

Bible Engagement

Year B, Pentecost 21

By Beth Barnett

This is a bible engagement for Hebrews 4:12-16.
This resource can be used in Early Word or Bible Reading times.

You will need:

- Several Chess sets prepared with verses and tags as described below, on card tables or lower coffee tables spread around your gathering space.
- One large set Chess Set at the front.

Time required:

5-10 minutes

Introduction

We're about to read from the book of Hebrews today.

Hebrews can be tricky to read. It's not like the gospels in which Jesus' stories use lots of everyday things like seed and salt and sparrows and soldiers.

Or like Paul's writing which is down to earth work-a-day images from the lives of city slaves and their families.

The writer to the Hebrews has a whole lot of characters that are like a Chess game.

Invite contributions from your gathering to describe what happens in a chess game.

Invite them to hold the pieces move them around the board demonstrating the strategies and actions.

Ask what the pieces represent, drawing out the world of kings and empires, wars and religion, castles and temples.

Hebrews is written in a time when the Roman Empire (King) has taken over Israel. And they must pay taxes to the Roman emperor (King) and make deals with the local officials to do what they want. So, they had no king, they had to live by Roman laws, the priests (Bishop) were all corrupted, prophets (Bishop) like John the Baptists were executed if they spoke too strongly. And then temple (Castle) was completely trashed and destroyed in battle.

So, all their kings and thrones and laws and temple and priests and prophets had been smashed – and it wasn't the first time in their history. So the writer of Hebrews uses all the old symbols of the Israelites from the Old Testament, from the days of the Kings, the noble ancestors – when Israel was strong and rich and powerful in battles and had a lavish temple with priests and large sacrifices and a fortified palace with an impressive throne where the king would sit and make wise judgments and laws, and prophets would bring the word of the Lord.

Hebrews takes all of the things that the Hebrew or Jewish people had lost and were sad about and missing and gives them a different story.

A story in which the good life-giving Word of God replaces the violent armies.

And Jesus – who knows all our weakness - replaces the corrupt priests.

And God's throne of Grace replaces the harsh emperor's judgments.

And God's mercy is a safe fortress castle of protection.

We have part of this story written on chess boards today, to help us recognise how this part of the Bible relates to the politics and history of God's people in the first century – and how it might speak to places of violence and corruption and protection today.

For each group, create a large chess board with the text of Hebrews 4:12-16 spread across the squares, as in the template.

Create a second set of tags with the text divided and printed on the tags corresponding to the squares on the chess board, along with some extra keywords.

Tie the tags to chess pieces, as designated in the table below.

1	Knight #1	Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword,
2	Knight #2	Piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow;
3	King #1	It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart
4	Pawn #1	And before him no creature is hidden,
5	Pawn #2	But all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.
6	Bishop #1	Since, the, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens,
7	Queen #1	Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.
8	Bishop #2	For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses,
9	Pawn #3	But we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.
10	Castle #1	Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness
11	Castle #2	So that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
Extra pieces with key words:		
	Pawn #4	Living
	Pawn #5	Judge
	Pawn #6	Sympathise
	Pawn #7	Boldness
	Pawn #8	grace

Each person in the group takes a chess piece.

Remind the groups to help each other read what is on one another's the tag, so everyone is confident to read, or has help.

When everyone is ready, the group reads the verses on the chess pieces in order and places each piece on the matching square of the chess board.

Either create several small group chess sets using the print out of the chess board with verses below, and tying tags on chess pieces, or use one large chess set and do the process together as one large group. If you have access to a 'Giant Floor Chess' set this would be ideal.



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						⁹ It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.	
⁶ Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens,						¹⁰ Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness,	
		¹ Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword		² piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow;			
⁸ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,			³ but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.	¹¹ so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.			⁷ Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.
	⁹ but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.				⁴ And before him no creature is hidden,		



Prayer

Conclude the reading by re-gathering and praying.

We have seen how the book of Hebrews takes all of the things that the Jewish people had lost and were sad about and missing and gives them a different story. God's bigger story.

A story in which the good life-giving Word of God replaces the violent armies, and Jesus – who knows all our weakness - replaces the corrupt priests, and God's throne of Grace replaces the harsh emperor's judgements, and God's mercy is a safe fortress castle of protection. Let's be bold, like Hebrews says, and turn this into a prayer.

Loving and Living God,
Make us bold in your grace

We pray for those communities that have seen their cities and safe places destroyed, whose own rulers have been overthrown and whose laws have been taken over by other powers. Whose faith has been attacked by others. We pray especially for people who have experienced this and have come to us for safety.
Make us bold in your grace

Thank you for your grace for us when we experience loss and sadness, devastation or disillusionment. Help us to be bold in asking for your grace and help in times of need.

May we be bold in offering grace and help to others in need, even if they are our enemies.

Make us bold in your grace

We pray that violence would be replaced by your good and living word

Make us bold in your grace

We pray that corrupt systems would be replaced with the good ways of Jesus

Make us bold in your grace

We pray that judgement would be replaced by grace.

Make us bold in your grace

And your mercy would protect those who are in need.

Make us bold in your grace

Amen.



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