

Hebrews 002

Hebrews Introduction—Part 2

Hebrews 1:3

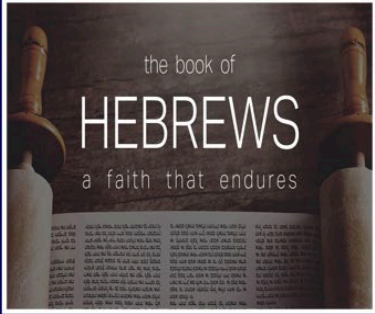
April 26, 2026

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It is a rather awkward time to say, "Turn to the Book of Hebrews," because there is so much going on in our world, but that is why you guys are here, right? So we started a study on the Book of Hebrews.

INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

- **Authorship**
- Audience
- Date
- Occasion
- Purpose
- Message
- Outline



One of the things I like to do before we start a book is give you the background of the book. So here are some of the background issues we looked at. We have looked at most of these, but we are going to finish this list today, Lord willing. The first is authorship of the book: who wrote the Book of Hebrews? And I told you last time that I agree with Origen on this. The church father Origen said, "Only God knows." So that is my answer. I have no idea who wrote Hebrews.

People go to great lengths to try to figure out who wrote an anonymous book. Was it Apollos? Was it Barnabas? Was it Paul? And the answer is, "I do not know." I had to go all the way through PhD studies to learn those words. There are some things you just cannot get a definitive answer on, although the human intellect is always craving answers.

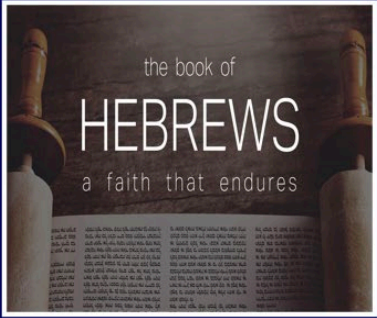
The far more important question, though, is "Who is the audience of Hebrews?" Who wrote the book—Apollos, Barnabas, Paul, or somebody else—has no bearing on how the Book of Hebrews is interpreted. You will interpret it the same way if Barnabas wrote it, if Apollos wrote it, or if Paul wrote it. So when you are studying the Bible, you do not

want to spend all of your time dealing with some issue that has no bearing on how the book is interpreted.

So that is why the whole subject of authorship and the amount of sweat people spend on this is really, to me, a waste of time. The far better use of your time is to figure out the audience of the Book of Hebrews, because if you can understand the audience, you can understand the Book of Hebrews, and the things in the Book of Hebrews will start to make sense to you.

AUDIENCE

- Believers (1:3)
- 2nd generation (2:2-3)
- Jews
- Located in the Land of Israel



So what do we know about the audience of Hebrews? We went through this last time. The most important thing to understand about this audience is that you are dealing with saved people. These are people who have already trusted in Christ for salvation. They are born again. They are regenerated.

And if you are struggling with that issue, you might want to take a listen or a look at the recording that we did last week where I showed you unassailable, irrefutable evidence that the audience of Hebrews is a saved audience (<https://slbc.org/sermon/hebrews-001-hebrews-introduction-part-1/>).

You are going to understand why this is a huge issue when I talk about the so-called warning passages in just a little bit, because that has a direct bearing on how you interpret the warning passages. The warning passages are like hot potatoes. Nobody really knows what to do with them except to throw them somewhere. Very few people interpret the warning passages correctly.

I think I have the right interpretation of the warning passages, not because I am some kind of genius, but because by God's providence I sat under somebody who was able to explain these things to me: a man named J. Dwight Pentecost. He wrote a little tiny commentary on the Book of Hebrews. It is called "Hebrews: A Faith That Endures." That is where we got the title for our series.

So the audience of Hebrews is saved. By the way, let me throw this in (we mentioned it last time): there are about thirty-eight exhortations in the Book of Hebrews, and there is not a single exhortation for the audience to believe and be saved, like you find in John's Gospel, which shows me that the audience is already a believing audience.

So the author of the Book of Hebrews is not dealing with evangelistic issues. The author is dealing with spiritual growth issues—spiritual development issues. The second thing to understand about the audience of Hebrews (we covered this last time) is the way Hebrews 2:2-3 is worded. (You can go back and listen to the last sermon to get the full explanation of this.) You are dealing with a generation of believers that are second-generation Christians.

The teaching transferred from Jesus to the apostolic generation, and then it transferred from the apostolic generation to those of us that heard, which would be the generation following the apostles. And as the teaching made that leap from the apostles to the second generation, it was confirmed to them through various signs and wonders, which is something that God does when He is inaugurating a new work (Hebrews 2:2-3).

And here we are seeing the beginning of the Church Age. So, the teaching was confirmed through various signs and wonders. And let me be clear about this: I do believe that God does miracles today, or I would not pray for people. But the truth of the matter is that miracles in the Bible cluster around certain time periods. And typically you will see that those miracles happen during time periods when God is starting something new.

In this case, God was raising up a new man called the church. So signs and wonders are very prominent in the Book of Acts. In the Book of Exodus you will see a lot of signs and wonders. In Exodus, God is doing something new: He is raising up a new age of time called the Age of the Law, when the Mosaic Law is being given.

You will also see signs and wonders in the Bible in 1 Kings and 2 Kings, clustering around the Elijah and Elisha stories: floating ax heads, fire from heaven, and those kinds of things. And the reason miracles are prominent there is that God was raising up a new office called the office of the prophet, whose function was to call wayward kings back to God's law.

And that is why most prophets had a very short career span and very short lives, because their function was to call the political ruler back to the law of God. And the political ruler held all the cards because he held the political power in the nation. So if someone was too outspoken against his leadership, he would just call him a "domestic terrorist," and jail or kill that person.

Anyway, miracles were clustering around that time period because God was doing something new. He was raising up this office called the prophet. Miracles cluster around the life of Christ because God was doing something new. He was offering the Kingdom to first-century Israel, which they nationally turned down.

In the future there is a coming upon the earth a counterfeit "Signs and Wonders Movement" orchestrated by Satan, in which the Antichrist will rule the world. There

Satan is imitating the work of the Antichrist. So people today that are looking for a Signs and Wonders Movement, I am thinking, "Well, the next one on the horizon is that of the devil. Are you sure you want to get too involved in that?"

Then, according to the Bible, miracles will cluster around the Kingdom Age, when once the Kingdom starts, you cannot even get the prayer request off your tongue before it is immediately answered. The lame will leap like deer; the blind will see; and all of these kinds of things; because God will be doing something brand new in that thousand-year Kingdom.

So that is why when the message traveled from Jesus to the apostles to this generation, Hebrews 2:2-3 says that it was confirmed by various signs and wonders: in the Bible miracles cluster around God initiating a new age or office. The third thing to understand about the audience of Hebrews that is being addressed here is that they are Jewish.

Doesn't the title of the book give that away? "The Letter to the Hebrews" is the title. It is in your study Bible. It is not inspired, but it is a title that goes back to A.D. 180, so we are pretty confident that it was the title of the Book of Hebrews. The fact that the book was titled that way indicates that this audience was Jewish.

So you have to put yourself in the shoes of a Hebrew Christian and ask the questions that they would be asking. And once you understand that, then you can understand the Book of Hebrews. And in fact, not only can you understand the Book of Hebrews, but also you can understand the six New Testament books which are specifically written to Hebrew Christians. Those books are the Gospel of Matthew, the Epistle of James, the two Peter epistles, Jude, James (written to the twelve tribes), and the Epistle to the Hebrews.

It is not as if I, as a Gentile Christian, cannot gain something from reading those six books, because all Scripture is for us, although not all Scripture is directly about us, so to speak. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable (2 Timothy 3:16). But you cannot really figure out why the author of Hebrews is bringing up certain things unless you understand that Hebrews is written to, along with those five other New Testament books, a Hebrew Christian audience.

Now, the fourth thing to understand about the audience of Hebrews is that they were located in the land of Israel. Saul of Tarsus, whom we know as Paul, was, prior to his conversion, a horrific persecutor of the Church of God. He did not like this idea of the church starting. He did not like all these Jewish people trusting in the Messiah whom his nation, the nation of Israel, had rejected.

So Saul launched a Terrible (with a capital "t") wave of persecution against this newborn church, which at the outset was all Jewish. In fact, Saul was the one who was holding the garments of those that threw rocks at the first martyr in the Church Age, a man named Stephen. You will see that in Acts 7-8.

The unbelieving Jews hated every word Stephen said because he condemned Israel up one side and down the other. Stephen (and he was Jewish himself) said that the Jews had always been rebellious. He went back into their history and traced it for them. "You

mistreated every prophet God sent your direction, and now you are no different because you have rejected your own King, Jesus."

And Saul of Tarsus, sitting there listening to that whole thing, hated the whole thing. So Saul launched this terrible wave of persecution against these people in the church. So Acts 8:3-4 says,

"But Saul began ravaging the church,..." (Acts 8:3).

This is what Paul, after he was converted (Acts 9) talked about all the time. He said, "I am the least of the apostles, the last of the apostles. I am not worthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God" (paraphrase, 1 Corinthians 15:9). Paul could not get over the fact that not only was he forgiven of his sins by Jesus, but he was actually put into the service of Jesus.

Paul went from being the great persecutor of Christianity to its greatest advocate and defender (Acts 9-28). And to his dying day, Paul never got over the fact that God showed him that measure of grace. So that is instructive for us, because a lot of people think, "Well, I have done this in my life. I have done that in my life. God will never use me."

The truth of the matter is that God's specialty is taking the least qualified people and using them for His glory, which gives me a lot of encouragement because God will accept my resume. I am unqualified, just like everybody else is unqualified. And who is it who wrote the opening Book of the New Testament? A guy named Matthew, who was a tax gatherer.

In that day, if you were a tax gatherer, it is the same way we today would look at an abortionist or a pornographer or someone who traffics in child sex slavery, or some horrific thing. A tax gatherer was always a thief, because after you were done collecting resources for Rome, you could extract whatever you wanted from the people. And number two, if being a thief were not bad enough, you were a traitor because you were working for the occupier, Rome.

So if you were a Jewish tax gatherer, you were hated. That is why Zaccheus was in the tree in Luke 19. What was he doing in the tree? Well, no one else would have him in their little group, so he had to go up in a tree. They were in Jericho just to see Jesus (Luke 19:1-10). And when Zaccheus was converted, he said, "I am going to pay back four times what I have stolen" (paraphrase, Luke 19:8).

So who is writing the opening Book of the New Testament, which features the regal authority of Jesus Christ? It is this guy, Matthew, who was totally unqualified. So God does not call the qualified, but He qualifies the called, amen? And this is so encouraging because all of us have shortcomings in our lives by which we discredit ourselves and disqualify ourselves and discount ourselves. And God says, "You are My specialty." That is who this man Saul was.

Acts 8:3-4 says,

"But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women [he was not a big supporter of women here], he would put them in prison. Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:3-4).

That is a very important word for "scattered": it is the word "diaspora" (διασπορά) from which we get the word "Diaspora," which is a word used in the Bible only of Jewish people.

"Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

And then it picks up again in Acts 11:19, which says,

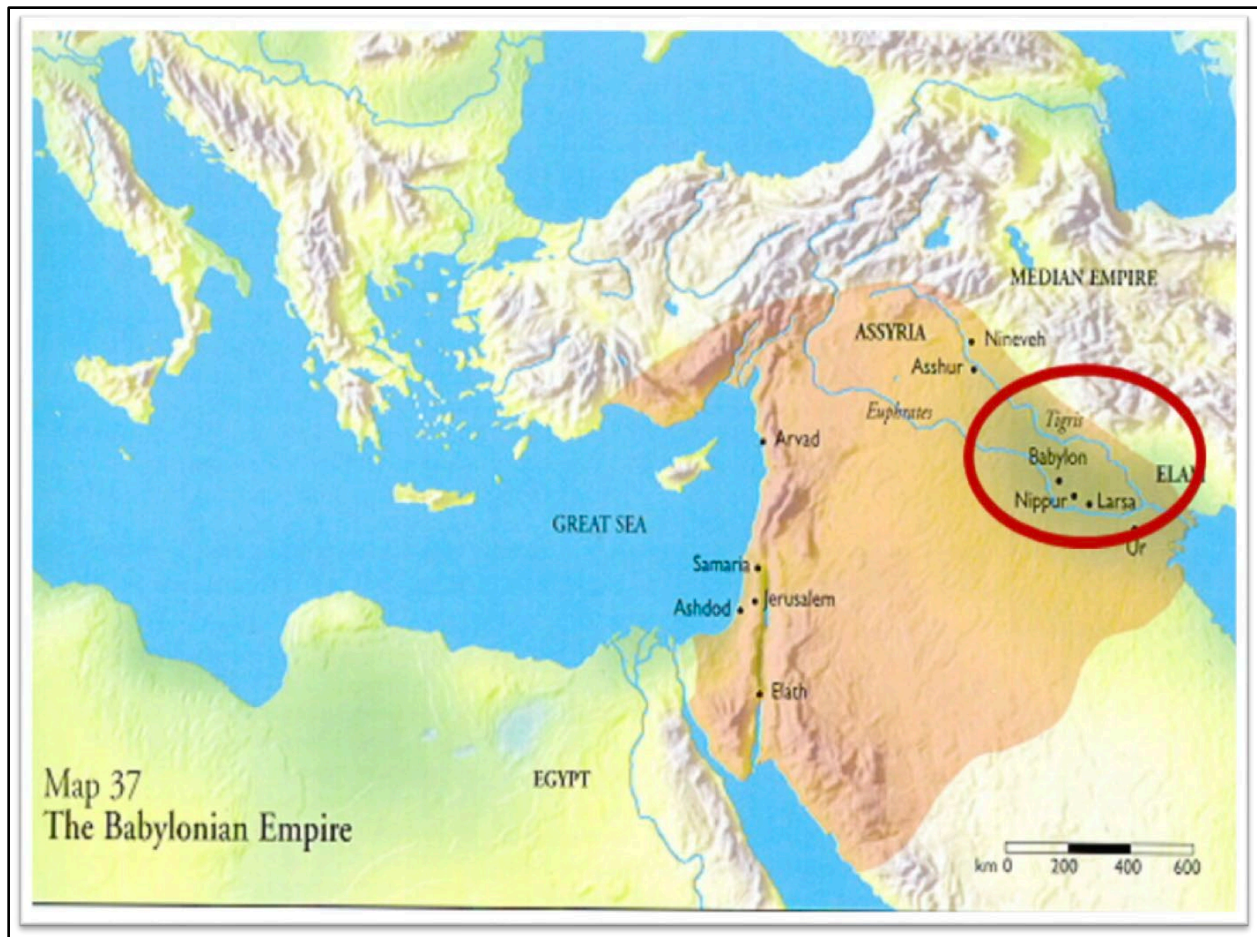
"So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen..." (Acts 11:19).

It was Stephen's speech that exasperated, or initiated, this persecution, because Saul of Tarsus just hated Stephen's speech. To quote that great theologian, Jack Nicholson "You can't handle the truth." Saul could not handle the truth as Stephen stood there. And Stephen's speech is not a short speech. It goes on for over fifty verses (Acts 7:2-53).

In his speech, Stephen just weaves together all this Old Testament and says, "You guys are guilty, just like this nation of Israel has always been guilty." And Saul, as a patriot, did not like hearing that. So he launched this persecution against Stephen and had him martyred on the spot. Then Saul launched a persecution against the Jewish believers in Yeshua. So the Jewish Christians were scattered.

"So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone" (Acts 11:19).

So where did the Jewish Christians go? Well, they went to join some of their fellow kinsmen in a place called Babylon in modern-day Iraq, a very famous place in history.



I am not really sure what the Flood did in terms of rearranging the topography of the earth, but the way Eden is described in Genesis 2:8-14, with four rivers—the Euphrates, Tigris, Pishon, and Gihon—the location of Eden was probably somewhere in that area, modern-day Iraq. We know that Babylon was where the Tower of Babel stood (Genesis 11:2).

Babylon was where the children of Israel were taken into captivity (Daniel 1:2). And a lot of the Jews—look at the genealogies, the post-exilic genealogies in Ezra and Nehemiah—never came back from the captivity. They stayed there. And there was actually a Talmud created in Babylon about five hundred years after the time of Christ, in A.D. 500, called the Babylonian Talmud.

So Babylon was where scattered Jews went to join their kinsmen. So James says in James 1:1,

"James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed ["diaspora" (διασπορά)] abroad: Greetings" (James 1:1).

And we generally think that James was writing to Jewish Christians of the Diaspora who lived in the first place they went to following the persecution under Saul of Tarsus after

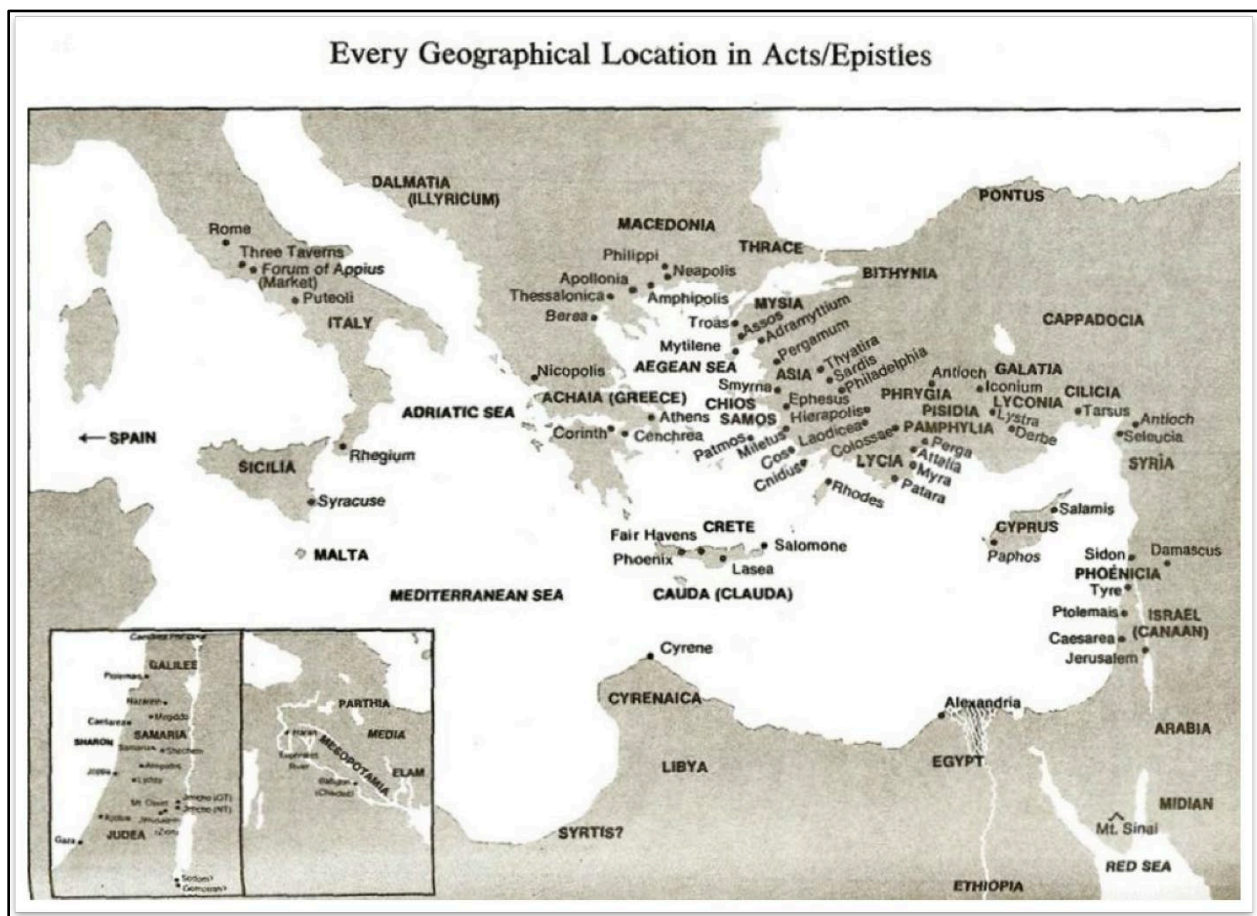
Stephen's speech and martyrdom: Babylon. And we think that by process of elimination, because Peter was going to write to some Jews who were scattered.

Remember, Peter was the apostle to the Jews (Galatians 2:7-8), so he actually went to Babylon. First Peter 5:13 tells us that. And I have no reason to give you a big speech on why Babylon does not mean Babylon in 1 Peter 5:13. Peter went to Babylon. It would be a logical place for him to go. And from Babylon he wrote 1 Peter and 2 Peter, which was delivered shortly thereafter, to a group of Jews.

Peter says,

"To those who reside as aliens, scattered ["diaspora" (διασπορά)] throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen" (1 Peter 1:1).

Those regions were located in modern-day north-central Turkey, and that is the second place the scattered Jews went to in the Diaspora. So if Peter is addressing that group, it is very logical to think that James would not address them, but would address the other group in Babylon. So it is by process of elimination that we think that.



But there were some of the Jews that stayed in Jerusalem and just put up with the persecution. That is the group that the author of Hebrews is addressing. So he, the

author of Hebrews, is addressing regenerated Jews who were new believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, second-generation believers, who managed to stay there in Jerusalem.

This is why the temptation that the audience of Hebrews was under, as we will be explaining, was very real to them, because the Book of Hebrews was written during a time when the temple was still standing. It was destroyed by Rome eventually in A.D. 70, but that had not happened yet. So this group was just tired of being persecuted.

And you can understand how the audience of Hebrews felt about it. They got tired of being persecuted by unbelieving Jews. So their temptation was, "Well, I will just go back to the temple, not because I really believe anymore in the rituals of the temple, but I just want to get these persecutors off my back. I will show up at a few feast days, if that is what will calm these persecutors down."

And the author of Hebrews is saying, "Don't do that." That is the point of the Book of Hebrews: "Do not retrogress—do not lapse backward—because what you have in Christ is better." The author of Hebrews is not saying that there is something wrong with the institutions of Judaism.

A lot of people take Hebrews and turn it into some kind of attack on the institutions of Judaism. Well, how could that be, when God is the one that is the author of those things? So the problem is not the institutions of Judaism, it is just that what you have in Christ is better.

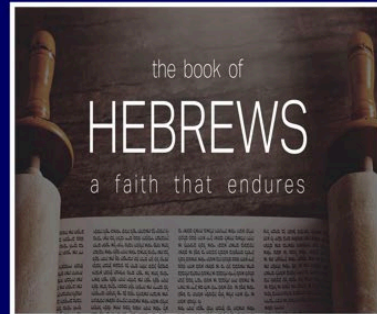
The word "better" is used thirteen times in the Book of Hebrews. So if you retrogress like you are thinking of doing, just to get out of persecution, you are retrogressing to an inferior revelation. It is not a bad revelation, but now something better is here. And what was there was just a shadow of what God said would come. Now the reality is here.

I am six feet, six inches tall. If the sun is right, you can see my shadow coming into a room a little bit before me. But the shadow is not me. When I come to the house, my wife does not kiss my shadow. What would be the fun in that? She kisses me because I am the reality behind the shadow.

What the audience of Hebrews is being forced to go back to just to get out of persecution is a shadow which just points to an ultimate reality. And what the author of Hebrews starts to explain to the audience is that "You have strength to not retrogress, because you have a high priest who is at the right hand of the Father, not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedek, who can help you say, 'No.' to this pressure." That is really the whole point of the Book of Hebrews.

DATE (A.D. 62–64)

- Before
 - ◆ A.D. 95 (Clement of Rome)
 - ◆ A.D. 70 (Heb 8:4, 13; 9:6; 10:1-2; 13:10)
 - ◆ A.D. 64 (Heb 12:4)
- After apostolic generation (2:2-3)



So the date of the Book of Hebrews, as we said before, would be about A.D. 62 to 64, as it was written to second-generation Jewish believers living in and near Jerusalem. The temptation to return to the temple was very near, or very real, to them, because the temple was still functioning.

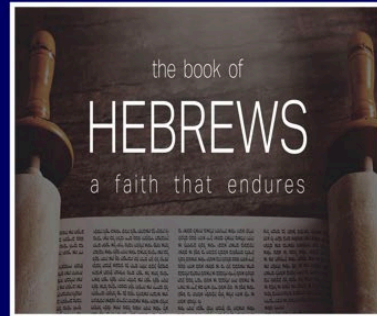
I showed you some references last time indicating that the temple was still up and running when this book was written. Hebrews 10:1-2 is a good one that we studied. So Hebrews was written pre-A.D.-70, pre-destruction-of-the-temple, to the second generation of Hebrew Christians living in and around the city of Jerusalem. These Jewish believers had a very real opportunity to go back to the temple to escape the persecution from unbelieving Jews.

So all of these points that I am giving you here are not just random data points. This is not a data dump. I try to give you points that are pertinent to how the book is interpreted, because if I am just going to come up here and rattle on and on about things that are interesting, but have no bearing on how the book is interpreted, I am basically wasting my time and your time because those things do not help in interpreting the book.

But these things I am talking about here are a massive help. And in fact, if you do not understand these things, then a lot of the statements of the Book of Hebrews will seem an enigma to you. But once this background is understood, everything in the book starts to fall into its logical place.

OCCASION

- A.D. 70
- Heb 3:1 (Christian confession)
- Unbelieving Jews placing audience under duress to return to Judaism
- Audience being worn down
- Temple still standing



That leads us to the occasion of the book. What is the situation that is being addressed in the Book of Hebrews? Something to understand about the Bible is that it is written as crisis literature. With every single book of the Bible, there is some kind of crisis taking place behind the scenes. And if you understand the crisis, you can understand why the author brings up the things that he brings up.

Most modern Bible study does not do that for you. They do not explain the crisis behind the scenes, and they just jump right into some kind of selective verse-by-verse understanding of the book. Well, the verses will not make sense to you without understanding the crisis, because the Bible is what we call occasional literature. It is written to address an occasion.

The Bible was not written like a systematic theology textbook in which the writer says, "Hey, I am going to defend the doctrine of the Trinity today. Ready? Point A, point B, point C." That is not how the Bible was written. Each book of the Bible was designed to deal with some kind of crisis.

Now, the work of a systematic theologian, then, is to go through the Bible and say, "Let's develop the doctrine of the Trinity," because there is no book of the Bible that gives you an exhaustive teaching on the Trinity. There is no "Trinity Book," right? "Let's open our Bible to the Trinity Book." "Well, where is that?" "Well, a systematic theologian has to assemble that doctrine, because it is scattered all over the Bible."

Why is it scattered? Because the Bible was not written the way we think it should be written—as a systematic theology book. It is written to address a crisis. The Germans called this "Sitz im Leben." That means "situation in life," another way of saying that it is occasional literature. That is how the Bible is set up. For every single book of the Bible, there is a crisis.

What is the crisis in Colossians? The Colossian heresy, which reduced Christ to just being an angel. That was the crisis. What is the situation in Galatians? It is legalism

coming into the church. What is the situation in 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians? It is a bunch of people who quit life because they thought Jesus was coming back within a few hours.

Why hold down a job if Jesus is returning so soon? I will just go out and max out my credit cards. And the Thessalonians had people who had died, and they wanted to know—"Paul, you talked about the Rapture. What is going to happen to our deceased loved ones in Christ? Are they going to be part of the Rapture?" So 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians address that.

Even in Romans, Paul is trying to lay the foundation in the church at Rome, which was formed from a group of people that started that church who were present to hear Peter preach on the Day of Pentecost. The people who started that church were not apostles. Did you know that the church at Rome was started by non-apostles—just ordinary folks?

Paul was going to use Rome as a beachhead to launch out further west into Spain. He explains this towards the end of the Book of Romans. He had to make sure that the Roman church was on a solid theological footing. So in the Book of Romans he laid out, in majestic, logical form, pure doctrine dealing with salvation and other related topics in the Book of Romans. So even Romans was written to address a crisis.

And you could find the crisis for every Old Testament book and every New Testament book. So what is the crisis in the Book of Hebrews? The crisis is that you have a bunch of people who are tired of being persecuted, and they want to go back to the functioning temple and embroil themselves in a few feast days and sacrifices just to shut the mouths of their persecutors.

That is the crisis. And the author of Hebrews is saying, "Don't do that." That is the point of the Book of Hebrews. It is an exhortation not to do that. A.D. 70 was around the corner. The temple would be destroyed, because Jesus said it would be, as did Daniel. All the way back in the sixth century B.C., Daniel predicted the reaction of the nation of Israel when Jesus would show up and present His Messianic credentials to the nation.

And in the famous prophecy of the Seventy Weeks, Daniel wrote, as Gabriel gave Daniel this vision,

"Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood;..." (Daniel 9:26).

That is A.D. 70. "When Jesus is rejected by the nation of Israel on Palm Sunday, two things are going to happen. He is going to be cut off for a season. He will not inherit the Kingdom." In fact, it says that He will inherit nothing. Tell that to people who think that Jesus established the Kingdom in the first century.

Are you kidding me? The Bible says that Jesus would inherit nothing, because He would be rejected by His own nation. And then, as a penalty for that sin, God would put

the nation of Israel under the consequences of her Mosaic Covenant, which God gave to her at Mount Sinai. The Mosaic Covenant is laid out as a suzerain-vassal treaty.

Six Parts of a Suzerain-Vassal Treaty in Deuteronomy

- Preamble (1:1-5)
- Prologue (1:6–4:40)
- Covenant obligations (5–26)
- Storage and reading instructions (27:2-3; 31:9, 24, 26)
- Witnesses (32:1)
- **Blessings and curses (28)**



"Suzerain" is the superior. "Vassal" is the inferior. It is a treaty structure that a superior would enter into with an inferior during the time of Abraham and during the time of Moses. We have a bunch of them from that time period.

The Mosaic Covenant lays out six parts. There is a preamble. There is a historical prologue between the parties. There are covenant obligations that the vassal has to do to please the suzerain. There are storage and reading instructions. Witnesses are called. But if the vassal does not do what the suzerain says, then there are curses built into a suzerain-vassal treaty structure.

Guess what? The whole Book of Deuteronomy reads like a suzerain-vassal treaty, exactly like everything we know about the ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties. There is a preamble (Deuteronomy 1:1-5) and a historical prologue between the parties as God has entered into this covenant with Israel (Deuteronomy 1:6-4:40).

There are covenant obligations for the vassal (the inferior) to follow (the Ten Commandments and the related 613 commandments in the Mosaic Law). There are storage and reading instructions (Deuteronomy 27:2-3; 31:9, 24, 26). There are even witnesses called (Deuteronomy 32:1). How do you witness for God? You cannot have a normal jury for that one. So God calls heaven and earth as his witnesses.

And then in Deuteronomy 28, which is the spine of the Old Testament and quite frankly, of the New Testament as well (there is a parallel chapter in Leviticus 26), there are blessings and curses. Deuteronomy 28:1-14 lists blessings for obedience: "Here are the things that the suzerain will do for the vassal if the vassal nationally fulfills their instructions under the covenant obligations."

"The vassal will go out and fight their wars and they will win. They will lend and not borrow, and their crops will produce overwhelmingly in terms of productivity" (paraphrase, Deuteronomy 28:1-14). But if the vassal disobeys the suzerain, Deuteronomy 28:15-68 lists curses for disobedience. Wow. It is almost as though God knew what was going to happen. For fourteen verses He said, "I will bless you if you obey Me."

"Now, here are a bunch of other verses that are far more numerous. Here is what is going to happen if you disobey Me: you are going to go out and you are going to fight your battles, and you are going to lose; and you are going to borrow and not be the lender. Your crops are going to fail, and you will not be the head rather than the tail—you will be the tail rather than the head. And you will be a bygone throughout the earth."

And that is a description of Israel's history since she has been kicked out of her land. But God cannot cancel Israel's program because of another covenant that He made with them called the Abrahamic Covenant. I am not dealing here with the Abrahamic Covenant, which gives Israel ownership of her blessings.

I am dealing with the Mosaic suzerain-vassal treaty, which gives them, not ownership, but enjoyment and possession of what they own. You can own something and not enjoy it. Did you know that you could own a house in the Hamptons but be so busy working that you can never go and enjoy it? (Anybody have that going for them? I need a vacation resort. Let me know.) You own it, but you are not enjoying it.

So that is where Israel is today. She owns her blessings under the Abrahamic Covenant. That is why all of these people saying that God is through with Israel do not understand this distinction that I am making for you. Israel owns her blessings thanks to the Abrahamic Covenant. But she is not currently enjoying what she owns. And in fact, Israel is under divine discipline, even right now as I speak.

As much as I am of the mindset that we should love the Jewish people and help the Jewish nation wherever we can, and speak up on behalf of injustices that are committed against the Jewish nation—and there are many—you cannot do that without also understanding that the people of Israel are under divine discipline as we speak. They are a nation under discipline right now to the present hour.

Did you know that two thirds of United Nations resolutions go against the modern state of Israel? You say, "Well, why is that?" Well, they are under discipline. This is what God said would happen. Do I become anti-Semitic and hate the Jewish people? I cannot do that, because the Abrahamic Covenant will not let me do that.

So when Israel would become disobedient, she would go under these curses, and the curses would roll up like a snowball (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). And then God would release the ultimate curse, which is in Deuteronomy 28:49-50.

"The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young" (Deuteronomy 28:49-50).


"And this power will evict you from your land." This has happened to Israel three times. Solomon, the fourth king of the United Kingdom, woke up one day near the end of his life and just decided to do exactly what the Mosaic Covenant commanded the king not to do. Deuteronomy 17 said that the king was not to multiply wives for himself (Deuteronomy 17:17). What did Solomon do? He had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines.

The king was not to amass wealth for himself (Deuteronomy 17:17). What did Solomon do? He amassed wealth for himself. So God, through the Mosaic Covenant, brought discipline, and the nation of Israel was divided at that point, right after Solomon left the throne (1 Kings 12) into the North and the South.

The North was headquartered in Samaria; the South was headquartered in Jerusalem. The North went into apostasy. So God brought judgment on them through the Assyrians—that is what He said He would do in Deuteronomy 28:49-50—and dispersed them from their land. And you would think that the South that was left would have learned from the lesson that happened to the North, but not long after the South was taken captive by Babylon in 586 B.C.

ISRAEL'S JUDGMENTS

- Division of the kingdom in 931 B.C. (1 Kgs. 12)
- Assyrian judgment in 722 B.C. (2 Kgs. 17)
- Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C. (2 Kgs. 25)
- Rome *Diaspora* in A.D. 70 (Luke 19:41-44)



Here are the dates for all of these: the kingdom divided, 931 B.C. (1 Kings 12); the North scattered, 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17); the South pushed out of their land by the Babylonians, 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25). The South did not learn a lick of evidence from what happened to the North, and she went into worse rebellion. So God, faithful to the Mosaic Covenant, kicked them out of their land. That was where the Babylonian captivity came from (586 B.C.).

Then the seventy years of the Babylonian captivity were over, and the Israelites went back into the land. They rebuilt the temple. Jesus showed up. And with the exception of a believing remnant, the Jewish nation said, "Thanks, but no thanks." In fact, Jesus, in the Parable of the Minas, talked about it. Israel essentially said, "We will not have this man to rule over us" (paraphrase, Luke 19:14, 27).

So to quote that great theologian, Yogi Berra, "It's déjà vu all over again." Here come the Romans who would kick the Israelites out of their land and push them into worldwide dispersion, which was exactly what God had said would transpire. So do you see how Deuteronomy 28 is the spine of the Bible? It reveals a pattern of discipline that happens over and over and over again to the nation of Israel, that they are still under today.

So, A.D. 70 had not happened yet at the time that the Book of Hebrews was written, because the temple was still functioning. But the whole thing was about to be destroyed in a few years. And this crowd here, this crowd I am describing, this Hebrew Christian crowd, had made a confession. The word "confession" is in Hebrews 3:1. The confession is their baptism.

Baptism does not save anybody, but it is an outward expression of an inward reality—that I stand with Jesus. In the early church, when you got baptized publicly, what you were saying to the unbelieving Jews in and around Jerusalem was that national Israel was wrong, and the church's message was right. You were taking a public stand.

That is why, once the Jewish Christians to whom Hebrews was written were baptized, the unbelieving Jews said, "Okay, those are the troublemakers. Let's persecute them." And so the unbelieving Jews placed the audience of Hebrews under duress to return to Judaism. The audience was being worn down.

There are a lot of people in this world who trust Christ and their whole family cuts them off. That kind of thing happens in Islam. I have seen it happen in "the Kingdom of the Cults." I have seen it happen with people in all kinds of false religions that they might be in. They get baptized and everybody says, "Ooh, they are against us. So we are going to just cut them off."

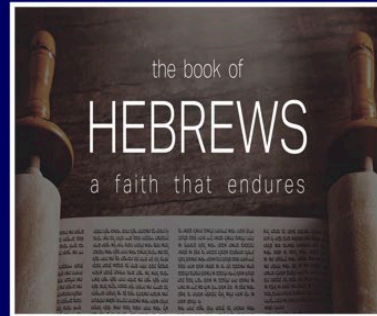
And you know, the holidays roll around, and you are cut off from your loved ones, and this goes on and on and on. So you are thinking to yourself, "Well, I want to visit my grandkids or my children," or whatever the case may be. "I will show up at a Jehovah's Witness meeting if that will give me access to my grandkids." See that?

If you can understand that, you can understand the pressure that the second generation of Hebrew Christians was under. It was not the stud generation of the apostles anymore. It was the second generation that was very vulnerable to this incentive to regress backwards. And as you can imagine, the audience was being worn down. A.D. 70 had not happened yet. So there was a temple to go back to.

"I will just slip in and out a few feast days, and offer a few sacrifices. I know in my heart that I do not really mean it, but I am just tired of being persecuted." So therefore, with that background in mind, now you can see the purpose of the Book of Hebrews. What is the purpose of the book? It is an encouragement or a motivation to not do that: "do not lapse backward into Judaism."

PURPOSE

- Encouragement/motivation to not lapse back into Judaism
 - ♦ What believers already have in Christ is superior to every vestige of Judaism (Angels, Moses, and the Aaronic priesthood)
 - ♦ Warnings



"Judaism was a good revelation, but you have something way better. Why would you go back to a shadow?" And the author communicates his purpose through two tools: the first tool is beautiful logic. This is why people think Paul or Apollos wrote Hebrews. Hebrews is a masterpiece in logic. It contains a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion.

What the author shows in the Book of Hebrews is that what you have in Christ is higher—it is better—it is superior to everything that the temple system has to offer, which, by the way, is about to be destroyed anyway." So the author says that Jesus is higher than the angels. That is the first two chapters of the Book of Hebrews.

Why would he say that? Well, because the Jews revered angels. Angels, as you study the Old Testament, were always the messengers of God. So if the author can show that Jesus is higher than the angels, he can show that Jesus is higher than any message found in Judaism. And that is what the author does for the first two chapters of the book: "Jesus is higher than the angels."

And people look at that and say, "Why is that even an issue?" It makes sense if you put yourself into the shoes of a Hebrew Christian who has always revered angels, but now something higher than angels has come. "Jesus' message is higher than any angelic message that the Old Testament has to offer. So why regress?" And then in the next two chapters, Hebrews 3-4, the author says that Jesus is higher than Moses.

If the Jews revered anybody, they revered Moses. He was the lawgiver. And now the author says, "Jesus is higher than Moses, so He is higher than the Law." And then beginning midway through Hebrews 4 through the middle of Hebrews 10, the author says, "Jesus is higher than Aaron." Why Aaron? Because through Aaron came the priesthood.

If you can show that Jesus is higher than Aaron, you can show that the priesthood that Christ is currently orchestrating is higher than, better than, or superior to, that whole

Aaronic system that goes all the way back to the Book of Leviticus. "So why would you retrogress? Oh, and by the way, the current priesthood of Christ will give you something called rest—Hebrews 4."

"Why do you need rest? Because you are under pressure. And you have an active High Priest at the right hand of the Father who cannot wait to help you. And in all this struggle that you are facing about retrogressing backwards, He is there to help you in His present priestly session, not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedek, meaning that He is higher than Aaron."

That is rule number one. It is just logic. And then here is tool number two: the warning passages. This is where the big debate is. "If you go back to Judaism, something bad is going to happen to you." So these are five times where the author will just interrupt his train of thought and throw in a warning. And then once the warning is over, he will go back to his train of thought.

WARNINGS

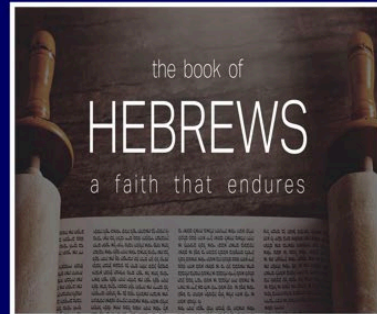
- 2:1-4 – Warning against drifting
- 3:7-4:13 – Warning against disobedience
- 5:10-6:20 – Warning against immaturity
- 10:26-39 – Warning against despising the truth
- 12:25-29 – Warning against denying the truth

So there are five places where this happens. These are very strong warnings. There is a warning against drifting (Hebrews 2:1-4). There is a warning against disobedience (Hebrews 3:7-4:13). There is a warning against immaturity (Hebrews 5:10-6:20). There is a warning against despising the truth (Hebrews 10:26-39). And then there is a final warning (Hebrews 12:25-29) against denying the truth.

So we have warnings against drifting, disobedience, immaturity, despising, and denying. But those are where the warnings are. And these warnings are so severe that people say that these could not ever be aimed at saved people. So once you understand that objection, you understand why we did the analysis of the audience last week where I showed you that they are saved people.

4 VIEWS ON WARNING PASSAGES

- Hypothetical
- Arminianism
- Calvinism/Reformed
- Loss of blessings



So here are the four approaches to the warning passages. The first is that they are so severe that they must be hypothetical: something that is described that we know could never happen. My hero in the faith, Charles Ryrie, takes that view. As he is describing Hebrews 6, he says, "By the way, this can never be done" (paraphrase),¹ which to me totally empties Hebrews 6 of its rhetorical impact, threatening somebody with something that could never happen. To Ryrie's mind, this is so severe that it could never happen to a Christian.

The second view is the Arminian view. And here the Arminians are closer to the truth than others, because they at least acknowledge that the audience of Hebrews was saved. But they say that the audience of Hebrews lost their salvation, which I cannot buy into, because Jesus says in John 10:27-29,

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish ["ou me aiona" (οὐ μὴ αἰῶνα)];..." (John 10:27-28).

Have you studied that in Greek? "Never perish" ("ou me aiona" [οὐ μὴ αἰῶνα]) is a double negation with the word "ainoa" (αἰῶνα), which means "forever." This phrase means "never, never, forever." That is what Jesus is saying. Your English translation does not do that justice. The way that reads in Greek is as follows:

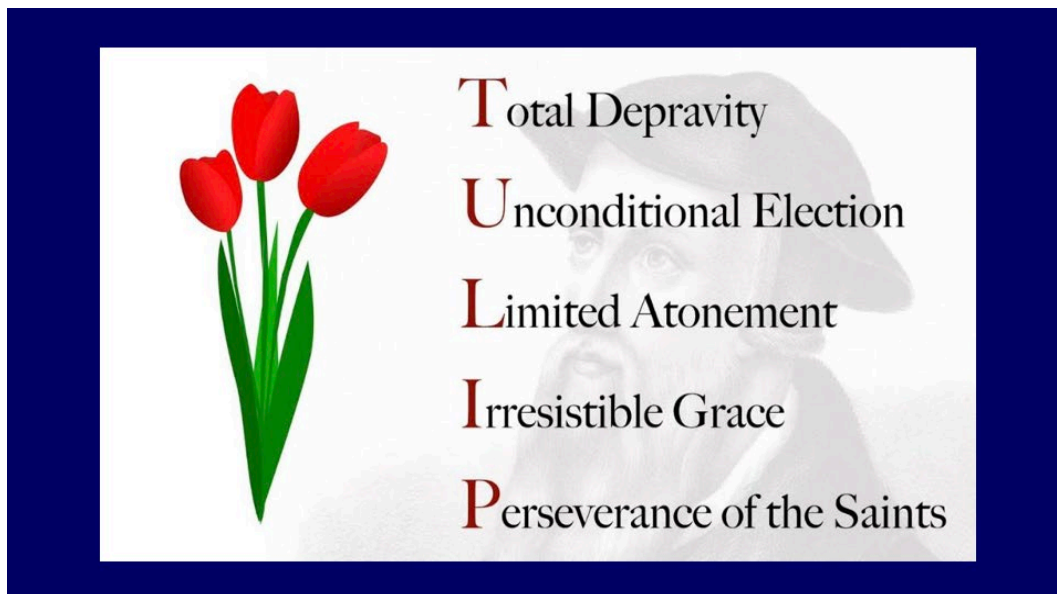
"and I give eternal life to them, and they will never[, never perish, forever]; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:27-29).

¹ Charles Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, 1521.

What are you as a Christian? You are not in just Jesus' grip of grace. You are also in the Father's grip of grace. You are in the double grip of grace, which means that you are secure eternally.

So when the Arminians are correctly understanding the audience of Hebrews, but they are telling me that the audience of Hebrews are people that can lose their salvation, I say that there has to be a better way than that, because the Bible says that you cannot lose your salvation (John 10:27-29).

The dominant view on the market today about the Hebrews warning passages is the Calvinist or Reformed view, which is the idea that these warnings are aimed at unsaved people. They get that from the "P" in Calvinism: Perseverance of the Saints in the TULIP doctrine. So the Calvinists have a theology which says that nothing this severe could happen to a Christian.



If somebody is a Christian, they are always going to persevere in good works and faith. And the warning passages in Hebrews are describing something awful. And all of these people—Alistair Begg, John MacArthur, Steve Lawson, R. C. Sproul—all the people that you hear on TV and radio just preach this around the clock.

So according to the Calvinist view, the author of Hebrews is teaching, and then all of a sudden he gives a lecture to some unsaved people that happen to be there. And then he goes back to talking about saved people. This is how the Calvinists all teach these warning passages. John MacArthur takes Hebrews 6 (I will give you the quotes from him as the series progresses) and says that it is clearly written to unsaved people.

And that is really peculiar to me because there is a line in Hebrews 5 that says, "You should be teachers by now" (paraphrase, Hebrews 5:12). Can you tell me any example where an unbeliever should teach a believer? That makes zero sense. But because MacArthur and others have this overriding theological commitment to Perseverance of

the Saints, they override what the text is saying. The warning passages are all written to saved people. I will show you the evidence.

The "P" in Calvinism stands for "Perseverance of the Saints." We have gone over all of this stuff in our Calvinism study, and this is where it is relevant, because it controls how the warning passages in Hebrews are understood.

By the way, if I am preaching and I am talking to believers, believers, believers, and believers, and then for a little bit of my sermon, I say, "Okay, now this applies to the unbelievers that might be here," what are you as a believer going to do? You are going to think about where you are going to go out for lunch, and mentally check out. "This applies to unbelievers. It does not apply to me. And let me know, preacher, when you get back to talking about believers."

But if I am in front of a group and I am talking about severe warnings that do not have to do with heaven or hell, but are still very severe, and I say, "This could happen in your life as a Christian," guess what? I got everybody's attention. See that?

So the view that I come from is what is called the loss of blessings view. According to that view, what is being warned about in these five warning passages in Hebrews is not heaven or hell, but something very serious that could happen to you that is unrelated to salvation.

The example that is going to be used in Hebrews that unpacks all of this is the Kadesh Barnea incident when the Israelites got to the southern border of Israel, they looked into the land, saw giants in the land, and went into unbelief. And that whole generation forfeited Canaan. "Well, that generation went to hell, right?" Be careful with that one, because Moses is part of that generation and he was on the Mount of Transfiguration.

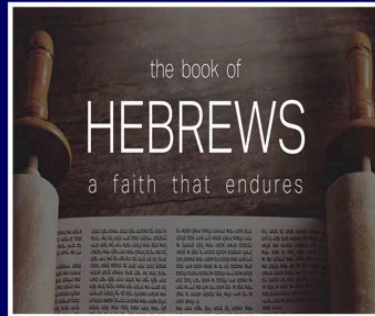
The unbelieving Exodus generation did not forfeit heaven, by the way. That is why all these songs equating Canaan with heaven really need to be gotten rid of. It is an unbiblical parallel. Are you going to get into heaven and fight giants? Canaan is not heaven. Canaan was a blessing above and beyond salvation that the Israelites could have had, that it was right within their fingertips, right within their grasp. They could have had it, but they did not.

God locked that whole generation out of Canaan. They forfeited a blessing that they could have had above and beyond salvation, unrelated to heaven or hell. That makes what I am doing here totally different from the Calvinist understanding, that the Hebrews warning passages address unsaved people; from the Arminian understanding, that the audience of Hebrews lost their salvation; and from the hypothetical view, because Canaan was not hypothetical.

In fact, in Numbers 14:40-45, the Israelites tried to get into Canaan the next day. That did not go so well for them. Suddenly the Israelites got brave and wanted to get in, and they were beaten back by the giants—the Bible says they were beaten back as far as Hormah (Numbers 14:45).

MESSAGE

- The superiority of the full revelation of Christ in comparison to OT Judaism is shown through Christ's superiority to every major vestige of Judaism, and the author wrote Hebrews so that his audience would not lapse back into Judaism.



So that takes us to the message of the Book of Hebrews, which you kind of already know: the superiority of the full revelation of Christ in comparison to Old Testament Judaism is shown through Christ's superiority to every major vestige of Judaism, and the author wrote the Book of Hebrews so that the audience would not lapse back into Judaism. That is the major message that is communicated in the Book of Hebrews.

And you say, "Well, we are not Jews thinking about going back to the temple." Well, the application to us is that we are under persecution and we are tempted to go back to false religions all the time to stop persecution. "Go back to Rome. God loves you anyway." What is going to happen to you if you do that? The Book of Hebrews becomes relevant.