

Introduction (Part 3)

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[0 : 00] Amen. You'll all be happy to know that tonight is our third and final introduction into the marvelous!

It is also the most important part of our lengthy introduction as we prepare to study the superiority of Christ in all things.

One of you came up and said, I think Jerry said, how long are you going to be in this thing? I said, I don't know, at least a year and a half or two years if I'm still around.

I'll say this. The book of Hebrews is different. It's a great book. But it's different. I'm of the opinion it's different from other books of the Bible in many respects.

This is especially true of the books that make up the New Testament. We discussed this previously, but it bears repeating that the writer of Hebrews dispenses with the usual greetings and salutations that were typical in the letters of Paul and James and Peter, John and Jude.

[1 : 25] And there's been just a small amount of speculation as to why the author chose to open the book in that manner.

While we cannot be absolutely certain, there are some very good theologians who believe that the writer chose this path as a way of honoring Christ.

This is a book about the superiority and preeminence of Christ. He alone deserves all the attention. This is God's revelation about his son.

And as such, we need to hear from and about him. We see in this writing the triune nature of the Trinity made up of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are the one true God.

Here we have revealed to us, I think more than any other writings of the Bible, the person, offices, and function of the Son of God, our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus.

[2 : 40] And one question that comes up is, to whom was this book written? In trying to answer that question, there's one thing that stands out.

There are no references to be found in this book to Gentiles. There are no references to concerns or problems or interactions between Gentiles and Jews in this particular congregation.

And based upon this fact, it, I think, strongly appears that this congregation was Jewish, made up of Jews, converted Jews, most of them.

Another thing that is significant is the lack of information concerning the location of this Jewish congregation. Theologians like to speculate that the church may have been in the area of Greece, but this fact has never been confirmed.

And perhaps in the future, the archaeologist Spade will uncover the remains of this church, but for now at least, we are unsure of its location.

[4 : 07] There are passages that indicate that the community where the church was located had been evangelized by New Testament-era missionaries and apostles.

Obviously, the church was formed sometime after Christ ascended back into heaven. And as we shall see, this church was like all churches in that it was made up of both believers and unbelievers.

To put it in the vernacular of Christ, this church was made up of wheat and tares. We find the Lord's definitive statement on this fact in the parables of Matthew's gospel, chapter 13.

Most modern translations have dropped the word tares. We don't use that very often in our common everyday conversations. And supplanted it with the word weeds.

Now, we touched on this last time, but there's no indication from any of the verses of Hebrews that anyone in the congregation ever met Jesus, ever saw Jesus, ever heard Jesus preach or witnessed any of His miracles.

[5 : 38] There's no reason for this to alarm us because that is also true about our congregation. It's actually true about most people unless you're a charismatic charlatan.

Like Jesse Duplantis, who once said he was called into the third heaven and he saw Jesus standing there weeping and he went over and said, What's the matter, Lord?

And he said, I failed. All these people are going to hell and I'm a failure. And Jesse said, I put my arm around him and I consulted him. I said, you're not a failure. We've got everything under control down there. We're taking care of you.

And his congregation gave him a standing ovation. Two weeks later, every major charismatic figure had been called into heaven because they were losing money.

Jesse was getting all the money. I find it, though, interesting that five years later he wrote his autobiography. And he forgot to mention that part. For some reason, I feel like you would remember that.

[6 : 45] By the way, I went into heaven and I saw Jesus. I think we can pretty well determine what was going on there. So where did this congregation learn about the Lord?

Could have been from visiting pastors, missionaries, evangelists. Could have been from neighboring churches. As this was one of the ways God grows his church.

A lot of people don't know it. This church was a missionary church from First Baptist Church downtown. They didn't have a Baptist church east of the Caney River.

And this church was from 80 years ago or more. Neighboring churches spread the Word of God by mouth-to-mouth communication.

We did the same as we spread the Word on the east side of Bartlesville once we were formed. Opened a little building that was a bar.

[7 : 51] There's a lot of stories around that. Can we date the epistle to the Hebrews? Well, not precisely. But there are some clues given.

Clue one, it was written after the ascension in 33 AD. It was written before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under General Titus Vespasian in 70 AD.

He later became the Roman emperor. Many theologians have settled on a date of authorship of around 65 AD. And there's another clue we should be aware of, and I find it very instructive.

In the fifth chapter of Hebrews, we learn that the church had been around for a little while when this letter was presented to them.

And here's why I say that. In Hebrews chapter 5, verses 12 and 13, we read this. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.

[9 : 09] And then the writer says this, you need milk, not solid food. For everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.

In other words, we know the church had been in existence for a while, because in this passage the writer tells them, look, you've had time to mature, and you haven't done it.

Still need milk. And now we come to the critical portion of our study tonight, and the summation of our series of introductions.

This is absolutely critical to our understanding the truth contained in the writing. Who was the audience to whom the epistle was written?

And as we read and meditate on this book, we learn that it was not just written to the followers of Christ in this Hebrew congregation. In fact, there are three distinct groups of people that the author has in mind.

[10 : 24] Group one is made up of Hebrew Christians who are babies in Christ. Babes in Christ.

Nothing wrong with that. We all were that at one time. The first group we shall discuss is the group of true believers within the congregation.

These are true believers. These were legitimate, born again, born from above, redeemed, and regenerated followers of Christ Jesus.

It is important for those of us who are Gentiles to at least grasp, as best we can, the trauma that these fellow believers must have experienced as they came out of Judaism.

I mean, first of all, they had to be ostracized by the Jews in that area. They had been born into that system of Judaism. They had been raised in it.

[11 : 30] All of that, of course, changed when they were born again or born from above. That's the more appropriate translation. Now they had received Christ as Savior and Lord.

He was their personal Messiah. Jews had been looking for the Messiah for 1,600 years. As followers of Christ, the larger and more influential Jewish community was now ostracizing them.

The Jews could and did generate tremendous hostility toward anyone who left their religion. This occurs even in our day. In fact, the Orthodox Jews of this day hold a funeral if someone leaves Judaism for Christianity.

Complete with a hole in the ground and a coffin. And they bury the coffin. The family treats the new convert as if he is dead and buried.

[12:45] Once ostracized, it's an easy step from there to persecution. Very easy. This leads to suffering at multiple levels and for some, even martyrdom.

In the case of the Hebrew Christians we are studying, they undoubtedly suffered from local Jews but also from local Gentiles.

So they were coming in all directions. And persecution is not something to be shocked at. It is something that's actually promised in Scripture.

In 2 Timothy 3.12, Paul said this, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. And unless you're fairly new, you've heard me say this, I told a friend of mine one time, you know, I don't feel very persecuted.

He said, be more godly, it will come. And we both kind of laughed the more I thought about it, that's right. That's absolutely true. It can be argued that the Hebrew Christians should have anticipated persecution and been better able to deal with it.

[14:07] Of course, that comes with spiritual maturity and not with babes needing milk. These Hebrew Christians had not yet put their full confidence in the gospel.

They were in the gospel. They were under the gospel. They were saved. But as Paul would say, they were babies in the faith. Being babies, they were in danger of going back to the old covenant that they had come out of.

And this was the pressure. And you read about this in a lot of books. This was the pressure. They wanted to go back. You want to be a Christian? Fine. You've got to follow the laws of Moses.

No, that kills you. You come out of that. Now, being true believers, they were not in danger of losing their salvation.

That was guaranteed them in Christ. The danger was that they would produce a mixture of Christianity and Judaism that would serve to confuse new converts.

[15:19] converts. You know, a guy comes to the church, hey, I like this Christian stuff. I'm interested. I've been a Jew my whole life. Well, you can join, but you've got to obey Moses' law.

Well, wait a minute, why would I leave Judaism if I'm going to do all that? the break with Judaism was difficult.

These baby believers wanted the gospel. They wanted the new covenant. But they were under this pressure, this cling to the forms and the ceremonies and the patterns of Judaism under the old covenant.

that. That was the problem in the region of Galatia. And Paul told them, you preach any other gospel, you are the anathema of God.

What does that mean? The eternally damned The eternally damned of God. If you want to mix anything in with the gospel as the grounds of salvation, you can't mix it in.

[16:24] They had raised questions about their responsibilities to worship in the temple. The Holy Spirit in this book will speak often about the new priesthood.

He will speak about the new temple, the new sacrifice, and the new sanctuary. And the Spirit of God will inform these Hebrew baby Christians that the new way is better than the old way.

But the break with Judaism had brought persecution from the surrounding community but also from family members. Dads were kicking people out of their homes.

And this place, this congregation of new converts under these severe pressure to hang on to some of the old forms. And they wouldn't do that if only to stave off persecution.

No one likes to be persecuted. You know, I had a guy, I won't call his name, but he wanted to be persecuted because he wanted to be a hero.

[17:37] I said, that's the wrong reason. That's the wrong reason. But it added to the difficulty of making a clean break with the past and pressing on toward the goal of the upward call of Christ.

So we see a combination of weak faith, pressure from Jews and Gentiles, and spiritual ignorance, all of which serve to create a dangerous mixture of truth and error.

And the new way plus the old way, in every respect, these were weaker brothers with a diluted understanding of true Christianity. But they were true Christians.

They had received Christ, and more importantly, Christ had received them. The Spirit of God wrote this letter to strengthen the faith of this young congregation in the revelations of the new covenant. He wanted to show them that they did not need the temple on the mount. They didn't have to have a temple to worship. In fact, if this book came to them in 65 AD, the temple was going to be totally destroyed five years later.

[19 : 04] And when I say total, even the rocks were thrown down. Anybody been to Israel? You can go there, you can see the rocks that were thrown down. And the rumor is, the reason they did, that the fire was so hot, it melted the gold, and the Roman soldiers who made about three cents a month were clawing up the gold that had been molten, and now it's just in the crevices, and would throw the rocks down the hill.

And they're still there. Pretty amazing. But they don't need the temple to worship in. The Spirit knew this, that the temple is going to be destroyed in just a few years.

And it would be totally destroyed. The Spirit knew this. It was God's way showing the people that the old way of temple worship, temple sacrifice, had come to an end.

The new way is to have the indwelling temple, the Spirit of Christ, walking around with each true believer in the church.

You know, the Jews used to go into the Holy of Holies through one man, the high priest that year. Believers walk around with the Holy of Holies inside us.

[20 : 35] That's an amazing concept. We have the Holy of Holies inside us. So there are many things that had passed away. They no longer needed the Arianic Levitical priesthood.

If you don't know what that is, don't worry, we'll get there. They no longer needed the daily animal sacrifices. Millions of animals a year.

They had no need of the ceremonies. They had a new and better covenant. They had a new and better priesthood.

They had a new and better sanctuary. They had a new and much better sacrifice. Christ. All of these under the old covenant were mere shadows and types pointing to Jesus.

Now, this Hebrew congregation of baby believers had the reality of what the Old Testament was talking about. So the book of Hebrews was written to give confidence to this congregation made up of timid, confused, and in some cases floundering believers.

[22 : 03] believers. The book is written to true believers. They were being instructed in how the old things had passed away and now new and better things had come.

They are and were the primary audience of this book. However, they were not the exclusive audience. there is a second group that attends this church made up of Hebrews.

The Holy Spirit will have some things to say to them as well as we work our way through this book. The second group I'm talking about are Hebrew non-Christians who were nevertheless intellectually convinced concerning the gospel.

Yeah, that makes sense. But they had a head knowledge and not a heart knowledge. The operative word here is non-Christian.

Every church has people on the rolls or in the pews that have heard the gospel and been intellectually convinced of its fundamental truth. They believe that Jesus is whom He claimed to be and did what He said He would do.

[23 : 21] But these same people have not yet made a commitment of faith in Christ. Intellectual faith is not saving faith. It's not saving faith.

And a number of times in this book the writer will address those who have not made a spiritual commitment to the Lord. How could someone believe Christ to be the true Messiah but not be born again?

Many of these people were probably in the Hebrew church for the same reason many people go to church today. It's expected of them. It's the only way you can keep your wife from nagging you.

A lot of guys go to church for that reason. There are a lot of people that go to church to receive the approval of men rather than God.

They come and they sit in pews but they're unwilling to make the sacrifice required of them for true salvation. Interestingly many who are intellectually convinced but not saved have plagued the church for millennia.

[24 : 40] the Lord addressed this in Matthew's Gospel. Matthew 7 you know it by heart. Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven but the one who does the will

of my Father who is in heaven on that day that's interesting that day many will say to me Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name do many mighty works in your name and then I will declare to them I never knew you depart from me you workers of lawlessness.

That's enough to give me a chill every now and then. These guys did a bunch of stuff I've never done. I've never prophesied in his name and cast out demons in his name and done mighty works in his name.

Those who did those things were told by Jesus himself I never knew you. He didn't say I used to know you but you departed and now I don't know you. I never knew you.

Depart from me you workers of lawlessness. Interesting thing there that day I'm convinced and some other guys I read that's actually at the end of days and these guys may have just spent a thousand years in the pit waiting for the return of Christ during the thousand year millennial reign for him to come and take them out of here and they're going Lord, Lord you made a mistake.

I should have been with you for these thousand years this thousand millennial reign. And he says I never knew you. Frightening words. It's frightening words.

[26 : 36] Now there's a trick here and we've got to be careful. The trick is knowing when the Holy Spirit is addressing group one and when he's addressing group two.

That's critical. And this has been a real problem as churches study this epistle to the Hebrews and they can come up with a confused interpretation.

Why is it confusing? Because they wrongly believe Christians are being addressed and given instructions to live by but in reality these aren't even believers who are being talked to. I call this the pendulum in Hebrews.

Pendulum's over here and he's addressing these Hebrew Christians and then the pendulum swings and now he's talking to these intellectually convinced but not born again.

with some hesitation I'm going to give you an example I'm not concerned with the example I'm concerned with the timing we're weeks or months away from studying this but I'm going to skip forward to Hebrews chapter 6 verses 1 to 6 and you'll be familiar with it the Holy Spirit says this therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God and of instruction about washings the laying on of hands the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment and this we will do if God permits now listen to this for it is impossible in the case of those who have been enlightened who have tasted the heavenly gift and have shared in the Holy Spirit and have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come and then have fallen away to restore them again to repentance since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding

[29 : 19] Him up to contempt for generations many churches and many denominations have used this passage as the proof text that it is possible for a true believer to lose his or her salvation I have gotten into some vigorous discussions concerning that point haven't come to blows yet it's my position that this passage is not addressed to believers in that Hebrew congregation it is addressed to those who are intellectually convinced but not born again they do not have the indwelling Holy Spirit to lead and guide them into truth years ago we had an organization here in Mike I can't remember the name it was made of about seven churches and Dr.

Mary Pride was one of them victory something victory in Bartlesville or I don't know and I should have asked him today I talked to him on the phone and Mike got there late one day and they were talking about this passage and the fact that Mike rejects this and believes you don't lose your salvation Mike walked in on that conversation and he said well can I give you all just one piece of advice if that's right then if you've got anybody in your congregation that has lost their salvation make them leave because they can't get it back it says right here it's impossible to restore them again to repentance and boy they got quiet they got very quiet okay now we're going to examine that passage in detail later not today but I want to go back to that chapter six in the book of Hebrews and show you the pendulum swinging on the clock because after the Holy Spirit tells us all that through the human author he then is going to focus again on true believers in Hebrews chapter six verse nine just after these verses he says this though we speak in this way yet in your case beloved we feel sure of better things things that belong to salvation now he's addressing the Hebrew

Christians see how that worked the pendulum swung back away and you're going to see these over and over I think chapter 10 has got about 12 examples of this but there we have the pendulum shift

from group two the intellectually convinced but not spiritually saved it shifts back to group one those who are born again those still babies in Christ now as if this were not enough tonight there's a third group in this church clean up your roles we did that one time years ago we had like 2,000 people on our role we didn't know who they were but there's a third group Hebrew non-Christians who were not convinced didn't want to be convinced they weren't interested they just didn't want their wives mad at them so they would they were the C&E;

Christians we'll go on Christmas and we'll go on Easter but don't ask me to go any other time the spirit of God speaks in the book of Hebrews to baby Christians non-Christians exposed to the truth and intellectually convinced and finally to those who don't believe any of the gospel they're there because they're expected and I can tell you I used to work for a major oil company located in this town when I said of security globally and they had a lot of guys that would show up because their boss and their boss's boss and their boss's boss's boss were members of that church and they would see him on Monday and say I didn't see you in church yesterday let me tell you in corporate America that's a big deal when the vice president of your whole section singles you out and says why weren't you in church why weren't you in church now why is all this important it is important for this fundamental reason in order to properly interpret a passage one must know the identity of the people being addressed if for instance the spirit of

God has in mind group two but we think it's group one being addressed we're going to be confused for instance we read this in chapter nine is appointed for men to die once and then the judgment that's not written to believers we were judged at Calvary we're going to go to the beam of the reward seat but we were judged at Calvary as we study the book we must discern to whom the spirit is speaking if we don't there could be not only individual confusion there's entire denominational confusion again the book of Hebrews was primarily written to believers most of the passages are directed to believers periodically there will be warnings to the other two groups in the book of Hebrews we find the spirit of God building the confidence of the true followers of Christ he also warns those who are in the church but not saved they must receive

[35 : 58] Christ or be forever lost and there are also warnings to the unsaved and uncommitted they too need Jesus well the book itself is nothing short of a masterpiece and only God could write such a book distinguishing between these three groups in it all Christ is glorified as the preeminent one of the universe he is presented as the Messiah the author of the new covenant which was greater than the old covenant that's the old testament now let me say this the old covenant is not presented as wrong and it wasn't bad but it was preliminary and incomplete until the new covenant came and fulfilled the old covenant and now this new covenant has come and this

Hebrew congregation we're going to study will never be the same never going to be the same and I have to say this neither will we if we study the book of Hebrews diligently well I don't want to shock your system this concludes our introduction to the epistle to the Hebrews the superiority of Christ in all things and we did it in a mere three weeks pretty amazing next time if God permits we shall examine the opening words of Hebrews chapter 1 you might want to look ahead and read Hebrews chapter 1 but only verses 1 to 4 because we're not getting much further than that we'll see you!