believe the author is simply trying to dissuade his readers from returning to Judaism in their fear of retributions. He is persuading them to understand and then believe that Jesus is above the angels, above Moses, above all priests, and is their sole Advocate.

SESSION ACTIVITIES

EXPLORE THE WORD

All in the Family

Before beginning this activity, you might pray with your students, encouraging them in this upcoming Bible study.

In the column of "Ideals," allow students to put whatever they want to at first, but after a few minutes of writing down initial ideas, explain to them that the ideals are not necessarily only those things that would make their own lives easier and more hassle-free; rather, the ideals enable the family as a unit to function better and more smoothly. Family is cooperation, not slave labor.

A family is made up of all kinds of people, playing all kinds of roles and doing all kinds of jobs. Make a chart, and list the people in your family, and if you live with an extended family either in the same house or nearby, you may want to list them, too. Be sure to include yourself. What are their "Job Descriptions" as you see them? What would be the "Ideal Job Description" for each person?

NAME

JOB DESCRIPTION

IDEAL JOB DESCRIPTION

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

ENGAGE THE WORD

1. WELCOME TO HEBREWS

How many times have you gone to the mailbox or your e-mail inbox and discovered a letter to “Occupant” or “Current Resident” “hey you”? Really personal, huh? You can hardly wait to get it inside the house, open it, and find out what it says and who wrote it. Right? Wrong!

The letter to the Hebrews must seem like that to many readers, for it is often overlooked in preaching, devotional writing, and scripture study. William Lane even calls it “A Sermon in Search of a Setting”. But that should not be, and this series of lessons will show you how important this book is to the young Christian who is struggling with the confusing messages of today’s world.

The New Testament is full of letters, most of which are written like personal letters today (especially letters from parents to their children, full of wise advice): Salutation, Opening Remarks, A Little News, A Lot of Insights, and Closure. After the Gospels and Acts, you will find 13 letters from Paul, then the letter to the Hebrews, followed by six letters from various writers including Peter, John, and Jude. Oddly, however, Hebrews is unique.

For instance, nobody is certain who wrote it. At first, scholars attributed it to Paul . . . all the way into the 1600s, in fact. But during that time,

called the Reformation, people who would know because they studied the Bible all of their lives discovered that not much of the letter resembled the other 13 letters Paul wrote. Sure, it was similar in content and overall philosophy, but not in style and tone.

First, it is more accurately described as a sermon rather than a letter. Instead of a greeting at the beginning, we have an invocation, a description of God who re-vealed himself in history and who is speaking to us now. The writer himself calls the message an exhortation (13:18-25) rather than a letter.

Second, the writer never identifies himself, as Paul did in the letters he wrote. All the author tells us is that he is a man, and even that takes a true scholar to discover: he uses masculine verb forms of the Greek language.

Third, the writer had never had any personal contact with Jesus, either during His earthly ministry before His crucifixion or in revelation after His resurrection, as Paul had had on the Road to Damascus. The author claims in verse three of chapter two that salvation “was first announced by the Lord [and] was confirmed to us by those who heard him.”

So whose signature is missing from this letter? Some suggest Barnabas, a close colleague and friend to Paul, who was both an authority in the

early church and a Greek intellectual who was an expert in the Old Testament, two characteristics obviously possessed by the writer. Others claim the writer is Apollos, who was also a Jewish Christian intellectual and renowned speaker. Luke calls him “a learned man with a thorough knowledge of scriptures” (Acts 18:24). He, too, was a co-worker with Paul in the Corinthian church’s beginnings.

We know more about the recipients of the letter than we do the sender: Jewish converts being tempted to renounce their Christianity and return to their Judaism. The writer, then, is arguing that Jesus was no mere angel, no high priest appointed only by the Church. No. Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the only Son of a compassionate and merciful God.

Before we start looking into this letter of encouragement chapter by chapter, let’s try to get an overall impression of what it says to us. It’s important that you should use a translation and version of the New Testament that you can read easily. Look at the page headings and section headings. If time permits, read the entire book as a class.

Once your class has looked at all 13 chapters, ask your group members to finish in their own words the following statements:

- If Hebrews were made into a movie, it would be called . . .
- A word or phrase that seems to occur over and over again is . . .
- As I read, I couldn’t help but wonder . . .
- Two or three things I’d like to learn are . . .

2. EARTH ANGELS (1:1–2:4)

Let’s look at this first section of Hebrews together and discover some of the foundations for the writ-

er’s argument.

Have someone read Hebrews 1:1–2:4 aloud while the rest of the class follows along in their Bibles.

- If you were sitting across from the writer right now, what would you ask him?
- What is the writer’s tone? Understanding? Anxious? Authoritative? Where do you see that most evident?
- What new insight did you pull from this section?

We all remember the neighborhood argument: “My dad’s bigger than your dad!” Some brave ones even screamed, “Oh yea, well my dad can beat up your dad!!!” On a much higher plane, some of that attitude was creeping up in the neighborhoods of the Hebrews, because as they met in each other’s homes (this is before they built Christian churches), they sensed hostility from the families and friends who still worshipped in the synagogue and held onto the liturgies of Judaism.

- In your imagination, picture the people who were listening/reading this sermon. How would you describe them?
- What is your concept of angels?
- What is the relationship of angels to God? To the Son of God?
- What does it mean to be a son or a daughter?
- How would 2:1-4 sound if you wrote those verses?

3. MISERY LOVES COMPANY (ESPECIALLY GOD’S) (2:5–3:6)

Have someone read Hebrews 2:5 – 3:6 aloud

while the rest of the class follows along in their Bibles.

Most of us have been awakened in the pitch-dark of night by a noise. Frighten-ing, isn't it? Some of us have lain awake all night, worrying over some relationship or job troubles. Usually, we are comforted by prayer. But what if our fear was that God had abandoned us? Or that there was no God at all?

- *Have you ever been rejected by a friend? Describe your feelings, first about the situation, then about your friend.*
- *The writer reminds the Hebrews that they are made "in the image of God." He shows how God's Son is our "brother." What are some of those shared characteristics found in these verses?*
- *Recall a time when someone came to you for comfort and reassurance. What were the circumstances? What did he/she ask you? What did you say and do?*
- *Now turn that around: think of a situation when you felt alone, afraid, alienated. You were so vulnerable and defenseless, it hurt. What steps did you take to climb out of that hole? What worked? What didn't?*

4. REBELS WITHOUT A CAUSE (3:7--4:13)

One of the "rites of passage" for a youth into adulthood seems to be rebellion. Some skip a class or two at school; some stay out beyond curfew; some run away from home. This passage encourages us to avoid "hardening our hearts as we did during the rebellion," but rather to enter God's sanctuary of rest.

Have someone read Hebrews 3:7—4:13 aloud while the rest of the class follows along in their Bibles, then answer these questions.

- *The writer quotes Psalms (95:7-11) to warn the reader not to repeat history. What is the Psalmist warning against? How does that warning apply today?*
- *The writer says, "the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith." How does the message combine with faith?*
- *What are some ways you have seen people "walk the talk"?*
- *In verses 12 and 13 of chapter 4, the writer describes the Word of God. What are some of the descriptive phrases? How do they fit the Word of God?*

APPLY THE WORD

All youth rebel in some fashion. It's part of breaking the tie with parents in order to forge ahead into a family of their own. It's painful sometimes and can become entirely unhealthy if it gets out of hand, but it is normal.

This activity asks students to consider Susan's rebellion from the teachings of her parents and her church. Why is she tempted to follow Billy instead of Sam?

You might have three students "act it out."

Susan is very close to leaving the youth group at her church. Her best friend, Sam, goes over to her house one night to talk to her and as he nears her house he sees Susan sitting on her front steps with the same guy she's been hanging around at school. Sam knows who Billy is but not too much beyond that.

Susan: Well, hello, Sam. What are you doing tonight?

Sam: Hi, Susie. Hi--it's Billy, isn't it?

Billy: Yeah.

Susan: We were talking about the party over at Millie's next weekend. It ought to be incredible. You know Millie --loud music, lots of alcohol, and her parents are out of town the whole weekend.

Sam: You're going?

Susan: Well, I guess. There's nothing else to do around this dead town, is there? Aren't you planning on going? What else you got to do, Sammy Boy?

Billy: It'll rock the place.

Sam: I never thought about it, I guess. Not my kind of gig, really. There's that thing at Pastor Greg's house that night after the "Jesus Freaks" concert, so I thought about going to that. Who else is going to Millie's?

Susan: I don't know. Jack, Marcie, Deedee, L. C., Andy. Probably. I don't know. Besides, with me there, you'll want to go, won't you?

Billy: Exactly.

Sam: I don't know, Susie. I'll have to think about it.

ASK:

- *What is making Susan think the way she is thinking?*
- *She has not usually gone to things like Millie's party (her parents have raised her in the church), but for the past several weeks, she's been acting strangely. What would you do if*

you were Sam?

- *What is it that causes youth to rebel?*
- *What are some ways people you know are rebelling?*
- *How are Susan's rebellion and other youths' rebellion like the rebellion referred to in 3:7-11.*
- *What does Hebrews tell us about rebellion against God?*

LIVE THE WORD

When I Have Fears

A British poet by the name of John Keats wrote a short poem in the early 19th century about his greatest fears, entitled, "When I Have Fears That I May Cease To Be."

- *What are some of your biggest fears?*
- *How do you deal with them?*
- *How might those around you help you to cope better with these fears?*
- *What have you seen from our study today that can help you when you face fears?*
- *In the last section, we looked at "God's rest." What does it mean to enter "God's rest"?*

Why don't we pause together right now and enter that rest? Let's shut out all the chores and assignments we have for a few minutes and focus on the face of Christ as He sits with us and the hands of Christ as He extends them to us. Lay your heaviest burden, fear, hurt at His feet for a few minutes. Rest.

End the class with prayer.