

# Hebrews Introduction 1

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Today we will begin our study of the Book of Hebrews... it's a deep book... and of course, all of God's Word is deep and wide and rich but Hebrews can seem even more so... but we can do it because we have God's Holy Spirit to guide us and enlighten us.

First and foremost, Hebrews is about the Lord Jesus Christ, highly exalted above all others... preeminent and superior to all others... the Lord Jesus Christ over and above all created things... everything, seen and unseen... He is God Almighty!

The problem some have with correctly understanding God's Word is that they view the Bible through their preconceived understanding of what it should say. Then, if some part doesn't fit their template they try to twist the Word to fit their preconceived interpretation or they simply discount it altogether. They'll say things like... 'Everyone has their own interpretation.' or 'Some things are just too hard to understand.' or 'So and so taught that it means... whatever.'

For example... one might think, I'm a Calvinist so everything must fit into what Calvin wrote... or, I'm an Arminianist, so everything must fit into what Arminius wrote... or I'm a Charismatic, so everything must line up with what TBN preachers say... or, I'm a TomTillmanist... oh wait... never mind... that one's OK.

But that brings us to Hebrews... who wrote it? We don't know. Some think Paul, some think Apollos or Clement of Rome or Barnabus or Peter... but no one really knows. The original King James Bible titled it, "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews," but most likely, it was not written by Paul. Paul identified himself as the author of all his letters... every one of them starts exactly the same... 'Paul'... the very first word of every one of Paul's epistles is 'Paul,' and each one is written as truth and doctrine for the Church... whether the Christian reading it is a Gentile or a Jew... He said that he was appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as the 'Apostle to the Gentiles.'

Hebrews, on the other hand, is not written to Gentiles... see the title... it is written to Hebrews... there are no references at all to Gentiles... there is no reference to any 'Jewish/Gentile' conflict like Paul wrote of concerning Peter's duplicity in withdrawing from eating with Gentile believers when Jewish leaders came from the Church in Jerusalem.

To correctly understand the book, we must always remember it is written to Hebrews... mostly to converted Jews... and that it's based on their previous, lifelong understanding of Leviticus... God's instructions to Moses regarding the Levitical Priesthood and the old sacrificial system... not that the Levitical Priesthood was or is still legitimate and efficacious, but that this congregation of Christian Jews were still filtering their understanding of the New Covenant through their understanding of the Old Covenant. They were born and grew up under the Old Covenant which had now been replaced by the New Covenant. The Lord Jesus Christ said that He had come, not to destroy the Old Covenant, but rather, to completely fulfill the Old Covenant... its complete fulfillment being found in, and only in, the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ... the perfect High Priest presiding over the perfect New Covenant... having fulfilled and replaced the old, imperfect, sinful High Priest who was still presiding, in Jerusalem, over the imperfect and now fulfilled and replaced Old Covenant.

A good illustration for us would be a practicing Catholic who comes to real, saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ... he joins a group of other newly saved Catholics, but they have little in the way of correct teaching or teachers from whom to learn the whole truth of God's Word and their new life in Christ. As persecution comes from Catholic friends and family, they would feel the pull to return under the yolk of slavery to their old rites and rituals as well as the authority of the Pope, Cardinals, Bishops and Priests... they would be having a very tough time of it... that's how it is for these Hebrews to whom this letter is written. This illustration would also hold true for Mormons, Muslims, Hindus, Jehovah's Witnesses and many others.

This would have been a small congregation of Jews, believers and unbelievers... just like in every Church... somewhere outside of Israel, who were being persecuted for their faith... persecuted both by other Jews and also Gentiles.

Paul is laying out for them the superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ and the New Covenant as opposed to the Old. The time of writing is probably somewhere in the AD 60's. It is still before AD 70, Rome has not yet conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple, but it has been of sufficient time since they were evangelized that the writer says they should have, by now, been mature in their understanding of the faith, but they were not. In Chapter 5:12 he says, For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you **again** the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

They didn't have the New Testament because it had not yet been put together... they would have had some letters, perhaps copies of some of Paul's or Peter's or others and they would have had the books of Moses and the Prophets upon which they were still relying for understanding... and of course, all of that Scripture is the Word of God... he says in 4:12, 'For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword...' and Paul had written to Timothy, 'All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.' 2 Tim 3:16... Paul meant all of the Old Testament also... but the fullness of truth was never found in the Old Testament... the fullness of truth and God's revelation of Himself only came in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and in His finished work on the Cross.

This letter is written to 3 types of people who were in this Church... the same 3 types of people who are in every Church... even our own... and we must understand this basic truth to properly understand the Book of Hebrews... and remember that in different passages, the writer is addressing different specific groups.

The first are Hebrew Christians... true believers... they are born again. These are Jews who were raised in Judaism but have come out from it... they've been enlightened by the Holy Spirit to understand and come to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and they are experiencing the hostility and persecution from their own friends and family... they've probably lost jobs and been ostracized by their families and persecuted as Christians by Gentiles also.

The tougher it got, the more they were tempted to go back into the patterns and rituals of Judaism... like our Catholic illustration. They weren't in danger of losing their salvation but rather, of confusing the legalism of religion with their freedom in Christ... they looked to the Temple and the High Priest in Jerusalem and the rituals and worship. The writer continually references the NEW... a new and better High Priest, a new and better Temple, a new and better Sanctuary, a new and better Sacrifice... all the new better than all the old but because of persecution and lack of teaching, it was difficult for them to fully break away from the old to walk in the new.

They were in danger of falling into a ceremonial, ritualistic Christianity which is exactly what Catholicism developed into. And, oddly enough, that is also what has become of some Jews and Gentiles who have entered into Messianic Congregations today or followed Hebrew Roots teaching... they are mixing the old with the new and thinking that they have now found the true and complete expression of faith.

The writer is trying to show them that they don't need the old priesthood. They don't need the old Temple. they don't need the old sacrificial system... sacrifices having to be made constantly... day in and day out... year in and year out... over and over and over... sacrifices made by a sinful priest for sinful people over and over continually. And those sacrifices never did purify anyone from sin. Every sacrifice, every drop of shed blood... it all pointed to the coming perfect Sacrifice offered by the perfect High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The second group in this Church, a smaller group than the first, are those who have come to understand and believe the truth of who Jesus Christ is and what He has done, but they have not truly placed their faith in Him as Savior... they have not been born again... they are not saved... they are only intellectually convinced, but have been unwilling to commit to true saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This second group is in every Church. In some Churches they are a very small group... in some Churches they are a very large group.

The writer addresses this second group in chapter 2:1, 'Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. <sup>2</sup> For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, <sup>3</sup> how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation.' They had heard the truth and even been convinced but they had not committed. Also in 6:4... 'For *it is* impossible for those who were once **enlightened**, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.' Enlightened here doesn't mean saved... it means having heard the truth and even having been convinced of the truth... having had the Holy Spirit whispering the Truth to them... having tasted the good truth but having chosen rather to reject the truth... and in 10:26... 'For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup> but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation...' this is the sin of willfully rejecting the truth that has been revealed, that one knows to be truth, but chooses to reject it because of the pull of sin or the fear of persecution... and then in verse 29, 'Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?'

He is saying, 'If you know the truth and then reject the truth, it will be far worse for you than if you had never known the truth.'

The third group in this Hebrew Church are those who don't believe... non believers who are not even yet convinced of the truth ... these are the whole nation of Israel. To these, the writer wants to give them enough information to understand and to believe that Jesus Christ is Who He says He is. We see this in chapter 9:11 'But Christ came *as* High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. <sup>12</sup> Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, <sup>14</sup> how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? <sup>15</sup> And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. And verse 27: 'And as it is appointed for men to die once, **but after this the judgment...**'

This is to the unbeliever... there is no judgment waiting for the believer.

There are 3 different groups of Hebrews to which this letter is written... he is writing to every Hebrew, whether they are saved or simply intellectually convinced or complete non believers... and to fully understand the Book of Hebrews, we must be careful as we are studying, to understand which of the three groups he is writing at any one time and to never make the mistake of thinking he is necessarily writing to us... Gentile believers. Most of what he writes is to the believing Hebrews and also applies to us, but not all of it... we must be careful to recognize when he is writing to those who are only intellectually convinced and to those who are nonbelievers.

To the believers, the Holy Spirit is giving comfort and encouragement. To those giving only intellectual assent, He gives stern warning... 'Wake up! Go all the way... commit! Place your whole faith and trust in the Lord

Jesus Christ.' And to the unbelievers He fully presents the truth. He presents the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, author of the New and Perfect Covenant, the perfect High Priest, the perfect and complete Sacrifice... everything new better than the old. He is not saying that the Old was wrong... only that it was incomplete... the completion came in Christ... He is better than anything and everything else... He is Preeminent. Preeminent means, eminent above or before others; superior; surpassing, more important or powerful than all others, surpassing all others. Jesus Christ is Preeminent.

He presents the Lord Jesus Christ, God Almighty as near and approachable. To the Jew, God was never approachable. Only the High Priest, one time per year on the Day of Atonement, could enter the Holy of Holies in the Temple and sprinkle blood on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant where God's Presence resided among His people, Israel... but the High Priest first had to offer sacrifice for his own sins... then he could offer sacrifice for the sins of the people. And since the people were always sinning... like us... the priests were constantly killing animals and offering sacrifices for sin... day in and day out... over and over... never ceasing... always blood flowing because of sin.

What was needed was a perfect High Priest without sin to offer a perfect sacrifice which would cover all their sin for all time... a perfect High Priest Who could open the way so that every believer could come into God's presence at all times.

This was the significance at the Crucifixion where it says that the curtain in the Temple was torn from top to bottom. It was the thick, heavy curtain which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant and God's Presence were, which only the High Priest could enter once a year. When the Lord Jesus Christ became the perfect sacrifice to satisfy God's Wrath for sin, He destroyed the barrier, signifying that now, every believer had free access to God at all times which is exactly what we read in Heb. 4:16...

'Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.' We no longer need an Earthly high priest to intercede for us... now we have a perfect, Heavenly High Priest through Whom we have full and constant access to God the Father. In fact, because of our Great High Priest, we are now actually seated with Him in Heavenly Places at the right hand of the Father.

And here is where we can begin to understand what saving faith is. It is our believing in that perfect High Priest Who did offer the perfect Sacrifice in His own body and blood... the sacrifice which did, in fact, cover and forgive all my own sin, past, present and future... and believing that His sacrifice is the only sacrifice which could ever cover and forgive any of my sin. This then shows us why there are so many from group #2 filling so many Churches today... those who have never truly placed their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work on the Cross. Salvation is only by faith in Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection... it is not by being a member of a Church or by faithfully attending church or by being a Christ follower or by inviting Jesus into your life or even asking Jesus into your heart or by saying a special prayer... Salvation is only through faith in the perfect sacrifice for sin by the perfect sinless High Priest, the crucified and resurrected Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ... one sacrifice by one High Priest to cover all sin for all time.

In 10:10 he writes, ' He takes away the first that He may establish the second. <sup>10</sup> By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.'

Then in verse 12, ' But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down...' He sat down. No other priest could ever sit down... there were no chairs in the old Temple... their work was never done... there was constant sacrifice for constant sin... but Jesus work was once and for all and then He sat down... indicating that His work was finished, never to be repeated.

All their lives, the Jews had been looking for the perfect High Priest... here He is presented with His perfect sacrifice. This was especially difficult for the Jews... to break away from the Old Covenant... that's why the

Book of Hebrews was written to them. Gentiles didn't have that problem... they were Pagans... they believed anything, everything and nothing... like so many today.

The Jews had had a religion established by God Himself, through Moses. It was very hard for them to break away from all the forms and rituals... especially since the Temple was still standing... at least until AD 70. But the writer was showing them that Jesus Christ was better than all of it, than anything and everything... all that He offers is better... better Priest, better Sacrifice, better Hope, better Country, better Promise... everything of Christ is better, the best!

Let's begin with Hebrews 1:1 ' God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets...'

The very first thing we see is that God had been preparing mankind and especially Israel for the coming of His Son and His Work of redemption. In many different ways at many different times through many different prophets God had spoken His Word, looking forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, to accomplish His perfect work of Sacrifice and Salvation. Beginning in the Garden, after the Fall... He promised One would come Who's heel would be bruised (crucified) but Who would then bruise the serpent's (Satan's) head... then His work in Abraham's and Isaac's lives and on to Jacob (Israel), to Moses and the Law and then all the Prophets... every one building on the previous and predicting and pointing to the coming of the promised one, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ... the perfect High Priest and the perfect once for all Sacrifice for sin.

'God spoke.' Without God speaking, man would never know anything of God except what He has revealed through His creation... and even that reveals the Creator, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every man-made religion, actually, every Satan-inspired religion, is the attempt of man to reach and discover God... do the right things, the right rituals, and you can discover God... but we only know of God and can only know God because He has chosen to reveal Himself to us... first through His prophets and then finally through His Son, the complete revelation of Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ.

God spoke. Men didn't write the Old Testament... God spoke. Every word is God's chosen word. He used each of the writers as His chosen instruments... He used their particular history, education and personality to craft His Word exactly as He intended.

'God spoke at various times and in various ways...' He spoke over a period of some 1500 years through forty some different writers... sometimes speaking directly to them, sometimes through dreams or visions, sometimes through a parable, a type or a symbol... but always causing to be written exactly what He intended... and all of it meshing and melding together into a perfect seamless unity of preparation and presentation of the coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ... each part building on the previous.

All of the Old Testament is progressive revelation. He never revealed all of His truth until His full and final revelation in the Lord Jesus Christ. He revealed some truth in Genesis, then some more in Exodus, then some more in Leviticus and so on through all the prophets until Jesus Christ.

'God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds...'

Immediately with the first sentence to these Hebrew listeners, God confirms the accuracy and divine authorship of the entire Old Testament. Then, throughout the New Testament He affirms the same... Peter wrote, 'for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit. 2 Pet 1:21... and Paul wrote, 'All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God...' 2Tim 3:16

In the past, God spoke in various ways through various writers but now, in these last days, He has given us His full revelation through His full and final revelation of Himself, His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

'... has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds...'

The writer is presenting to these Hebrews the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, heir of all that is and also as God, Himself... creator of all that is. He is our perfect, Great High Priest, He is the Son of God, rightful heir of all that is, He is Almighty God, Himself, Creator and Sustainer of all that is.

'In these last days'... whenever a Jew heard the phrase 'last days,' he would think 'Messianic.' The 'Last Days' referred to the future fulfillment of God's promises to Israel through His promised Messiah. In the Last Days, the Messiah would come and fulfill all God's promises and He would destroy all Israel's enemies. The writer is saying that the Lord Jesus Christ is that Messiah and His coming inaugurated the Last Days. He is the fulfillment of all of God's Word... the full and final revelation of God to man. All the rest of the New Testament is God more fully explaining to His people, the Church, about the Jewish Messiah, His Son. The Jews were so steeped in the form and symbol of Judaism, they didn't recognize their own Messiah when He came; they rejected Him and God put Israel 'on the shelf,' as it were, until He removes the Gentile Church at the Rapture.

They were so focused on the symbols of Judaism that they missed the fulfillment of all the symbols, the coming of Jesus Christ. The Gentiles had no concept of the Messiah and no hindrance of religious knowledge so they readily accepted Him but they, we, needed to have the full picture of His person and work explained to us... all the New Testament... especially Paul's letters to the Gentile Churches do that.

When the Church is removed at the Rapture, God will once again bring Israel to the forefront to finish all His work and fulfill all His promises specific to Israel.

We, the Church, are not the end of God's plans... we are not the climax of God's work with Man. We were blessed to be created and inserted between Pentecost and the Rapture... when Israel rejected her Messiah and was 'put on the back burner' until God finishes His work of creating us, the Church, a Bride for His Son, a special love gift to His Son, drawn and created from every tribe and tongue, from every nation and family... but we are not the end. We will end, we will stop growing and expanding and be removed at the Rapture, but Israel, the Hebrews, as a nation, will go on and on forever.