

Hebrews

Today we're going to begin a study of the book of Hebrews. And this first lesson is basically just going to be an introduction. We're not really going to even get into the first few verses. We're just going to be giving you a lot of background. And that background is going to be really important in understanding the book of Hebrews.

OK, so I'm really looking forward to this study. The book of Hebrews is one of my favorite books in the Bible. If I had to choose just one book as my favorite, it would tough. You've got Psalms and Isaiah in the OT, and in the NT you've got Romans and the gospel of John, and Revelation. But if I had to choose just one that was my favorite, I think it might be the book of Hebrews. The book of Hebrews is just so beautiful. It is poetically beautiful, and has such depth of feeling in parts, that it is just an amazing book

And I guess one of the main reasons why I find it so beautiful is because it connects the dots between so many different things in scripture. Between the OT and the NT. Unlike any other book.

In Hebrews Paul does a lot of expounding on various OT passages. And he draws a lot of parallels between OT events and NT truths. And even OT events, and future events.

And so in the book of Hebrews Paul basically does a lot of preaching on OT passages. And that gives us some good examples how pastors and teachers should be expounding the OT today. Paul looks at it from the big picture, from the perspective of God's eternal plan, and shows how it fits, how the things that fell out to them, what happened in the lives of the OT saints, was prophetic of future events. Of our faith in Christ, and of our hope in his return.

And so we get to see the beauty of how God declared the end from the beginning, in how he worked in the lives of these people in the OT.

And so I guess one reason that I like the book of Hebrews so much is that it starts to unfold that to us, it gives a basic understanding of the relationship between the Old and New testaments, and I just always find it amazing to see how everything in the Bible fits together so wonderfully. And so the main brunt of the book of Hebrews, is to connect the Old and New testaments.

So studying the book of Hebrews is partly going to be studying the OT. In fact the book of Hebrews quotes from the OT more than almost any other NT book. Near as I can figure, Hebrews quotes the OT about 40 times. And only Matthew and Romans rival it, and it's close, it is within two or three quotes. And of those three books, Matthew, Romans, and Hebrews, Hebrews is the shortest, it has the least number of verses. The book of Matthew quotes the OT once for about every 25 verses. The book of Romans quotes the OT once for about every 10 and a half verses. And the book of Hebrews quotes from the OT more than once for every 8 verses. So yes, studying the book of Hebrews is going to be practically like studying the OT, more so than any other NT book.

So it is going to be quoting a lot from the OT, and so we're going to be looking at all of the different passages that it quotes, because most of us aren't familiar enough with what they meant to the OT-minded Hebrew to be able to understand what Paul is saying by them otherwise.

Because you see the book of Hebrews is written to the Hebrews, to the Jews, to Israel. It was written to people who have an understanding of the OT. A deep, generational understanding of OT concepts and ideas, that was part of their heritage, that for generations had been a part of their daily lives.

And so as somebody like that, as a first century Hebrew, having heard that the Messiah had come, having come to belief in Jesus as the Christ, there was some uncertainty as to what to do now. As to how those OT principles, those OT truths, that were so deeply ingrained even in your very culture, how all of that related to the NT truth of Christ's death and resurrection, of his payment for our sins.

You see the Hebrews had a very strong heritage, a scriptural heritage, based on the law and the prophets. And that ran very deep.

And so as they were coming to Christ, they were coming from that OT perspective.

Now most of us, like the first-century Gentile convert, we come to Christ from the NT perspective. We don't come from an understanding of the OT. We don't know anything about the Mosaic law and all that until we've already heard all about Jesus and the gospel.

And so we can relate to the many epistles in the NT written to the Gentile churches. Because that is the kind of people that God was speaking to in them for the most part, people that were coming out of idolatry, or human philosophy, and hearing the truth of Christ and getting born again. They were coming straight into the NT. And they only acquired a basic understanding of the OT later on. And that was all from the NT perspective, having already understood the NT first.

But there were also some Hebrews getting saved, who were coming from that OT perspective.

Who were passing from faith to faith, from faith in Moses and the prophets to faith in Christ.

And a lot of us probably can't really imagine that, but they were coming to Christ from the OT perspective, already having a fear of God, already having a reverence for the OT scriptures.

And so they had a very deep understanding of certain OT concepts. And now that they were believing in Christ, they needed to understand how those OT concepts related to this new truth that they had received.

And so that's why God had Paul write the epistle to the Hebrews. To give them an understanding of how to view the law and the prophets from the NT perspective, how to come from the OT perspective of that, to the proper NT perspective of it.

And so to really understand the book of Hebrews, you actually need to understand the OT. You need to be able to think the way that a first century Jew would have thought. You need to understand the OT perspective that Israel had. Because that is where the book of Hebrews is coming from.

And unfortunately many times we don't really understand the OT from the historical perspective. We only ever think about it at a very superficial level from the NT perspective. And I say that that is unfortunate, because we often get very confused in the OT when we look at it straight from the NT perspective. Because to us that usually means that we are looking at it as if it was part of the NT, which of course it's not.

And so to really understand the OT properly, what we need to do is first look at it in its original historical context. To first look at it from the OT perspective. Or rather to look at it without jumping in our time machine and transporting NT understanding and principles back into history thousands of years before Christ came. We need to not look at the characters as if they are born-again and relate to God in the same way that we do today. Because they didn't. They couldn't, because Christ hadn't come yet.

And so the OT first has to be understood in its historical context, and then we can apply our newer knowledge declared in the NT, to get an even fuller understanding of OT events and ideas.

And that is where the book of Hebrews comes in. The book of Hebrews will show you how to relate the OT to the NT, once you have an understanding of the OT in-context, as a first-century Israelite would.

And so we are going to be dealing with some OT concepts here, that as people who came straight into the NT, some of them aren't going to be as familiar to us. And so sometimes we may have to go back and understand some of the OT things that Paul is talking about, before we can understand fully how and why he is relating them to the NT in the way that he is.

And there are two main concepts, two main themes that underpin the OT. And in fact, the entire Bible. And those are the two main things that are dealt with in the book of Hebrews. The two most basic elements, ideas, concepts, that are dealt with in scripture. And so Hebrews is a very fundamental book. It deals with these two most fundamental of fundamentals.

And they are: the kingdom, and the priesthood. The kingdom and the priesthood.

And I'd like to talk a little bit about these before we even start the book of Hebrews, to give us some background on what they meant to somebody who grew up with the OT and without the NT.

First let's talk about the kingdom. Now when I say kingdom, I'm talking about a political entity, that is comprised of three main parts, like every kingdom is: you have the king or ruler, you have the geography, the domain, that they are ruling over, and then you have the subjects, the citizens of the nation.

And this concept of a kingdom plays a vital role in the OT. And in the NT as well. And we'll get to understand that better in the book of Hebrews, as it brings that OT concept of the kingdom up to date with NT revelation.

And so what we're going to see as we go through this, is that these concepts haven't been cast aside. They aren't thrown off now, they haven't been replaced, or figuratively replaced. They actually predate the law and the prophets, and they are a part of God's eternal plan for mankind, not just a interim work that he did with a few of the OT saints just because he didn't want to sit around twiddling his thumbs waiting to send Christ. They are a part of the eternal plan.

And so this concept of the kingdom, actually goes back before the prophets, before Moses, all the way back to Adam. When God created Adam in the garden of Eden, he gave man dominion over the earth. And by doing that God was giving man a kingdom. A kingdom whose domain included the entire earth. Whose rulers were mankind, and whose subjects were all creation.

And all of that fell apart at the fall, so that creation is no longer subject to us as it once was. We lost that dominion. Now, we still get to live here on the earth, but creation isn't subject to us as it once was, it now kills a lot of us, through viruses, natural disasters, wild animals. And so that original created order that God had planned for us, was messed up when we rebelled against him. And the entire rest of the Bible is about God working to bring about the restoration of that original dominion. It's about God seeking people worthy to participate in a new kingdom.

And so some time later God would begin that work in earnest with Abraham. God made a promise to Abraham, and God's promise to Abraham was a promise of a kingdom. There was a promised *land*, a piece of geography, that God promised Abraham that his seed would inherit. There was the promised seed, that would have dominion over that land. And so ultimately what God promised to Abraham, was that he would be the father of a *great nation*. That's a promise of a kingdom.

And God continued to work with Israel, bringing them out of Egypt, and giving them the law through Moses. And so God brings them out and into that promised land, into that kingdom, and in the process he gives them the law by which that kingdom is to be governed.

And for a while they were governed by judges, but eventually they requested that God would give them a king. And God had Samuel set up the nature of the kingship over Israel, what the king would be like, what powers he would have.

And then God found the man after his own heart, David. And God made David a promise that he and his seed would rule that kingdom forever. That the kingdom, which God had set up through Samuel, David, and Solomon, would be an everlasting kingdom, that would never end, so long as they followed God.

And so the heritage of a Hebrew, as a child of Abraham, was the inheritance of a kingdom. A promised land, that they would inhabit, and be a great nation that had the dominion of it. And that dominion was given to the sons of David.

And so this is where a first-century Hebrew was coming from. He was a zealous child of Abraham. And that's first and foremost not a religious statement, it is a political statement. You have to understand that. Being a child of Abraham made them a part of that great nation and an heir to the kingdom, governed by the law of Moses.

And it does also have a religious aspect. That's the priesthood. That law of Moses ordained a priesthood, by which their sins could be cleansed.

And that also didn't begin with Moses, that went all the way back to Adam and Eve, when God killed the animals to make coats for them at the fall. And so ever since then, the kingdom and priesthood have been intermingled. Because the dominion is no longer ours as it once was, we no longer have the proper right to it, we come short of the glory of God. And so their sins required that in order to maintain their position as potential heirs of the kingdom, there had to be a priesthood that could intercede on their behalf. That could cover their sins before God, lest they be discarded from that position.

And so all the way back at the time of Cain and Abel, they offered sacrifice. And it will talk about that later in Hebrews.

And Abraham, the heir of the promise, also sought unto priests, which it will talk about as well. And when Israel came out of the promised land, even Moses sought unto the priest of Midian. And then God ordained the Levite priesthood as a part of the law. And without that priesthood, they could not enter into the promised land. Without Moses and Aaron and Eleazar and Phinehas intervening on their behalf, they could not inherit that promised kingdom.

Anybody that didn't get their transgressions covered by sacrifice would be cast out of Israel, cast out of their inheritance, and they wouldn't be able to participate in the kingdom.

And so these things are inextricable.

When God ordained the Davidic line to rule Israel, then the temple worship was established.

And the priesthood was to offer sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem, the same location as the seat of the kingdom.

And so again, the two remained connected throughout Israel's history.

And so as a first-century Hebrew, this priesthood is also a vital part of their heritage. In fact, without the law and the priesthood, there would be no kingdom, they couldn't inherit that promise, because God would not accept them. And so this was vital to them, this was extremely important to them.

Here was this kingdom that God had promised, that they were to be heirs of through Abraham. That was their calling, that was their heritage, and the only way for them to receive that promise, the only way for them to maintain that, and to participate in it, was through the law, and ultimately, the priesthood.

And so these are the two vital aspects of a Hebrew's heritage, and of his position relative to God. His politics and religion are somewhat rolled into one, and these are the things that make

him what he is, that set him apart from the Gentile nations, that give him a special place in God's plan. These are things that he from childhood is taught to understand, to be proud of, to fiercely defend.

And so an Israelite is very zealous of the kingdom and the priesthood.

And Paul certainly would have understood that, possibly better than anybody else at the time. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee, of the most straitest sect of his religion. He lived and breathed this. So much so that he persecuted the church because of it. He persecuted the church, not because they taught the resurrection, as the Sadducees did. That was their reason. But Paul's reason was because he was zealous of his heritage. He was zealous of the kingdom and the priesthood. And he saw the doctrine of Christ as a direct threat to these things. He could see that it was undermining the kingdom and the priesthood. And so he killed all of the Christians that he could.

And so you can imagine how even some of the Jews who came to Christ, would have struggled with this. They would wonder about how exactly this truth of Christ related to these most precious OT themes.

And some of them would remain zealous to these things, and others would leave these traditions, not understanding exactly why, becoming confused regarding these OT doctrines so familiar to them.

And so to some of them it must have kind of seemed like there were these two loose ends, the kingdom and the priesthood, just kind of hanging out of the OT, and they weren't all clear on exactly how they fit into the NT.

And so basically the book of Hebrews is saying, OK, now that Christ has come, what about the kingdom, what about the priesthood, what is the current state of these things now? How should we relate to these concepts now? How should we walk, how should we live in regard to the kingdom and priesthood?

And these are things that actually aren't as foreign to us as they may seem. We often actually get confused about these very same things, and how they relate to the NT. All the more so because we don't understand them fully in the first place sometimes. And really they have a bearing on the entire NT as well, and so if you don't understand them you'll find many other NT books confusing, or at least you will very likely not understand them properly even if you think that you do understand them. Particularly many things in the gospels, and especially the book of Matthew. But throughout the rest of the NT as well.

So these concepts aren't entirely foreign to us, we just don't understand them properly, or understand them as a Hebrew would. And really, these are two of the most important NT doctrines to understand. Most false doctrine in the church, and among so-called "Christian" religious groups and cults, especially the more dangerous false doctrine, stems from a misunderstanding of these two things.

Anybody who is in a religious or religious/political system, whether Judaism, Islam, Catholicism, Mormonism, or anything like that, that is based on a misunderstanding of or failure to acknowledge the relation of Christ's work to the OT, they would really greatly benefit from studying the book of Hebrews.

If I was going to do a Bible study, or preach to a bunch of Jews, Muslims, Catholics, or any group that is zealous toward God, that maybe even has some knowledge of Christ, but doesn't

rightly understand the gospel as it relates to these things, I probably wouldn't begin with the gospels. I probably wouldn't begin with the book of John. It might be the best one of the gospels for that, but I'd probably begin with the book of Hebrews. Because those people may already have an idea of who Jesus is, what they don't understand is what he means, in practical terms, in relation to the kingdom and the priesthood.

And so I'll be pointing different things out, as we go through this, that would be important truths for somebody like that to understand. This would be a good study for anybody like that.

Catholics, Islamists, even Amish, or any religious sect or cult that is zealous toward God, but doesn't fully understand the gospel.

And it is a good study for all born-again Christians as well, because it will not only give you a better understanding of scripture, but it will give you the tools to be able to witness to people like that, who are approaching Christ more from that OT perspective. It will give you the knowledge to be able to show them from scripture how the kingdom and the priesthood relate to Christ, and how we ought to be living today in regard to those things, based on that truth.

Many of the major religions of the world have these same themes, especially those that claim to honor the God of the Bible. They have a political aspect, and they have some kind of priesthood. And many of them do reverence the Bible, they do reverence the God of the Bible, they may even reverence Christ. And I think in the latter days, that number is probably only going to be increasing, in preparation for the antichrist. And so understanding these things, and how to share them with others, to reach these kind of people with the full truth of the gospel, is going to become really important. And it already is.

And so this is a good book to be studying.

PAUL?

You'll notice I've been saying "Paul", that Paul wrote the book of Hebrews. And some of you may have been surprised that I was so bold, that I seem so sure of that, that I just seemed to be assuming that Paul was the author of this book.

And I have to admit that I have a pet peeve. I have a pet peeve when I hear people talking about the book of Hebrews, or teaching from the book of Hebrews, and they say, "the author of the book of Hebrews." As if he is some mystery man.

If you look in your Bible you'll see that it tells you right there who the author of the book of Hebrews is. Look at what the full title of the book is: The epistle of Paul the apostle to the Hebrews. That's pretty clear.

But you see, people will say, "Well, you know, it doesn't actually say in the book that Paul wrote it, that is just the title." And that's true. It doesn't say anywhere in the book of Hebrews who the author of the book is. And that does seem strange. I mean, every other epistle that Paul wrote tells who wrote it, it starts off with his greeting, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ." So isn't that kind of suspicious?

No, actually there is a very good reason for it, which I'll explain in a moment.

But folks, don't let them fool you. Don't think that some people doubt who wrote the book of Hebrews just because it doesn't say within the book. You pick up a commentary on just about any one of Paul's epistles, and sometimes they are just as happy to debate who wrote it, even though it says right there in the first verse. They are just Bible critics, that's their job. That's what they do. But I'm not. I'm a Bible-believer. So whatever the Bible says, that's what I believe.

You say, "Well, that's OK for the other epistles, but in this case the Bible doesn't say. I mean, the title of the book isn't inspired." So the title isn't inspired, huh? Well, let me ask you this: who wrote the book of Matthew? The title of the book is "The gospel according to Matthew", but who wrote it? You say, "Well, Matthew did." But how do you know? You know, there is nowhere in the

book of Matthew where it says that Matthew wrote it. If you believe that Matthew wrote the book of Matthew you believe that for one reason and one reason only. And that is because the title of the book is “the gospel according to Matthew.”

What about the book of Mark? Who wrote the book of Mark? You say, “Mark wrote the book of Mark.” Do you know why you believe that Mark wrote the book of Mark? Because the title of the book is “the gospel according to Mark.” There is nowhere in the book of Mark that says who wrote it.

And what about Luke? The title of the book is “the gospel according to Luke,” but you know, that’s not inspired, so let me ask you who wrote it? “Well Luke did, doesn’t it say that somewhere?” No. There is nowhere in the book of Luke where it says who wrote the book of Luke. You believe that Luke wrote the book of Luke for one reason and one reason only, and that is because the title of the book is “the gospel according to Luke.”

And how about the book of John? You say, “Oh, I’ve been waiting for you to get to John. The book of John says who wrote it.” It does? “Yes, at the end doesn’t it say ‘this is the disciple that wrote these things’?” Well, yes it does, but you know, it doesn’t say which disciple that was. But you say, “But it was the disciple whom Jesus loved!” Yes, that’s true, and John was the disciple whom Jesus loved, right? Do you know why you believe that? You believe that because it says that the disciple whom Jesus loved is the one that wrote the book, and you believe the book was written by John. And you believe that, you believe that the name of the disciple who wrote the gospel of John was John, for only one reason, and that is because the title of the book is the gospel according to John. But you know those titles aren’t inspired, so you could have that all wrong.

You say, “But wait a minute, we can compare the writing style in the gospel of John with his other epistles, 1, 2, and 3 John. And that demonstrates that they were written by the same person.” And that’s true. But that still doesn’t tell us who that person is. You say, “It doesn’t?” No. Because it doesn’t say in 1 John who the author is, it doesn’t begin with a greeting or anything like that. So guess what. You believe John wrote it because it is called 1 John. That’s the only reason. You say, “But what about second and third John, doesn’t he start them off with a greeting?” Yes, in fact, you know what he does. But he still doesn’t give his name. He just calls himself, “the elder”. So nowhere in any of those books written by John does it tell us who the author is, but we believe that they were written by John because that is what the title of the book says.

What about the book of Acts? Or have we made our point?

You see, we accept the titles of the Gospels as gospel truth, why not the title of this book? Why do we have to doubt this one? The fact is there is more evidence contained in the book of Hebrews to help us deduce who its author is than there is in all of the gospels, combined. We have available to us a wealth of information about Paul, other books in the Bible that he wrote, that actually say who wrote them, so that we can recognize his style. We know all about his ministry and his personality and the people that he hung out with and what happened in his life, from Acts and his other epistles. There is more information about Paul in the NT than there is about anybody else, except possibly Jesus. So it’s absolutely no mystery at all who wrote the book of Hebrews.

It is amazing that people will believe that one day the Hebrews found this epistle in their inbox, and they didn’t have a clue who it was from, but they thought it must be scripture. Or to think that it was a forgery. Or that somebody else wrote it and it just got lost in tradition.

Listen, the identity of the author of a NT book was absolutely vital. The church was warned against false apostles, against forged letters written in the name of the apostles. They weren’t going to accept something that they weren’t absolutely sure where it came from. Least of all the Hebrews, who had thousands of years of experience with handling the OT scriptures. And so

when we get toward the end of the book of Hebrews, you'll see that people that Paul is writing to personally know the author. That they have a personal history. So this isn't just a made-up thing, that somebody pulled over on them or something.

And you have to understand, that to doubt the author of the book, is to doubt the authority of the book. It is to doubt its genuineness. Because if the church was so careless that it just forgot or got mixed up on who the author was, that calls into question their ability to discern whether the book was actually genuine to start with.

And if it was made up, if it was somebody trying to impersonate the apostle Paul, they really did a terrible job of that. They really blew it. You'd have thought that they'd have at least ascribed Paul's name to it. Right?

So there is really no good explanation for how anybody else could be the author of this book.

There is no way to believe that without casting doubt on the book itself. And I'm not a Bible-doubter, like some commentators are, I'm a Bible-believer. So I'm not going to doubt who wrote this book. I have confidence that it was written by the apostle Paul. And we'll present more evidence for that as the book unfolds.

Now as we mentioned, it is true that every other epistle that Paul wrote begins, "Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ," or something to that effect.

So what does that mean? Well, it means that the book of Hebrews is different, that's what it means. And there is a very good reason for that.

When Paul would open his letters that way, what was he saying? He was saying I am writing to you in my authority as an apostle of God. I'm not writing to you as your old buddy Paul just checking to see how you're doing, I'm writing to you as God's apostle, as his messenger, as his dispenser of grace. I'm writing to you in that capacity, with that authority.

And so you ask, "well, why didn't Paul start that way here? I mean, obviously this isn't just a letter to a friend."

And that's true. But let me ask you something. Think about Paul's apostolic ministry. It had a very clearly defined scope. Who was Paul the apostle to? He was the apostle to the Gentiles, right?

And this letter here is being written to Hebrews. So naturally Paul is not going to write a letter to the Hebrews as the apostle to the Gentiles. Based on the nature of what he writes here, that wouldn't make sense. And so Paul doesn't sign this letter as Paul the apostle. Because he's not writing as Paul the apostle, he's not writing as Paul the apostle to the Gentiles.

Let me put it this way. And this might blow your mind. This epistle, that Paul wrote to the Hebrews, is not a part of his apostolic ministry. It is separate from that. It is outside of that, it is outside the scope of the apostleship that God originally called Paul to, to take the gospel to the Gentiles. This is a completely separate ministry, a separate dispensation of truth, that God has given to Paul, late in his life. It is a one-off thing, that God asked Paul to do, once he had finished his ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles. Just before Paul died, God asked him to do one last thing. He asked him to do something different than he'd ever asked him to do before. Separate from that former ministry and apostleship that Paul had. He asked him to write this letter to the Hebrews.

And so why does this letter not start out with an apostolic salutation from the author? Because it isn't being written as a part of his apostolic ministry. And listen, I'm fixing to blow your mind again: It isn't written as a part of any apostolic ministry, period.

You see, God did not choose Paul to write this, because of Paul's apostleship, because he was the apostle to the Gentiles. It wasn't a part of that. And so God really could have chosen anybody to write the book of Hebrews. He could have chosen John, or James, or Peter. After all, wasn't Peter the apostle to the circumcision? Shouldn't he have been writing, in his apostolic

authority, to the Hebrews here? But the book of Hebrews is not a part of *any* apostolic ministry that God had ordained in the first century. It is separate and distinct from the other work that God had given the apostles at that time. And there is a reason for that, it is symbolic of something, that we'll see in a little while.

But then why *did* God choose Paul, if it wasn't for his apostleship, why him? Well, it does in a way relate to the fact that he was the apostle to the Gentiles, it is symbolic of something, as we said we'll see in a little while. But I've also already mentioned that Paul is somebody who best understood the mindset of the people that he is writing to. He understood what it was to be zealous toward God, and not understand the doctrine of Jesus Christ. The other apostles never really got this in the same way that Paul did. In Acts 15 we see that James got it to a degree. But Peter and John, they were just small-town fishermen. They hadn't been brought up like Paul, at the seat of the political-religious system in Jerusalem, brought up as a Pharisee, the religious sect most zealous of these things. And so Paul had an understanding of this, a personal understanding of zealousness toward God in this regard, and of ultimately coming to an understanding of how the law and the priesthood and the kingdom relate to the doctrine of Christ, and how we should live today in regard to them, he had a personal understanding of that that the other apostles did not.

And so that made Paul a good choice for this.

And there is another reason that Paul was a good choice to write the book of Hebrews. This is something that he'd always wanted to do. In his letter to the Romans Paul said this:

Romans 9:1 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,

2 That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.

3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:

4 Who are Israelites...

And so Paul had a heart for this, a heart for the Hebrews, a very deep desire to see them come to an understanding of the gospel. So much so that he was willing to be damned himself if it would have brought Israel to repentance.

Later, in the next chapter of Romans, Paul started out this way:

Romans 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

2 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

And so Paul had a strong, unquenchable desire to see Israel saved. To impart knowledge to them, to direct that zeal of God that they had.

And so that is exactly what Paul got to do here. He got to take his understanding of their zeal, and give them knowledge of how the things that they were so zealous of related to the gospel.

And in fact it was prophesied before that Paul would do this. At the time of Paul's conversion, God told this to Ananias:

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

And so that is exactly how Paul's life unfolded. He first took God's name before the Gentiles, as the apostle to the Gentiles. And then he was bound and taken before kings, brought before caesar. And then finally, he wrote the book of Hebrews, to declare God's name to Israel.

And so Paul, who was zealous of God, and desired to see the salvation of Israel, finally got to speak the word of God to Israel and give them knowledge. To add full knowledge of Christ to their zeal of God.

That's what Paul got to do in the book of Hebrews. Instead of getting damned to get Israel saved, he got to write one last glorious epistle, imparting to them the knowledge that would save them.

PROPHETIC?

And to really understand the full import of that, I need to explain something to you about the book of Hebrews that I haven't mentioned yet. What I find to be really the most fascinating things about the book of Hebrews.

So yes, there is actually another aspect to the book of Hebrews. And this may be surprising to you, but the book of Hebrews is actually also a book of prophecy, for want of a better term.

Now remember, the main purpose of the book of Hebrews is to give the Hebrews an understanding of how they should relate to the Jewish religious and political order. The kingdom and the priesthood. But in 70 AD that political and religious order was destroyed. It's been gone ever since.

And this book was written later in Paul's life, the last book he wrote, and so it probably wasn't written too long before that happened. So that means that this book's primary recipients, the people that it was originally written to, that it was only relevant for them for a very few short years. They received this epistle, and within 5-10 or even just 2-3 years, that whole political and religious system that it was talking about, was gone.

Now, there are still general principles that we can learn from it, and that they could learn from it, but that main point of it has been kind of blunted for two thousand of years.

So did God make a mistake here? I mean, couldn't he have just gotten one of the apostles down in Judaea to deliver this message to them, and then it would have all been said and done? Why did he go through all the trouble to get the apostle to the Gentiles to write a book to the Hebrews, when it was only going to be useful to them for a very short time? Why did he have it become part of the eternal canon and be preserved to us down to the present day?

And the answer is, because the work of the book of Hebrews is not done yet. Because God's work with Israel is not done yet.

Jesus said that one sign of the end would be that the fig tree would put forth leaves again. And so the Jewish religious and political order is going to be reestablished. And we're actually seeing that happen right before our very eyes right now. It's in the process, preparing to rebuild the temple and all that. And Jesus was saying there, that when the kingdom had been set up again, and then when the priesthood had also been set up again, when the temple had been set up, then within a generation the end would come. The time of Jacob's trouble would come upon them.

And so this religious and political order that the book of Hebrews is primarily in reference to, is going to be reestablished. And when it is, then God is going to recommence his work with Israel, and all Israel will be saved. And so the Hebrews are going to once again be coming to Christ, from within that religious and political order. And during their time of trouble, the book of the

Bible that is going to give them the most comfort, the most relevant knowledge and admonition, that is going to inform their practical daily living, is going to be the book of Hebrews.

See, God wrote the book of Hebrews with a two-fold purpose. First, to admonish the Hebrews of the first century prior to 70 AD, and then finally to exhort them during the tribulation.

And so during that time the book of Hebrews is going to be perhaps the most important book in the Bible. Not Revelation. Not Isaiah. There will be many passages from those as well that will be good for them. But the most important book, the one that they read, the one that they love, the one that they memorize, that they quote to one another, that they teach, that they preach, that they encourage each other with, the number one book, I believe, is probably going to be the book of Hebrews. It is going to be foundational, it is going to be fundamental for them. It is through this book that they are going to understand how to properly apply what is in those other books.

And so the book of Hebrews is pretty unique, especially in the NT, because it isn't just a historical book, it isn't just a record of historical events like the gospels and Acts, or an epistle written to a group of people in a particular historical context back then. And it isn't even just a prophetic book, like the Revelation. The wonder of the book of Hebrews is, that it is actually a book that is prophetic in its very admonition, that is written for a future time, a future age.

And so as we go through the book of Hebrews, especially toward the end, we'll see how so many things that it says will mean just that much more to the Jews during their tribulation.

And so as we see that political and religious order being reestablished, and the time seems to be drawing near, it is all the more important for us to understand these things, and teach these things. Because who knows whether the Jews during the tribulation will get ahold of some of that teaching, and it will help them and encourage them and comfort them greatly?

And also, simultaneously, as things are happening in Israel, things are happening with the "Christian" political and religious order today. And in order to understand that properly, and not be deceived by some things, every God-fearing person needs to understand the book of Hebrews. Because it explains to us how we should relate to the kingdom, and the priesthood.

And so anybody who believes that they are an heir of that kingdom, and that they need to participate in the atonement offered by a priesthood in order to maintain that position, the book of Hebrews is written to you.

OK. So Paul had a desire that all Israel might be saved. And he said that that was indeed going to happen. And I don't know if he knew it at the time that he wrote that in the book of Romans, but it was him, through the book of Hebrews, that was going to get to play a vital role in that salvation of Israel.

And so that's why this book wasn't a part of an apostolic ministry. Because all of those apostolic ministries that God ordained, of the disciples of Christ and of the apostle Paul, all of them were apostles in reference to the church. The Gentile church or the Jewish church.

And so I'm going to show you in a moment that the book of Hebrews wasn't written to the church in Judaea, and that in fact it wasn't written to a church at all, it doesn't say that. And that is a reflection of the fact that when God resumes his work with Israel, the church is no longer going to be on this earth. It is going to have been taken up. And so Paul's use of the word church in the book of Hebrews is sparser than any of his other epistles. Out of thirteen chapters the word church is used just twice. And when it is used, it isn't directly referring to the people that he is writing to. In the latter case it is actually talking about a group of people separate from

the people that it is talking to. It is talking about a separate group of people that they are coming unto, to become participants with in the kingdom, but that they aren't members of. And we'll get to look at that when we get almost to the end of the book of Hebrews.

But basically there are several different aspects to the book of Hebrews that we're going to look at. What we're going to do, is we're first going to understanding it as it was intended to be understood by the first-century Hebrew. And then we're going to also note how that it useful to reaching people today who have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. And then finally we'll go back through the same verses each time, once we've done that, and look at how there is a prophetic, further application as well. How those same things relate to the salvation of the Hebrews in the last days.

So that's going to be very interesting.

And you know, I say that the book of Hebrews is unique in that, but really I guess much the same thing could be said for the book of James. The book of James is also written to Israel, and it also contains admonition that will be especially important to them again in the last days. And so really, the book of James picks up just about right where the book of Hebrews leaves off. That's kind of a coincidence, isn't it, seeing how James comes right after Hebrews? But you know, I don't believe that there is any coincidence in scripture. Everything in the Bible is just exactly as God designed. And so James comes right after Hebrews.

And so perhaps once we get done the book of Hebrews, we'll go ahead, while we're already in the mood, and go through the book of James. And then you'll get to see what I'm talking about.

HEBREW

OK. So let's get started here. Now the first thing that I want to do before we even get into verse one, is look at the title of the book of Hebrews. I know you thought that we already did that, but we're not done yet. I want to give you some scriptural background on this word "Hebrew", what that means, what the significance of it is.

First time:

Genesis 14:13 And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the **Hebrew**; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram.

So Abram, who became Abraham, was the first person to be called a Hebrew in the Bible. And notice there how it immediately related that to where he was dwelling, in the plain of Mamre. Why did it do that? Because the definition of the word Hebrew relates to geography. Our English term "Hebrew" comes from the Hebrew word for Hebrew, and what that word literally means is "one from the other side (of the river)".

So why does it mean that, what's the significance of that? Well, it might call your mind to something that Joshua said:

Joshua 24:2 And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt **on the other side of the flood** in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods.

3 And I took your father Abraham from **the other side of the flood**, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac.

So Joshua described their forefathers, Terah, Abraham, and Nahor, as having dwelt on the other side of the flood. And God called Abraham to pass over the river Euphrates, out of Ur of the Chaldees, and to enter into the promised land.

And so it called Abraham “the Hebrew” there in Genesis, because he was “the one from the other side,” from the other side of the river, from the other side of the flood. He was a stranger, who had passed over the river and was sojourning in the plains of the Amorites. And so he was called the man from the other side.

And that’s a name that stuck throughout Israel’s history.

When Joseph was in Egypt, he was described as a Hebrew. And also the other Israelites, while they were sojourning there, the Egyptians called them Hebrews.

And as a side note, in modern times the fact that the Egyptians called the Israelites Hebrews seems to have been confirmed archeologically. We’ve found references in Egyptian writing to the “Habiru”. And so, the Bible was right.

And so this is what Abraham was called, and what the Egyptians called the Israelites.

And when God spoke to Moses at the burning bush, you remember Moses asked God what his name was. And he said I AM, and he said, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And then just after that God said this to Moses:

Exodus 3:18 And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The LORD God of the **Hebrews** hath met with us...

And so this is the way that his words are conveyed to Pharaoh, as the LORD God of the Hebrews. And you know, that might just have been God’s way of shortening the phrase “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” That gets kind of unwieldy. So he just says “the God of the Hebrews” there. The God of the people whose forefather’s were from the other side of the river.

And so that’s what the Egyptians knew them as. And later, in 1 Samuel, during the time of Saul, when they had war with the Philistines, the Philistines would call them Hebrews.

I’m sure they liked to harp on that. “They’re foreigners, they’re from the other side, and they’re trying to take away our land.” So they’d call them the Hebrews.

And it also talks a little bit about the Hebrews in the NT.

Now most of the NT references are just talking about the Hebrew language. In fact, aside from one reference in Acts, Paul is actually the only person to reference the Hebrews as a group of people in the NT. He does that twice beside in the book of Hebrews:

2 Corinthians 11:22 Are they **Hebrews**? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I.

And so there Paul gives a good clear statement of what a Hebrew is. They are an Israelite. They are the seed of Abraham. Which he was.

Philippians 3:4 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:

5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an **Hebrew** of the **Hebrews**; as touching the law, a Pharisee;

6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

And so Paul calls himself an Hebrew of the Hebrews there, touting his genealogy, that he had a pure family line, as an Israelite. And he says that, in connection with the fact that he was also raised as a Hebrew from birth, he was circumcised the eighth day, as God commanded Abraham to do. And so when he grew up he was zealous of his Hebrew heritage, so much so that he persecuted the church, and was blameless in his keeping of the law. And so by saying that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, he was saying that he wasn't just a Hebrew in name, but one in deed. That was not only his heritage, but it was a pure heritage, and he was zealous of it, and lived up to it.

And so that is the kind of people that Paul is writing to here. People who have that heritage as Israelites, as descendants of Abraham, and are zealous of it.

He's writing to the people from the other side. The people that God brought from the other side to give them a kingdom, an inheritance.

He could have called them Israelites, but that would be speaking genetically. He's using the term Hebrew instead, which doesn't just mean a descendent of Israel, a descendent of Abraham, but also encompasses their culture, their heritage. That God has called them from one thing to another.

And he could have called them Jews. But the term Jew is a reference to the kingdom of Judah. And ultimately he is going to point them to a higher calling than that, an even greater heritage than that. So what he is really doing is calling them out of Judaism, to their true Hebrew roots. To receive what their forefathers were originally called to.

You see, he's not going to down their heritage, or undermine their heritage. He's not going to ask them to stop being Hebrews, or to give up their Hebrew heritage.

He's going to explain to them how Christ has and will perfect that heritage. How all of their promises are fulfilled in him, and how they will only receive the inheritance through him. And so he is writing to Hebrews to point them to the ultimate calling of the Hebrew. To pass over from the other side of the flood, and follow Christ. To receive that kingdom. To be made worthy partakers in it through that priesthood. And so this is about fulfillment, this is about the ultimate perfection of their Hebrew heritage, of their hopes. Not in Judaism, but in Jesus. Not in Israel, but in Jesus. It's not though the kingdom of Judah and the temple order that they will be true Hebrews. It's not as descendants of Israel instead of Ishmael or Esau that they will be true Hebrews. It isn't being a Jew or an Israelite that will bring them to that inheritance. Ultimately they need to know the true priesthood to be able to participate in the true kingdom, and receive that which they have been promised.

And finally I'd like to note that this designation is different from Paul's other epistles. Every other epistle that Paul wrote falls into one of two categories. It is either written to the church at a particular location—Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossi, Thessalonica—or it was written to a single individual—Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. But in this case it is different. Now Paul is writing to a group of people, but not based on a geographic designation. This isn't the epistle of Paul the apostle to the Judaeans. To the Judaeen church. This group of people is not defined geographically, but ethnically and culturally.

Paul's other epistles are written to the church at different geographical locations. But this one is written to a group of people with a common heritage. Those epistles were written to the Gentile churches. This one isn't. And it isn't written to the church in Israel either. It is written to a group of people, the Hebrews, that have a common heritage, that God gave to them. That are the heirs of a promise of an eternal inheritance, through that. That are God's chosen people. And so this book is written to the people that God called out of their country, to pass over the river to sojourn in a promised land. And that designation, that promise, is not invalidated by the NT. The entire premise of the book of Hebrews, is that those promises are still there for those people in a special way. That they still, nationally, ethnically, have a special calling. And in the book of Hebrews God is reminding them of that calling, and explains to them how it relates to the NT, and how it is through the NT that they will ultimately, nationally, receive that promise. By calling them Hebrews here it is acknowledging that that is their calling, that they have ethnically, and that that calling is going to be fulfilled. But it isn't going to be through the OT, through the old covenant, but through the NT, and new covenant. It hasn't passed away, the NT simply fulfills it, fulfills the next step, so that they can receive the promise that God made to their forefather Abraham.

And so in the book of Hebrews it isn't going to be telling them to set aside their Jewishness, to set aside the idea that they are a chosen people. Instead it is going to be telling them how that relates to Christ, and how, based on the current state of things under the NT, they should then be living. How they ought to be relating to those promises at this time, at this stage. What they need to be doing now in reference to the kingdom, and to the priesthood, in order to be assured of one day receiving that promise.

Verse 1

GOD

Now the first thing that I want to note is just the first word here. The first word is "God", rather than "Paul". And we talked about that. This isn't a message of Paul the apostle to the Gentiles, this is a message straight from God, not through one of the apostles' ministries.

And so it doesn't salute the saints or say "to the church which is in...", or anything like that.

But why doesn't it start out that way, why doesn't it have a salutation here, and greetings from Paul's companions at the end? I mean it is an epistle after all, and that's how the other epistles are.

Well, I mentioned before how Hebrews is a good example for us on how to expound scripture. And that's because Hebrews is basically a sermon. And that could be said of many of Paul's epistles, but this one most of all. It's in a category all its own in that regard. So much so that I suspect that this might have really started out as a sermon, that Paul preached to the Hebrews in Rome, and then God told him "I want you to write that down and send it to the Hebrews in Judea," and so he did. I don't know if it happened that way, but I wouldn't be at all surprised. And so really this book is basically pure Bible teaching, it doesn't have any of the trappings of an epistle, like the other letters do. And that is certainly by design, that is just the way that God would have it.

But that doesn't answer the question in practical terms, as to how it got sent that way. I mean, didn't Paul sign the thing somewhere? Didn't anybody else send along salutations with it as they did with his other epistles?

And I do believe that they did. You see, I think that a second letter was sent along with the book of Hebrews, that contained Paul's salutation and that of his companions. And I think when we get to the end of the book, we'll actually see some evidence for that.

But do you remember how the book of Romans ends? The first fifteen chapters of Romans are Paul's epistle, and the sixteenth chapter is just a whole bunch of salutations from Paul to different people, and then other folks adding their greetings, and then he tucks a little bit exhortation in there, and finally closes the book.

And I think that is very much what happened with the book of Hebrews. Accompanying it was a second letter, similar to Romans 16, containing all the greetings, and also a few short additional pieces of admonition that Paul wanted to send them. And possibly there were actually several different ones, several different little letters like that, each specifically tailored to a particular group of people that would receive the epistle. Remember this is a general epistle to all of the Hebrews, so he may have sent out several different copies of it to different places, one to Jerusalem, one to Caesarea, one to Samaria, one to Antioch, and so on. And so he'd salute the different people in each place, and give them some direct exhortation based on his knowledge of their affairs in that area.

And so I think that's how the book of Hebrews came to be the way it is, without any greetings or the usual trappings of an epistle of this size.

And so God worked all of that out so that this book would just be his pure message to his people. Just practically a written sermon.

And in fact, when we get to the end, I think I'll probably just go back through and just preach this word for word. Once we've expounded everything. The next week this will be my sermon. Just the book of Hebrews. Just straight, no added commentary. And we'll see how well that seems to fit.

FIRST 4 VERSES: SUMMARY OF HEBREWS

OK, so now that we've looked at the first word, and gotten that out of the way, I want to show you the next few verses, before we start to go through them in depth. Because what the first four verses of the book of Hebrews do is basically summarize the entire message, the entire basis of everything that Paul is going to say. Basically it's the condensed version. And so this is what it is going to be talking about. Paul's going to expand on it a little bit, and fill in a few details here and there, but these first few verses are powerful all on their own.

In fact, if these first four verses were all that we had, they'd be sufficient to convey a large part of the message here, to many people. They might not seem like much, because they are very fundamental, but that is what makes them so powerful. Just these first four verses are enough to radically challenge anybody who is zealous toward God, toward the kingdom and the priesthood, and maybe respects Christ but doesn't really understand his place in all that. These verses can completely change their entire view of religion, and of the religious and political order that they've been participating in.

You might find that hard to believe, but the fact is that there was a Muslim man, who after an encounter with just the first verse of the book of Hebrews, decided to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, and got born again right then and there.

And so listen, if you are ministering to that kind of people, especially if they are seeking to learn more of Christ, and you point them to Hebrews, even to just the first couple verses, they are so profound, they are so powerful, that they can bring the zealous to knowledge right then and there.

And if they accept it then they will get saved, if they reject it then they are rejecting the most basic essence of who Christ is.

OK, so let's look at these four verses together, and then we'll go back through them in depth one by one next time.

Now remember, think "kingdom and priesthood" as I read through this.

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Now you probably don't see all of the implications of that. That's why we're going to be going through it in depth. Because somebody coming from that OT perspective that we talked about, as they hear this their mind is going to immediately be running over some of the implications of this. And to them, they would be really profound.

There is so much packed in there that it is hard to summarize it. As I said, it is already a summary. It can't really be condensed down much more than that without losing something important. So I won't try to summarize that for you, we'll just have to go through and look at each thing it says there in depth, in order to understand what he is saying.

What I can do though, is say that the nature of these verses is that they are a declaration of the ministry of Christ, particularly as it relates to the kingdom and the priesthood. And really, if you took those two things out, there really wouldn't be much ministry of Christ left. That is what he's all about.

So what we are about to dive into next time right here is a declaration of what Christ has done, stated for the benefit of somebody who understands the work of God up to that point, up to the point of the coming of Christ. Somebody who understands the OT, who understands the concepts of the kingdom and the priesthood. Here is how Christ is an extension of, and really a culmination of, that work that God has been doing with mankind, the things that he has promised in regard to the kingdom.

And so that's what we'll be looking at next time. We'll be going through those first few verses. And you'll be able to get a flavor of the book Hebrews. We'll touch on most of the basic points that this book is going to cover. It is basically going to be the condensed version of the book of Hebrews.