

Message One: Laying the Foundation

Hebrews 1:1-14 — Understanding Hebrews Series, Part 1

By Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

There is a book in your New Testament that most Christians walk past. They walk past it the way you'd walk past a doorway in a house you've lived in for years without ever opening it — assuming there's nothing in there but an old closet. That book is Hebrews.

Some of you have read Hebrews chapter eleven — the great "Hall of Faith" chapter. Maybe you've heard a sermon or two out of chapter four, "the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword." Maybe someone quoted Hebrews 13:8 to you at a funeral — "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." But chapter one? Most believers skip right over it. They read verse one or two, feel the weight of some unfamiliar Old Testament quotations, and move on to "the good stuff."

I want to tell you, **that is a mistake**. And it's a mistake the author of Hebrews himself warns us against, in the very first verse of chapter two — "*Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.*" Did you catch the word "therefore"? That word is a hinge. It swings backward. It's pointing you back to chapter one and saying: don't you dare move on until you understand what you just read.

So for the next several weeks, we are going to do something that very few churches ever do. We are going to work through the Book of Hebrews the way it was meant to be worked through — slowly, carefully, letting Scripture interpret Scripture, tracing the author's argument from the Old Testament types all the way to the coming Kingdom of Jesus Christ. This is the first of sixteen messages in that journey, and today, we lay the foundation. Everything else we build over the coming months will rest on what we uncover this morning.

I. A Letter Written to Someone in Particular

Here is the first thing you must understand about Hebrews: it was written *to* someone. Not written *about* someone, not written as a general theological essay for whoever happens to pick it up — written *to* a specific group of people, with a specific purpose in mind, carrying specific warnings that were meant to be heard and heeded by that group.

Nobody knows who wrote this letter. The Holy Spirit saw fit to conceal the human author's name, and that's by design. We are not meant to fixate on who penned it. We are meant to fixate on who received it — because if we don't know who the letter is addressed to, its warnings will fall on deaf ears. They'll feel like they belong to someone else. Someone in the first century. Someone more spiritual, or less spiritual, than us.

So who is it written to? Let's look at the evidence the author leaves us, right in his opening chapters.

Notice, first, how much this letter is built around *hearing* and *speaking*. 1:1 — "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son." Two verses later — spoken again. Chapter two, verse one — "we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away." Verse three — "was confirmed to us by those who heard Him." Chapter three, verse seven — the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY, IF YOU WILL HEAR HIS VOICE." Chapter four, verse two — "the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it." Chapter five, verse eleven — "you have become dull of hearing."

Over and over — spoken, heard, hearing, hear His voice. Why does that matter? Because Romans 10:17 tells us faith comes by hearing — not hearing just anything, but hearing the Word of God. The author of Hebrews is not writing an academic treatise. He is pleading with real people to *listen*, because what he's about to say carries *weight* — weight that reaches into the age to come.

Now notice the pronouns. The author constantly says "we" and "us," including himself with his readers. "In these last days He has spoken to us" (1:2). "We must give the more earnest heed... lest we drift away" (2:1). "How shall we escape if we neglect..." (2:3). And then, in chapter three, verse one, he stops being general and gets specific: "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus."

Holy brethren. Partakers of a heavenly calling.

That phrase — "partakers of a heavenly calling" — can only be describing believers. Born-again children of God, called with a calling that is not earthly, but heavenly. Neither an unbelieving Jew nor an unbelieving Gentile has a heavenly calling. Only the new creation in Christ has this. So mark this down as bedrock: **Hebrews is written to genuine believers.** Not to convince the unsaved to get saved — but to press *the saved* on toward maturity.

That single fact changes everything about how you read this letter. When you get to the warning passages later in this series — and there are five of them — you will be tempted to ask, "is this person losing their salvation?" Hold that question. File it away. Because that is not the question this letter is asking. This letter is not concerned with whether you get into the family of God. It's concerned with something else entirely — something we're going to spend a great deal of time on in the weeks ahead: **what happens to a believer's soul, and to a believer's inheritance, when Christ returns and sets up His Kingdom.**

Write this down, because it will anchor everything: the five warnings in Hebrews deal with the 1,000-year reign of Christ — the Millennial Kingdom — and with a believer's future rest, reward, and rulership in that Kingdom. They are not about whether you go to "Heaven." They are about whether you *reign* with Christ in His kingdom. That's not me editorializing — that is the substance of what this entire letter is built to say, and it is why the author spends so much time drawing his readers' attention back to the Old Testament, and specifically back to the *types*. Paul told the Corinthians that "these things happened to them as examples" — literally, "as types" (1 Cor. 10:11). The exodus generation leaving Egypt, wandering the wilderness, and either entering or failing to

enter the Promised Land — that whole historical drama is a *picture*, a type, of the Christian's pilgrim journey from this present world, under the reign of Satan, toward the coming world, under the reign of Christ.

So hold onto that framework as we move through this series together: Hebrews is a letter to genuine believers, urging them not to grow dull, not to drift, not to fall short — not of “Heaven”, but of *reigning with Christ* when He comes. That's the "for this reason" of 2:1. And chapter one is where the whole argument begins.

II. God Has Spoken — And This Time, In His Son

Look again at verse one: "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son."

Notice the structure. In the past, God spoke — but He spoke *through* prophets. Many prophets, many centuries, many different manners of speaking — visions, dreams, audible voices, written oracles. Fragmented. Partial. Progressive.

But now — "in these last days" — God has spoken again. And this time, not through a prophet who receives a word secondhand, but *in His Son*. The Son doesn't relay a message from God. The Son *is* God speaking. John 7:16 records Jesus Himself saying, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me." And John 5:37 — "the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me." It is one and the same voice. When the Son speaks, it is God Himself speaking, in a way that is even more direct, even more final, than through any prophet who ever lived.

So who is this Son? The author of Hebrews doesn't waste a single verse getting to the point. Verses two through four:

"whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds [literally, *ages*]; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."

Look at what's packed into these three verses. He is heir of all things. He made the ages. He is the *brightness* — the radiance, the shining-out — of God's own glory. He is the *express image* of God's person — that word in the Greek carries the idea of an exact imprint, the way a die stamps its precise image into wax or metal. He upholds all things — not just created them and walked away, but is, right now, holding the universe together by the word of His power. He purged our sins. He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. And He has inherited a name more excellent than any angel has ever borne.

This is the preeminence of Jesus Christ. Not *a* preeminence — *the* preeminence. Paul says it this way in Philippians 2: "God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and that every tongue should

confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." Peter says it in Acts 4: "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." From the very opening of this letter, the author sets Christ before us in His full, unrivaled majesty — because everything that follows, every warning, every exhortation to press on, is going to be measured against the glory of who this Son actually is.

And then the author does something remarkable. He backs up his claim about Christ's preeminence not with his own words, but with the Old Testament. Verses five through fourteen contain seven separate quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures, each one demonstrating something further about who the Son is: He is begotten of God (v. 5). God is His Father (v. 5). He is worshiped by angels — something reserved for God alone (v. 6). Angels serve Him (v. 7). He holds an eternal throne and scepter (vv. 8-9). He laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and He alone will remain when it perishes (vv. 11-12). And He is seated at the Father's right hand, waiting for the day His enemies become His footstool (v. 13).

Let's slow down on one of those seven quotations, because it is, in many ways, the key that unlocks the rest of the letter. It's found in verse five.

III. "Today I Have Begotten Thee" — Psalm Two

Verse five: "For to which of the angels did He ever say: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You'?"

That line comes from Psalm 2 — one of the great Messianic Psalms of the Old Testament, and one that the New Testament quotes not once, but three separate times: here in Hebrews 1:5, again in Hebrews 5:5, and once more in Acts 13:33. When something gets repeated that many times across Scripture, you had better believe the Holy Spirit wants you to pay attention.

Psalm 2 falls into three movements. In the first three verses, the nations of the earth are in an uproar. Kings set themselves against the Lord and against His Anointed — His Messiah — saying, "Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us." Man, in his rebellion, wants to throw off God's rule entirely.

Then verse four: "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the LORD shall hold them in derision." God is not threatened. He is enthroned — that word "sits" carries the idea of being seated as sovereign, unshakeable. And in His anger, He declares: "Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion" (v. 6). God the Father announces that He has installed His King — His Son — on Mount Zion, regardless of what the raging nations think about it.

Then something beautiful happens in verse seven. The King who has just been installed on Zion — the Son — speaks. He says, "I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel'" (vv. 7-9).

Do you see the exchange taking place? The Father speaks of installing His Son as King. Then the Son quotes back exactly what the Father told Him at that installation: "Today I have begotten You." And then comes the invitation — "Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations as Your inheritance."

Now let's linger on that word "begotten," because most of us have never stopped to ask what it actually means. The Greek word behind it — *gennao* — covers the entire process of childbirth, from conception all the way to delivery. It's not a single instant; it's the whole arc. And in every place this Psalm 2 quotation is used in the New Testament — here in Hebrews 1:5, again in Hebrews 5:5, and in Acts 13:33 — the verb "have begotten" is in the perfect tense. In Greek grammar, the perfect tense describes an action completed at a point in the past that presently exists in a finished, settled state. Something that happened, and stands *done*.

So when was the Son "begotten" in this sense? Luke chapter one records the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary:

"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:31-33)

There it is. The begetting of the Son — from the Spirit's overshadowing of Mary to the moment of His birth — was accomplished for a purpose that stretches out into the future: a throne, a reign, a kingdom without end. Jesus Himself understood His birth this way. Standing before Pilate, facing His own crucifixion, He said: "For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world" (John 18:37) — and the "this" He's referring to, in context, is His kingship.

So here is the picture Scripture is painting for us. The begetting of the Son was completed — past, finished, settled — but it was accomplished *for* a coronation day still ahead. Psalm 2 looks forward to that day: the day the Father will say to the Son, in effect, "Today is the day — the day I install You as King on My holy hill." And on that day, the Son will ask, and the Father will grant Him the nations as His inheritance, the uttermost parts of the earth as His possession.

That is not a Christmas story. That is a coronation prophecy. And it stands at the very foundation of the Book of Hebrews.

IV. Begotten for a Purpose — And the Purpose Is Inheritance

Hebrews chapter one already told us this. Verse two — He is "appointed heir of all things." And verse four — He has "by inheritance obtained a more excellent name" than the angels. Twice in the first four verses, before the author even gets to his Old Testament quotations, he tells you: this Son has an *inheritance*.

Do you see the thread now, stretching from Psalm 2, through Luke 1, through John 18, into Hebrews 1? Jesus Christ was begotten — for a purpose. That purpose is a Kingdom. That Kingdom

has a throne. That throne comes with an inheritance — the nations themselves, the uttermost parts of the earth.

And here is where I want you to pay much closer attention, because this is not merely a study in Christology. This is a study in *your* future, if you are in Christ.

In John 16:15 Jesus says, "All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you." *All things that the Father has are Mine*. And what has the Father promised the Son? The nations. The earth. A throne. A reign.

Now hold that next to what Paul writes in Romans chapter eight — that we are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Rom. 8:17). Joint heirs. Not spectators to the Son's inheritance — participants in it, IF we walk faithfully with Him.

This is precisely what the whole sweep of the Book of Hebrews: the Old Testament history of Israel — leaving Egypt under the blood of the Passover lamb, journeying through the wilderness, and either entering or failing to enter the Promised Land — was written for exactly this reason: it is a type, and the antitype is the Christian's own pilgrim journey from this present world under Satan's rule toward the coming world under Christ's rule. Not everyone who left Egypt entered Canaan. An entire generation was redeemed — genuinely, savingly redeemed by the blood of the lamb — and still died in the wilderness, never entering the land of promise, never inheriting what God had for them there. That is the picture standing behind every warning in this letter. This letter moves — *logically, deliberately* — through five successive warnings, each one pressing believers further to lay hold of the full inheritance set before them, rather than settling for the "milk" of elementary things when God has "meat" — maturity, and a share in Christ's own reign — waiting for those who press on.

That is the whole burden of the Book of Hebrews. And chapter one is where the author establishes *why* it matters so much: because the One who calls us to press on is the very Son who was begotten for a throne, appointed heir of all things, and who is now inviting us — His brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling — into that same inheritance.

Let me show you where this leads, because the author of Hebrews will build toward it across the entire letter, and it will become the great, glowing center of this whole series. Look at what's promised to "overcomers" in Revelation chapters two and three:

"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." (Rev. 3:21)

"And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'— as I also have received from My Father." (Rev. 2:26-27)

Do you hear the echo? "As I also have received from My Father." Received *what*? The very inheritance of Psalm 2 — the nations, the rod of iron. Christ received that inheritance because He was begotten for it. And He turns to overcoming believers and says: I will share it with you.

This is what is at stake in the Book of Hebrews. Not whether you belong to God — that was settled the moment you trusted Christ, and nothing in this letter threatens that. What's at stake is whether you press on toward the fullness of what God has for you — whether, like the wilderness generation, you stall out short of the land, or whether, by faith and endurance, you go on to inherit the promises.

V. Therefore — Applying the Foundation

So what do we do with all of this?

First — take chapter one seriously. I said at the outset that most believers skip it. Don't. The preeminence of Christ that this chapter establishes is not decoration before the "real" content of the letter starts. It is the reason the warnings carry any weight at all. You cannot rightly hear "we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard" until you have first seen *who* is speaking. A word from an ordinary teacher, you might set aside. A word from the radiance of God's own glory, the exact representation of His nature, the One who upholds the universe by the word of His power, the Son who was begotten for a throne — that word, you dare not neglect.

Second — settle in your heart what kind of book you are reading. This is not a letter questioning your standing before God. It is a letter pressing you toward maturity, toward pressing on, toward not being satisfied with milk when meat — full growth, full inheritance, a share in Christ's own reign — is set before you. Every warning we will study together in this series should be heard through that lens.

Third — ask yourself honestly: am I pressing on, or am I drifting? The wilderness generation was redeemed by the blood of the lamb and still failed to enter the land. Their redemption was real. Their inheritance was forfeited. That is not a threat to frighten you; it is a wake-up call to focus you. God has not called you merely to survive the Christian life. He has called you, as a joint-heir with Christ, to reign with Him. That is what your begetting — your new birth — was for, just as the Son's begetting was for a throne.

Over the coming weeks, as we work through the five great warnings of this letter, keep chapter one in view. Every warning is spoken by the One who is preeminent above all. Every call to press on comes from the One who has already been begotten for glory, and who is inviting His brethren to share it with Him.

Looking Ahead

Next week, we move into Hebrews chapter one's remaining Old Testament quotations and begin the first of the letter's five great warnings in chapter two — the warning against drifting.