

DEREK PRINCE
MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Sermon

Introduction



Part 1/23

God's Last Word: An Exposition of Hebrews By Derek Prince

For the first part of this first session I'm going to be giving you some preliminary explanation as to the way I will be teaching and how you can benefit best from it. Some of you may feel this is just a kind of option, that it's not of much importance. But I venture to suggest to you that this could be perhaps in some ways the most helpful instruction that you receive at any time in this series because it relates to how to study God's Word.

So I'm going to explain to you now how I'm going to be teaching, how we are going to be studying and then, how you can receive the most from what we will be studying. Beginning then with the method of teaching, I'm going to be translating directly from the Greek text of the New Testament. I've had the privilege of learning Greek since I was 10 years old, which is a long while ago now. I'm going to be doing this to try to give you the real original meaning as accurately as I can. I suggest that you follow, when we come to the teaching, primarily in the New American Standard Version but if you want a backup, then I suggest the New International Version. You can manage with another version, but you'll find it a little bit confusing if I'm reading from one and you're studying from another. My language will not be elegant because I'm going to try to maintain as far as possible the original order and just bring it out the way it is and then we can check from the other translations how well I'm doing.

This is something that my wife Ruth and I have developed. We did it kind of accidentally, we really weren't—I don't know what we were planning—but I said to her, "Why don't you let me read to you from the Greek and you follow in two English versions?" (the New American Standard and the New International Version). And it so happened we were taking a couple of days of fasting and waiting on God and without any special reason I turned to this epistle to the Hebrews. God moved in a very remarkable way. It was like He arrested us and He showed us this is where it's at for you at this time. And actually, we spent almost two entire days studying Hebrews together—just this way that I'll be doing it with you. I read from the original Greek translating as I went. Ruth followed in the other two versions. We compared notes and somehow God seemed to open the truth up for us in a very vivid way through that. Later, we decided to do it also with the Hebrew Bible in the Old Testament and again God blessed that, but we will not be going into that, naturally, tonight.

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I've already said, but let me repeat, the version that I'm going to follow primarily in English will be the New American Standard. I also will refer to the New International Version. I may refer to other versions, too. Neither of these versions is totally satisfactory from my point of view.

Let me offer a few brief comments on them. The New International Version basically is excellent English. It's very clearly set out, it's beautifully printed and just for reading it's infinitely preferable to the New American Standard. Those of you that listen to my radio broadcast, you probably have noticed that's the version I try to use mainly because it comes over the air so much better than other versions. It's so much easier to grasp. One thing is that they split up the long sentences into a series of short sentences. However, there are areas in which it, in my opinion, departs too far from the original text.

On the other hand, the New American Standard is much closer to the original text but I find the English almost painful, to tell you the truth, because it's so involved—and by sticking to the original order they come out with sentences that don't sound like English. Also, I have to say that they combine English usage from different ages of the English language, which just don't go together. So, you'll get a very antiquated phrase and then a completely modern word side by side.

However, as an attempt to be accurate, it is praiseworthy. I personally attach a great deal of importance to tracing a particular word all through the Scriptures. In order to do that you have to have access to the original. My complaint about nearly all translations is that they frequently translate the same original word by a different English word where it is not necessary. Sometimes it's unavoidable. Therefore, it's very difficult for a person that has no access to the original language to follow where the same word occurs. In my opinion, this is one of the main ways to trace threads of truth through the Scripture—is to take a given key word and follow it wherever it occurs. We will be doing this in this study and I think you'll get an idea of how it works. I want to recommend it to you, if you're that kind of a person, as a very fruitful way for studying the Bible for yourself. It'll bring truth out that you never knew was there.

I have to say, basically, there are two kinds of people in the world. Those that like to be analytical and those that don't. Now, I'm definitely in the first class. In the former class, let me say. First class might sound arrogant. For instance, I like grammar. I won't ask how many of you like grammar but it would be a minority. But there are people here that enjoy grammar. You and I are on the same wavelength. To me, it's fascinating. I've studied probably ten languages or more and I like to get into the structure of a language. I find that when you do that, you get into the thinking of the people who use the language.

But not everybody is like that. So, I'm just presenting that to you and trusting that the Holy Spirit will help you to help yourself.

Now, let me deal with the method of study. As I've already said, it will be primarily analytical. We will be analyzing the Word of God. I want to add there are many other valid and good methods of studying, this is not the only one nor is it necessarily the best. But in my experience, it can be extremely helpful. This is the way we're going to do it, basically. We're going to read through the text. That is to say, I'll be reading, translating as I go, pausing where there's a word that could have two or three different shades of meaning, asking maybe which is the most appropriate in that particular context.

Then, we will, as we read, be asking ourselves mentally two questions:

"What does this passage actually say? What is it really saying?

And two, how does it apply practically to me? Or, to us."

I never study the Bible without a practical motive and I believe it is wrong to do so. I don't believe the Bible should ever be merely the object of abstract intellectual study. I believe its basic thrust is practical. I think one of the ways in which God has blessed me and helped me is that my study and my teaching have always had practical motivation. First of all, I want it to do in me what needs to be done. Secondly, if I teach it, I want it to do in those whom I teach what needs to be done in them. As we study together I trust both methods or both aspects of that will be in operation. I trust it will be doing things in me that need to be done (I am not a finished product; I'm very well aware of that). There are no finished products here tonight. We're all still on the workbench. And, let's approach it with that attitude, "God, use this Word of Yours to change me where I need to be changed."

Then, in going through the text of Hebrews—which is our particular object of study—I will be frequently referring to related or parallel passages. Most of you probably have Bibles with cross references in the margin. Those are helpful, although, again, I don't think there's any perfect system of cross referencing.

When I first came to the Lord in 1941, shortly after I came to know the Lord I found myself in the deserts of North Africa

for three years without a pastor, without a church. And in most cases, without any Christian fellowship whatever. My companion was my Bible. I lived on it and by it. It was King James Version, which was the only one I knew of in those days. It had rather liberal marginal notes. Although they weren't perfect, they were a tremendous help to me. What I did, essentially, was read the Bible and look up the cross-reference. I came to a certain conclusion, which was that the Bible is the best commentary on the Bible. Somewhere or another, if there's a problem in the Bible, there's also an answer. If you can find it, it's there.

When we turn to passages from the Old Testament, I propose to analyze them as revelation. We will not be dealing primarily with historical passages in the Old Testament. That is, historical accounts. But we'll be dealing with what I call "revelatory passages." I will seek to analyze them from two viewpoints: Some will be prophetic predictions. They'll be Old Testament passages that predict things yet to come at the time they were written. The other will be types or shadows, truths in the Old Testament contained in the form, in the pictures, symbols. These words and other words like them are used in Hebrew as we will see later.

Just to give an example by way of anticipation, after we've studied chapter 2 here in Hebrews I intend to go to the Old Testament for a description of the high priest's garment. Because until you know something about the high priest in the Old Testament, there's much in the book of Hebrews you really can't relate to. And in the study of the high priest's garment we will see much of what we would call typology. For instance, all the colors in the garment have a meaning. All the materials have a meaning. The place on his body where the various items were located have significance. In fact, they open up the most beautiful truth which, in the end, points us to Jesus Christ. So that's what I mean by types or shadows.

Then, as I've already indicated, as we go along, I'll be picking out key words. In fact, I have already picked them out as you'll see in a little while. Key words which, to my understanding, are significant related themes of this epistle.

I've done quite a lot of work for you. I've taken thirteen words and I've found every passage where each word occurs. I've listed it and I've counted the number of times it occurs. When you look at that, it tells you a great deal about the book. I've put in work, but it's been very rewarding. My own grasp of the structure of the book has been increased immeasurably by that study.

Then, we will try to see how those strands of truth, each represented by a key word, are woven together into the whole texture of revelation.

I need to say once more that normally you can't do this satisfactorily unless you have access to the original text because the same word in the original is often translated by two or three or four different words in the translation. That does not mean absolutely that you have to be able to read Greek or Hebrew, because there are two concordances which are widely used which make the original words available to you. One is Young's, the other is Strong's. Somebody said there are three concordances: Cruden's, Young's and Strong's. If you use Cruden's, you're crude. If you use Young's, you're young. And if you use Strong's, you're strong. Well, you can interpret this whatever way you like. The one I prefer to use is Young's. I'm used to it and I know my way through it. It lists all the different words from Greek or Hebrew that are translated by any given word. Then, if you look in the right place at the back, at that word it will tell you all the other ways that word is translated. So, with a little work—let me add work— you can trace any original word into the King James.

Now I say the King James because both Young's and Strong's concordances are based on the King James. Then, if you wanted to you could transfer it to another translation by just reading the two passages side by side.

To give you an example, which I think is a good one, there are three important Greek words, all of which are normally translated life in the New Testament. Yet their meanings are very different. One word is bios, B-I-O-S, as far as you can write it in English letters, from which we get the English word biology—though that has nothing to do with it. Bios means "natural, physical, material life." Jesus said, "A man's life [bios] doesn't consist in the amount of things he owns."

The next word is zoe, from which we get the English word zoology—although that's got nothing to do with it—it's just to show you there's a connection. Zoe essentially means "divine life." Its implication is that it's a life that you cannot have apart from God. "He that believeth on the Son hath life." That's not bios, that's zoe. You can have bios without believing, but you cannot have zoe. That's a very important difference.

The third word that's frequently translated life is the Greek word psuche, from which we get the English word psychology. Again, that doesn't have much to do with it, but it just shows you there is a connection. Now the word psuche or psyche means "soul." It's completely different in its meaning from bios and zoe. Jesus said, "Greater love

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hath no man than this, that he lay down his soul for his friend." All right. We ought to lay down our souls for one another.

Now, I have a message on that. If I'm not careful, I'll start preaching it, but I don't intend to! All I want to point out is that there is an example of how helpful it can be to go behind any translation to the original. You can do it; you don't have to be learned in Greek or Hebrew. You do have to be prepared to do some work—that is absolutely essential. Without a certain amount of hard work, you can't do it.

The next point about the way we're going to be studying is that I will attempt to point out to you structural features of the epistle. I think these will become clear when we look at the introduction in a little while. Just by setting things out systematically, you're made aware of the fact that there's a very definite kind of structure in this epistle.

Now, I love music but I have no musical ability. I love the music of Bach, people from that general level and age. I buy these good records and I read the analysis by this learned musician on the back and he talks about halftones and semitones and semi-octaves and all sorts of other things. I just have a vague idea of what he's talking about. But I like the music. But because I don't identify things—in fact, I have the difficulty in telling the difference between a flute and a harp, to be honest. I mean, I'm not that advanced. But because I can't identify these things in the music, I can't analyze them. But when it comes to language, I think God has given me a gift. I'll tell you, my private ambition would be to be able to teach the Bible like Bach wrote music. If I could do that, I would feel I'd arrived. I'm aware I have a long way to go.

Now, one of the interesting things, particularly in the epistle to the Hebrews, is that when you analyze you come up with an extraordinary number of things that occur in sevens. You don't have to work at it, you don't have to try to make it happen; it just emerges. And somebody has said—I don't know who it was—this is the signature of the Holy Spirit on the Bible. See, I don't think any human mind, even with a computer, could ever have achieved that result. It's supernatural. It's one of the great supernatural features of the Word of God.

One last comment on the method of study. We will seek to be economical of time, but we will not let time dictate to us. Okay? We are staging a new American Revolution! We are not tied by the hands of a clock—or the figures on a digital clock either! I'm going to take as long as I feel God wants me to take. If I spend two hours on one verse, let there be no complaints. I've warned you in advance. All right?

On the other hand, there may be passages that I'll go through very quickly. I don't want to waste time, I want to make the best use of every moment. But, I do not want to be tied by some human framework of time.

We come to the last and perhaps in a way the most important point in this introductory explanation which is, What is required of the student? That means you. All right. You are the student. I'm going to answer that question out of a passage in the Bible. Turn to Proverbs 2:1–5. I am only going to read these direct from the New American Standard. As a matter of fact, this is one of the passages that Ruth and I got into with me reading the Hebrew, and we hardly got out of it again. It is truly fascinating. It isn't really the purpose of this particular talk to get involved in all that. I want to suggest to you that the method of study or the requirements for how you study or approach are beautifully stated in the first five verses of Proverbs 2. Notice it is God speaking to Solomon and He says, "My son." And that, in Hebrew, includes "My daughter." So God is speaking to you as His child about His Word. And the next word is "if," which sets the condition. And there are four verses, each of which has two related conditions. Four times two is eight. You come up with eight requirements for receiving what God has for you in His Word. But they're in pairs. Four pairs of requirements, one in each of the first four verses.

> "My son, if you will receive my sayings, and treasure my commandments within you..."

That's the first pair of requirements. Number two:

> "[if you will] make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding..."

That's the second. Number three:

> "... for if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding..."

The third pair. Fourth:

> "... if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures..."

All right. Those are the requirements. Four pairs of requirements. Then there is the reward in verse 5:

> "Then you will discern the fear of the LORD, and discover the knowledge of God."

Let's just look briefly at the key thought in each verse. I ask you to take this and apply it to yourself in a practical way. Verse 1, the two key words are receive and treasure. Take it in and keep it. Keep it as the most valuable thing that you have. See, begin by receiving. Have a receptive heart and mind. James 1 says, "Receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your soul." It will save you if you receive it. But if you don't receive it, it'll do nothing for you.

I trust nobody will be like this, but you can sit there like a bottle with a cork in it. I could be pouring out and pouring out but you get nothing in because of the cork. So if there is a cork, take it out right now. Okay? Remove it. Cork? What could it be? Prejudice, preconception, cynicism. One thing that's been impressed on me lately is how dangerous is it to "sit in the seat of the scornful." And you know, I've met a lot of people in churches who are very close to being in the seat of the scornful. They've been soured by some experience, somebody let them down and, actually, they've tuned God out. That's a modern way of saying the same thing: they're not receiving. One thing that James says is it takes meekness to receive. "Receive with meekness the engrafted word."

Don't only look for what suits you. In fact, it will be better if you looked for what didn't suit you. You know, sometimes we read something we don't like and we hurry past it. That's not the way to go. It's rather the opposite. If there's something that gives you a jolt, you think, God couldn't really have meant that. That's the thing you need to attend to.

So, "If you will receive my sayings, and treasure my commandments within you." Notice that God's commandments are not given to create problems for us. You do appreciate that, don't you? God doesn't make a lot of commandments just for the sake of making life awkward. All God's commandments are designed for our good. But we live in an age where people resent commandments: "I don't want anybody to tell me what to do." That's almost endemic attitude in contemporary America. Well, your attitude will have to change; you're going to have to treasure God's commandments. "God, thank You for telling me not to do that. I know You said it because You cared for me." Don't try to rub the slate off. Focus on it.

The second verse, "Make your ear attentive to wisdom." Again, that's something that I think is something that is very difficult for contemporary Westerners. Very few people today are used to really attending to anything. I've seen so many teenagers—and some of them were teenagers and they're here tonight—who would do their homework at the kitchen counter with one eye on the television. I have to say, frankly, that would drive me crazy. I could not do it. But I cannot believe that any person who does that gets the best out of either the television or the homework. I would say you're getting the worst of both worlds. And if you get a C-minus, you probably deserved it!

But that's typical. We go into a place, there's background music. This is personal, but I either want to listen to music or I want to listen to what people are saying. I don't want to try to listen to both at the same time. If you play background music when I'm in your home, I'll really try to be polite but you will not find it in my house. If I'm talking to you I don't want you to be trying to take in something from the hi-fi at the same time.

Make your ear attentive. Then "Incline your heart." You know what incline means? That's an example where I would say the New American Standard should have used a different word. Most people today really don't know what it means. It means "to bend down." So, what does it mean to bend down your heart? It means to humble yourself. Say, "God, I don't know it all. There's a whole lot I need to know. Teach me."

Going on to the third verse, "If you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding." Those are very strong words. That means pray fervently for understanding and discernment. That must be included. Earnest prayer. Not here in the meeting but at home before you come. As you meditate on what we've been studying together. Lift up your voice to God and say, "God, give me understanding. Illuminate that for me. I find it hard."

Fourth verse, "If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures." I think the picture is similar to a parable that Jesus spoke about treasure hidden in a field. If you're going to find that treasure you probably have got to dig quite a substantial area of that field. You may not know exactly where it is. Digging is hard work. I would really illustrate that by using a concordance to follow up a given word in the original language. It's digging. You see, you've got to have a real appreciation of what's available to you. God is offering you His treasures. You know, Jesus said, "Don't cast your pearls before swine," don't give that which is holy to the dogs. God doesn't do that. One thing I've noticed about the Holy Spirit is, I can prepare the same message out of the same text, use the same notes and preach it in two different places. One place I just can't stop, there's no limitation, it just comes flowing out of me. I think,

I must be a terrific preacher! Then I go to another place, exactly the same preparation and it's like pushing something up a hill. You know what I've learned? The difference isn't in me, it's in the people. When people are really open, receptive, responsive, there's just no limit to what the Holy Spirit will give. But where they're bored, sophisticated and cynical and they think they've heard it all before and anyhow, "We're going to miss the late night show if we stay much longer"—the Holy Spirit doesn't give them anything. Why should He? Bear in mind in the last resort it's not from me you're going to get something, it's from the Holy Spirit.

Let me offer you one final thought, too. I've had the privilege of a very elaborate and prolonged education culminating in philosophy, logic and so on. Most of you are never going to have that kind of education and if you did, you wouldn't enjoy it. But I want to tell you on the basis of my own experience, the best way I know to train your mind is to study the Bible. It is the most logical book on earth. There's no other book that can compare with it. And if you set your mind to find out what the Bible is saying in an orderly, systematic way; you will develop your mind. You'll become sharp. You may not have very high grades at school or college, but you'll get just exactly what God promises here. You'll get wisdom, understanding, discernment and there are different meanings to those words.

Now I'd like you to turn to your outline to Page 0/1. We're going to go through this material pretty systematically now just giving you some simple basics that are necessary for you to be able to understand the epistle. I've tried to keep these to an absolute minimum.

The date of its writing is very important because it ties in with one of the most historical events of the Christian era. How many of you know what was the date of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans? 70 AD. Now, this is very relevant here because we find in this epistle that the writer speaks about the Levitical ministry and sacrifices as still taking place, which means what? It must have been written before 70 AD. There are various theories as to the exact date, but they're not important for us. So let's just be content with what's written here, between 64 and 68 AD as I point out, before the destruction of the temple and the consequent cessation of the Levitical ministry, sacrifices, etc.

I've put there "compare Hebrews 9:1–10." We'll just turn to Hebrews 9 in the New American Standard for a moment so that you can see why I say that. Verses 1–10, we're not going to read them all. The first verses explain what I would call the typology of the furniture of the tabernacle: the Holy Place, the Holy of Holies, the various items of furniture. Then in verse 6 and following we have the words in the present tense about the ministry of the Levitical priest:

> "Now when these things have been thus prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle, performing the divine worship [you notice it's in the present tense], but into the second only the high priest enters, once a year, [and then in verse 9:] ... which is a symbol for the time present. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience..."

So, all through there the continuous present tense is used of the Levitical ministry and sacrifices, indicating that they were still going on and therefore that this was written before the destruction of the temple in 70 AD when all that ceased and has never yet been resumed.

I would just mention to you, those of you that didn't know it, that date 70 AD is one of the most crucial dates in understanding the outworking of God's purposes for His people. It marked the total destruction of Jerusalem, complete destruction of the temple, the end of all Levitical worship and all sacrifices. As you probably know, God had told Israel that there was only one place where their sacrifices would be accepted, that is what we call today the temple area where there now stand two Muslim mosques and no Jew is permitted to enter. As long as that situation remains, I think it's fair to say it's inconceivable that the Jewish people would resume the blood sacrifices of that order. So, that's possibly the most decisive date up till our present century when I would say the two key dates are 1948, when the state of Israel was reborn, and l967, when the Jewish people recovered political control of this very area where the temple used to stand. However, although they have governmental control, they still have no access to that particular area.

Going on in the outline. The author I have simply stated "uncertain." The following have been suggested. Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Philip. Traditionally, it was always attributed to Paul and that's actually the reason why it was included in the New Testament canon. However, there really is no final convincing evidence that it was written by Paul. Possibly it was, I would say equally possibly it was

not. It was Martin Luther who suggested Apollos, and I'm not saying it's right, but it's what I would call an interesting conjecture. But I don't intend to spend time on that because, as I've already indicated, my desire is to come to the epistle in the areas where it has something to say to us practically as Christians.

Then it's important to bear in mind that it's addressed to Jewish Christians. Unfortunately, that phrase is objected to today. A lot of Jewish people say there is no such thing as a Jew who's a Christian. So, Jews who believe in Jesus—of whom, thank God, there are many—have taken other forms such as "Jewish believers" or "Hebrew Christians" just to avoid that very controversial phrase. But at any rate, bear in mind the people to whom this epistle was addressed were Jewish. That's very important.

We are so used to seeing the New Testament from a Gentile or non-Jewish standpoint that we overlook the fact there are four epistles in the New Testament which were written either exclusively or primarily to Jewish people. Hebrews, James and the two epistles to Peter. Actually, even the translations we use of the New Testament, the two that I've recommended, are incorrect when they translate the opening phrases of 1 Peter, because it's stated that it's addressed to "people in the Diaspora." How many of you know what the Diaspora is? A few. The Diaspora is the technical Jewish word for Jewish people scattered abroad outside the land of Israel. So, our translation doesn't bring out this fact that that epistle was addressed primarily to Jewish people. Peter, after all, was "the apostle of the circumcision," the Jewish people.

I think it's particularly important in connection with Hebrews because of its content. Let me add just what's there in your outline, it's been suggested that it was addressed to a house community, what you'd call a house church. Something which was very common in the early centuries of the gospel because the Jewish people basically in their synagogues are used to small buildings and small gatherings of people. In the area where we lived in Jerusalem recently there were probably half a dozen synagogues. But you wouldn't know they were there because they were over a store or in an apartment building just maybe two rooms or one floor that was dedicated to being a synagogue. And maybe not more than 30 or 50 people would meet there. So the idea of a small community of believers meeting together is very easy to fit into that background.

It's been suggested that this community might have been in Palestine or Alexandria or Rome. But all three possibilities leave it pretty clear that nobody really knows. I don't think we need to know. But the important thing about it is the background of these people. The whole epistle assumes that they had a good knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures and of the rituals and practices and laws of the temple and of Jewish life.

They were the people at that point in history who had the greatest spiritual privileges and opportunities. They were far ahead of people from a non-Jewish background who'd never picked up a Bible or the scrolls of the Law and had to find out who Moses was, who Joshua was, who David was. I've been in countries where you have to start and approach people like that, they've never heard of Moses or David or Joshua—anybody. And maybe never heard of Jesus. But these people had a really good background in the knowledge of God and His Word and His requirements and principles.

There's one Scripture I'd like to turn to there in Romans 9:4–5. Paul is speaking about his "kinsmen according to the flesh" in the previous verse. He says he has tremendous burden for them. Then, in these two verses, 4 and 5, he speaks about all the blessings that they had received that no other group of people anywhere on the earth had received. He says:

> "... who are Israelites, to whom belong ..."

And then he lists a series of things that belong to them as Israelites. As I go through it you might like to count, I want to kind of train you in this counting habit.

> "... to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers ..."

Seven things, do you agree? And then the climax:

> "... and from whom is the Christ [the Messiah] according to the flesh ..."

That's the eighth. Seven plus Jesus. So in a sense they had it all. They started far ahead of everybody else.

Now, nineteen centuries and more later, to whom does that apply? No longer to the Jewish people but to Christians, to people like most of us here—not all of us—whose background is in a Christian culture, who are used to the word church, who know what a hymn is, who know what prayers are. Probably there are very few people here who

couldn't quote the words of "Amazing Grace" or some of the old great hymns of the church. We're familiar with the concept of sin. I wonder whether it occurs to you that people who don't have a background in the Bible don't know what sin is. One of the things that impressed me in East Africa when I was there is that the African tribes didn't have a word for "thank you" in any of their languages. That, basically, comes out of the Bible. People without a Bible don't know what it is to be thankful.

So, what the writer says to the Hebrew believers nineteen centuries ago is particularly appropriate to people with a Christian culture and background today. The boot is right on the other foot. We are the people who've had it all, who've had all the privileges, all the opportunities, who've been blessed far more than almost any other group of people anywhere on the earth. And so as you read these words that we're going to be studying, to Jewish believers I want you, in a sense, to put yourself in that place. Because, as you'll see, this epistle is full of reproofs and warnings that they haven't utilized their advantages. At one point it says" when by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need for somebody to teach you what are the basic principles of the Word of God." That was a rebuke. But that would be true of probably 80 percent of professing Christians today. When we ought to be ready to teach others we need to be taught once more what are the basic principles of the Word of God. That's why I brought out my Foundation Series about 17 years ago, because I saw that multitudes of people who thought they were spiritual had no knowledge of the basic truths of the Bible. I sought to supply that need.

One of the most dangerous things that you can ever do is say, "We've got it all!" I'd like to ask you some questions. If you've got it all, first of all, where is it? Why doesn't it show? Secondly, if you've got it all, you're answerable for it all. "To whom much is given, of him shall much also be required."

I remember once I actually heard somebody say, "We've got it all!" It's a very vivid scene in my mind. It was in a little Pentecostal church on the island of Funen in the city of Odense, which is where Hans Christian Anderson came from. There were about fifteen people in a little room and there was this precious elderly widow. She was poor, she was sick, she wasn't very happy. And we were talking about us Pentecostals and other people. And we weren't saying anything too good about other people. I remember she said in Danish—and I understood Danish—"We've got it all." I looked at her and I thought, Dear Lord, if that's all, it isn't much! I'm not in any sense making fun of her; I'm sure she's with the Lord by now. But, it never left me how we can deceive ourselves. We've got it all. Let me put those two questions to you again. If you've got it all, where is it? And secondly, remember you're answerable for it all.

I want you not to kind of sit there as we go through this and say, "That was for the Jewish people in those days," because really, if there's one epistle that's up to date for the kind of people most of us are, this is it. When Jim said at the beginning, "If you've been going to church for more than 40 years, put your hand up," I was very reluctant to put my hand up. I thought, Dear Lord, is that really true? How far have I come in 40 years? What have I done with it all? But unfortunately, I had to put my hand down.

I remember when I was a young preacher I was making fun of churchgoing people—which is a thing I would never do today—which is easy, anybody can make fun of churchgoing people. I mean, it doesn't take the least bit of cleverness to do that. To criticize the church is just not to prove you're clever in the least bit. I was talking about religious people. And the Holy Spirit spoke to me while I was doing it and said, "Remember, you're a religious person and you've been one a long while now." And it was a shock. I thought, I am. See, before I knew the Lord the one thing I never wanted to be was religious. I looked at religious people and I thought, God knows what they find in all that, but I don't want it. Well, most of us are religious people. Bear that in mind.

Going on now with our outline.

The distinctive revelation of this epistle, I think, without any doubt, is Jesus Christ as our high priest. I don't know of any other book in the New Testament which deals with that. It's there by implication in Revelation but I don't know of any other book that touches on this theme except Hebrews. It's an amazing fact. If Hebrews wasn't there, we would know nothing about the high priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Remarkably, also, as we'll see in due course, the teaching about the high priesthood of Jesus Christ, and with it the priesthood of Melchizedek, is based on about four verses in the Old Testament. Two verses in Genesis 18 and two in Psalm 110. And yet this tremendous revelation grew out of all that. Never think that because there's just about two verses about a thing in the Bible it isn't that important. It may be extremely important.

Another thing I want to say on that subject is that what we will be studying is, I would say, 90 percent of it in an unseen realm. It doesn't belong on this earth that we live on. And there is no way we can know it except by revelation. Science can't tell you, reason can't work it out. If

God had not chosen to reveal it to us, we would never be able to know it. So I want you as you move on to set your mind to this that you're going to have to receive revelation by faith. There's very little you can check it against. We're going to find out the pattern of heavenly worship, we're going to find out the way that our high priest operates in heaven. Particularly, if we don't know the Old Testament passages that relate to Aaron as high priest, we really don't have any point of reference. One of the vital truths of this is that without a high priest, we can't approach God. There is no way. It's not permitted. And yet I think hardly any of us most of the time are conscious of our total dependence upon our high priest to enable us to approach God.

We'll be studying in two or three sessions the ministry of a priest: What is a priest there for?. As I indicated, we will also take a quick glimpse at the Old Testament picture of Aaron as a high priest because you've got to go to the Old Testament to find out the meaning of the New Testament. That's marvelous.

Let me illustrate that from another thing which occurs to me. The description of the death of Jesus on the cross in the gospels, the historical account, is amazingly brief. In fact, it's in about three words: "They crucified Him." No details about blood, no details about anguish; very, very little. No modern writer would have ever presented that crucial event in such few words. But, if you turn back to the Old Testament and read some of the Messianic psalms like Psalm 22, Psalm 69, Isaiah 50, you'll have an exposé of what was going on in the inner consciousness of Jesus while He was there on the cross. So you have to go to the Old Testament to fill out some of the simple statements of the New Testament.

Okay, going on in my note outline. I would like to say the main practical theme is indicated by some of the recurrent words and we'll look at them a little later this evening. But particularly three: inheritance, rest and perfection. Practically, this book is designed to get you into your inheritance. And in your inheritance you will find rest and out of that you will achieve perfection or maturity. It's got a very practical thrust to it. I suspect that for most of you it'll be an area that you've scarcely covered.

To sum up the purpose of the book, I just picked out one phrase which is Hebrews 6:18, we might turn to that. We won't even go into the background, we start in the middle of a sentence.

> "... in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement ..."

I picked that phrase out because I felt that's really the result that the writer wanted to achieve in God's people, that "we may have strong encouragement."

Now the Greek word that's translated encourage is the same word that's used in John 14 where Jesus speaks of the comforter. You know the Roman Catholics call it "the paraclete"? That is the Greek word, paracletos. And as a verb, paracleo, it has two related meanings which I express this way: "to cheer up" and "to stir up." If you're discouraged, you need to be cheered up. If you're getting lazy and indifferent, you need to be stirred up. They're both included in the meaning of the one word. So, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, He's the "cheerer-upper" and the "stirrer-upper." He just does whatever you happen to need at that given moment.

If I were to ask how many of you here tonight either need to be cheered up or stirred up, I imagine many of you would raise your hands. Well, I trust these studies will do that.

We come to the key words, which I have to say are very interesting to me. I hope they'll be to you. I've chosen the first word, which is high priest, and then we have 12 words, all of which, in one way or another, are related. I've grouped them together in four groups of three because each of those groups stands together. So let's just go through them, you'll follow in your outline.

Number one, high priest. We have that on its own.

Then three words that are closely related. Promise, oath and covenant. These are related to the high priest because it takes a high priest to guarantee or assure us of the fulfillment of the promise, the oath and the covenant. Without a high priest we'd have no guarantee. Turn to one passage in Hebrews 8:6:

> "But now he [that is Jesus] has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises."

You notice the two words covenant and promise in that one verse. But you see that they require a mediator, somebody to make them work out for us. Without a mediator they're of no avail. So we start with the high priest, the mediator. These are the things he mediates: the promise; the oath and the covenant.

Now, when we come to the word covenant we discover in Scripture that a covenant is of no avail without a sacrifice being offered. And a sacrifice requires the shedding of blood. Let me relate to you how I discovered that, because it's a good example of the benefits of this analytical method.

In l945—which is a long while ago for all of us, and some of you weren't even thought of at that time—I was in Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives working in a British military hospital. I decided to start studying the Bible in Hebrew. I got myself a Hebrew Bible, got some grammars and other things and started. I started to read the book of Genesis. I think it must have been the prompting of the Holy Spirit, I decided that I would underline three words as I went. One with blue, one with green and one with red. I recommend this as a very good way to study the Bible. I underlined covenant, Hebrew berith, with blue, sacrifice with green, and the shedding of blood with red. I don't know what put those three together in my mind. Do you know what I soon discovered as I went through my Bible? Wherever I had the blue, I had the green. And wherever I had the green, I had the red. A covenant is effective only with a sacrifice. A sacrifice is effective only with the shedding of blood. So you see, I grasped one of the most important truths of the Bible just by that particular method of seeking it out for myself. I had no preconceptions when I started.

So here we find that because we have a covenant we have to have offering, sacrifice and blood.

The next three indicate the response required from us to benefit from what has been said: Faith, hope and confession. I think we understand basically what those are. You'll find that confession is one of the dominant themes of this epistle. I'll explain what confession is more thoroughly when we get there.

And then in 11, 12 and 13 we get into our objective. Where are we going? I think there's nothing more frustrating for most people than not to know where you're going—which is the condition of the majority of the Christian church. Well, this epistle has got a definite objective for which we are headed.

It's our inheritance. In our inheritance—and nowhere else—there is rest. And when we enter into our rest in our inheritance we come to perfection or maturity. So those are the objectives. If the epistle does its work in us, it'll bring us much closer to those objectives by the time we've finished.

Now, there are various other particular features in the epistle that I want to point out to you. The next one is passages containing solemn warnings. I would say this book in the New Testament has more solemn warnings in it than any other book and they're very, very serious warnings. I think, that relates to the people it was written to. Don't imagine that because you've had it all that you're secure. On the contrary, the more you know, the more will be expected of you. That's the essence of it.

I've set out there five passages that contain solemn warnings. Against each one I've noted the thing that we're warned against. Let's read the list down.

The first is neglect, the second is unbelief, the third is apostasy or falling away, the fourth is willfully continuing to sin, the fifth is coming short of the grace of God. I think, as a matter of fact, they're in a logical order. If we begin by neglect we will end up in unbelief. Unbelief will lead us to apostasy and apostasy will cause us to go back to willfully continuing to sin. This epistle says if you get there, there is no more sacrifice for sin, it's the end. The tragedy will be that we've known the grace of God and come short of it.

I think this epistle does as much as any passage in the New Testament to correct the very inaccurate and sloppy view of grace which is held among so many Fundamentals and Evangelicals today, which makes grace almost a license to live any way you please. It's totally out of line with what this epistle teaches.

Then there are passages that indicate positive, practical application. I think the interesting thing about it is they're comparatively brief although they're very important. I think it's interesting that they're brief because it tells us that most of this epistle is revelatory and it only pauses quite briefly to give us the practical application. What we're really being initiated into is truth in a realm we would never know in any other way. Then we're told how that truth will affect the way we live. There are, I find, seven passages of practical application. They're listed there, we'll just read and this is just my personal summary of the things that this epistle requires us or recommends us to do.

First of all, confident access to God. Second, going on to maturity or perfection. Go on is a key phrase. Third, the need for zeal, faith and patience. Fourth, an exhortation to draw near, hold fast, assemble and encourage. Another key word, I think, is encourage. Fifth, to remember and endure. Another key word is endure. Sixth, press on, endure discipline, be strong, pursue peace and holiness. And then the closing passage, which is essentially the last chapter, chapter 13, we're exhorted to love, holiness, submissiveness and prayer.

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Then there are seven passages of comparison and contrast. In every case the essence of the thought is that Jesus and the New Covenant are infinitely superior to what was offered to Israel under the Old Covenant. See, the danger was that they were going to settle down in their old religious form and not have the full glory of the revelation of Jesus Christ. I would say the danger of these people is that they were just sliding back into religion without live faith. If I were to sum it up one way, they were religious people but there was no life, no faith. Because they were sliding back into religion they could no longer see the uniqueness and the supremacy of Jesus. They were willing to put in, more or less, on the level with angels or with Moses. See, they'd lost their vision of what God had offered them.

Again, that seems to me so applicable to the majority of Christians. Forgive me for saying this but I remember thinking when I was a boy in the Anglican Church in Britain, I listened to all those beautiful words that are uttered in the Anglican prayer book and they're as beautiful and as vibrant as any you'll find anywhere. But as I listened to those people and I uttered them myself I thought, Who really believes this? We all say it, we don't think what we're saying; nobody knows what it means. I remember thinking to myself, if one of these ladies were to walk out of church and drop a lace handkerchief and somebody ran after her and gave her her handkerchief back, she'd be more excited about getting her handkerchief back than she would about all the things she'd been saying she believed about Jesus. I concluded, It's not real. It's just a form, a way of doing things. The life has gone out of it.

And this was the danger with these people. I like to tell you, out of observation, it doesn't take long for that to happen. It can happen in two years. In fact, it can happen in less. But you can slide from one to the other in less than two years.

Let's look at the seven points of comparison. I've listed inferior, superior. And again, the references are given in the right-hand corner. First of all, angels. They are inferior to Jesus. It takes most of the first chapter to establish that. Second, Moses is inferior to Jesus. That's a hard thing for Jewish people to accept. Third, the Levitical priesthood is inferior to the priesthood of Melchizedek. Fourth, the Old Covenant is inferior to the New Covenant. Fifth, the tabernacle of Moses is inferior to the heavenly tabernacle. Sixth, the Levitical sacrifices are inferior to the sacrifice of Jesus. And seven, Mount Sinai is inferior to Mount Zion. So you can go down that at your leisure and pick them out.

Now, another interesting feature of structure in Hebrews is that there are twelve passages where the writer says "Let us" do something. That's interesting because that phrase "let us" indicates two things. First of all, it indicates a decision. Secondly, it indicates a corporate decision. There's much in this epistle that shows us we can't do it all alone. We have to move on with our fellow believers. There again, it corrects a very wrong attitude in some contemporary forms of Christianity where it's "just Jesus and me." That isn't it. It's not "I will," it's "let us." And it's interesting to look at the twelve "let us" things. I think, if you go through them, they'll tell you a lot about the problems of people to whom they were addressed.

First of all, amazing, let us fear. Don't presume, don't take it for granted you're all right because you know all about this and that.

Number two, let us be diligent. Not lazy. It distresses me how little laziness is reproved among Christians. In my observation, laziness is far more severely condemned in the Bible than drunkenness. And yet, few of us would tolerate drunkenness, many of us tolerate laziness.

Number three, let us hold fast our confession. Don't give up.

Number four, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace. We have a privilege, let's use it.

Number five, let us press on to maturity or perfection. Again, that's a key phrase. Go on, press on, move on.

Number six, let us draw near into the Holy of Holies. If you study the context, that's what it means.

Number seven, let us hold fast the confession of our hope. That's the one phrase that's repeated. Hold fast.

Number eight, let us consider how to stimulate one another. Again, we cannot be self-centered; we have to look at our fellow believers.

Number nine, let us run with endurance. Another key word, endurance.

Number ten, let us show gratitude or have grace.

Eleven, let us go out to Him [Jesus], outside the camp.

And number twelve, let us offer a sacrifice of praise. There are twelve collective decisions that we need to make.

Now, in closing I want to go through this list of words. I have to say I'm rather proud of it. Okay. We don't have long and we don't need long but let's just glance at these lists of words and references where they occur. You may think it's kind of dry but I believe if you move into it you'll find it's revelatory.

The first word—and they're taken in the same order that we listed—is high priest. That occurs altogether 18 times. It's interesting to notice somewhat where they first occur. The first account of that is in the second chapter. Also, it's interesting to notice it goes on till the last chapter which is 13. It runs all the way through.

The next word is promise and that occurs 16 times. It begins in chapter 4. It also runs nearly all the way through.

The next word is swear or oath. Now those are two different words but they're just a verb and a noun for the same thing so I've put them together. That occurs 13 times but primarily it's all in the first half of the epistle.

Covenant occurs 16 times and essentially it's in the second half of the epistle. It runs all the way through to the last chapter.

Offer or offering occurs 27 times. Offer is a verb, offering is a noun, but they're the same. That doesn't begin till chapter 5 and it runs all the way through.

Sacrifice—which is close to offering—occurs 15 times. It begins in the same place as offering and runs all the way through.

Seven, blood. It occurs 21 times, but it doesn't begin till chapter 9. Then it's very frequent.

Then the most common of all the key words is faith or faithful. It occurs 38 times. I'll point out when we get there that there's an adjective, faithful, verb "to believe" and a noun "faith." In English it happens that the verb is different in form from the adjective and the noun. That's not true in Greek. Here is the place where we bring something together which the English translation wouldn't indicate it's so closely related.

Of course, all of you know which chapter the word faith occurs most in, don't you? Hebrews 11. See, faith is really the antidote for religion, it's the antidote for letting go; it's the antidote for getting discouraged. Faith. Let's never get so clever that we think we can do without faith because we can't. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." It's no good trying. I think these people were trying, but without faith.

Ten, confess or confession. I've put in parenthesis below that confidence. That is actually a different word. I'll explain it when we get there. But the original Greek word for confidence was initially a political word meaning "freedom of speech." So it's a confidence that's expressed in speech. So I put it there together with confess or confession. I put that word in parentheses so you'll see those references are in parentheses. Can you see that? Together they occur 8 times, each of them occurs 4 times.

Then heir, inherit and inheritance. That's two nouns and a verb, but they're all from the same basic word. Occurs 10 times. I would say it's the initial word that hits us. It occurs in the second verse. When we get there I'll try to show you how significant that is.

The last two words on Page 0/6. Rest occurs 12 times. But the interesting thing about that is it only occurs in two chapters, chapters 3 and 4. In fact, it only occurs twice in chapter 3 so it occurs 10 times in chapter 4. If there's one thing that God has made real for me in this study as I prepared it, it's this theme of rest. I trust that the Lord will enable me to share that with you.

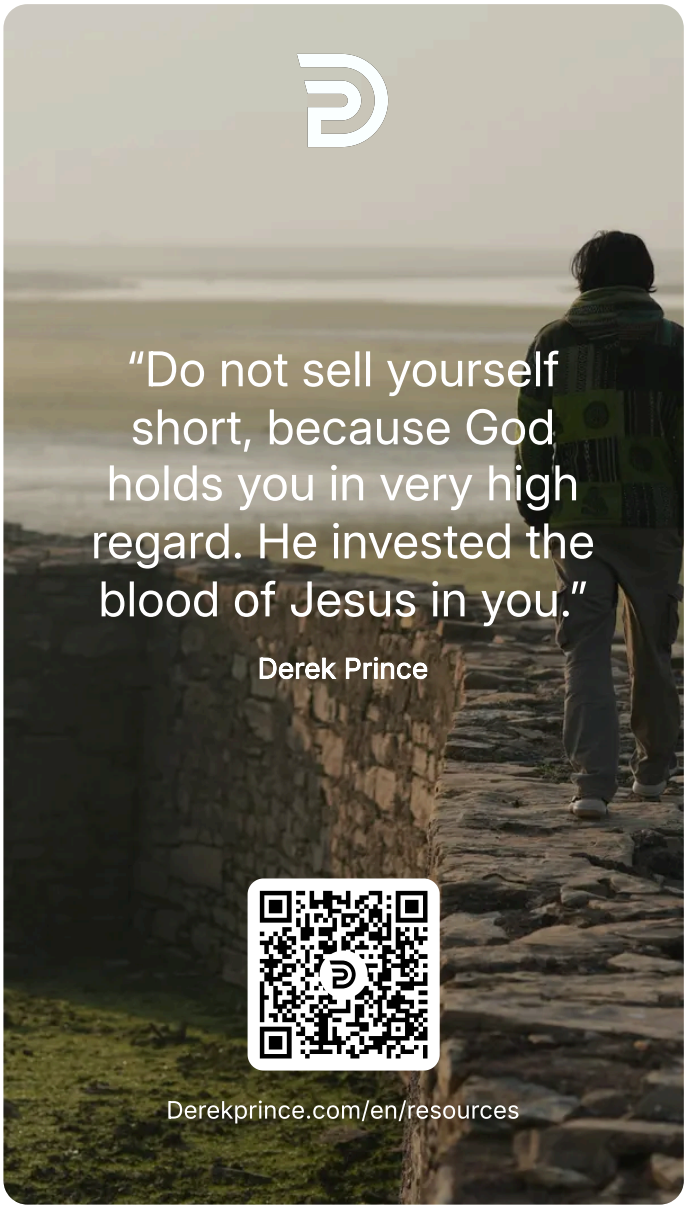
Finally, a word which is translated various ways but is the same word in the original. Perfect, perfecter, perfection, mature, maturity. They're all the same Greek word. teleioo. The root of that word is the word end. telos is end, teleioo is perfect. You come to the end. If I were to sum up what this is intended to do for us, that would be the word.

Perfection. It's to bring us to perfection, completion, maturity, the end of our course.

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Sermon

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