

Hebrews: Its Background (Part Three)

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Turn to Matthew 6: These are very familiar verses and I am going to spend a little bit of time expounding on this as we begin this sermon. This is spoken by Jesus, going through what has become known as the Sermon on the Mount. He has some advice for us; He says:

Matthew 6:19-21 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

At the beginning of my previous sermon, I spent some time encouraging us to understand the unique treasure God freely gave us by means of His calling us into the purpose and plan that He is working through. With the beginning of this sermon, I am going to exhort us to seriously add something to that gift. Pay particular attention to Jesus’ use of the term *treasure*. God gave us an extremely valuable gift of the Bible and even profane history clearly show that He does not give to everybody. He just does not hand them out like freebies at a circus somewhere, and so He is picking and choosing as He goes along through the purpose that He is working out.

And we have received this gift that He does not give to everybody. We need to take this gifting seriously. Why? Because we of all people, coming at this question from God's point of view, have to come to grips with the fact that, though our carnality is constantly pressuring us to exaggerate our importance to ourselves, the reality is, we are nobody of any importance whatever concerning real accomplishments. I do not mean that we have not done anything that is worthwhile at all, but we have not come to the place where we are indispensable to life, even in this United States.

In short, what it is that puffs us up and makes us feel more important than we actually are, is the carnality within us that must be subdued. Not merely held in check, but subdued. Why is our calling called a *treasure*?

First, because it is fairly obviously of immense value to those of us who are in the church for a long period of time and never had eternal life. We know from what we think, just normally, carnally, that living forever if we were in good health and had plenty to take care of, would keep us busy and productive. We know obviously that living eternally is going to be of immense value. Directly tied to that fact is that Jesus meant exactly what He said when He stated that *no one* comes to Him without God first drawing, attracting, stirring up the person's mind that leads that person *to* Jesus.

I will tell you that has much meaning. Jesus does not throw words around uselessly. Every word of His has such value that the Bible itself says that we have to live by every word of God. Jesus is God and He shares exactly the same beliefs and understanding as the Father does. Every word of His has value and what He said about our *treasure* has the meaning of being of great value. Our calling's value is not at first easily understood, because we do not immediately grasp some peculiar aspects of it very quickly. Sometimes it takes years for this to buildup within our mind where we begin to see, “Yeah, this is pretty valuable,” therefore we tend to under appreciate its worth.

Let us string together a number of verses that might be helpful to giving us some insight into a little bit more of the value of this gift that we have been given. I want you to turn with me to Mark 3. Here in this third chapter of Mark, Christ is up on a mountain, and this may be part of Mark's version of the Sermon on the Mount. I want you to notice what happens here in this particular occasion:

Mark 3:13 And He went up on the mountain and called to Him [notice this carefully] those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him.

We find out in verse fourteen who those people were that He himself wanted:

Mark 3:14 Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach.

I want you to zero in that “He himself wanted.” He wanted those particular twelve men and nobody else would do. He has a hand in those who were going to be His closest associates while He was alive on earth and they were going to be part of the church. This is where it begins to get interesting for you and me: *those He wanted*. Do we see a pattern developing here? Is it possible that, like the twelve apostles, we are the ones that God called and we are the ones that Jesus specifically wanted to perform a function for Him, with Him as He leads, guides, and directs the church?

God not only has a purpose but He also has a plan that He is following. Do men build a building without a plan? That is normally called a draft or a blueprint, something along that line. It is beginning to look like God follows the same thing, as I think that you will agree with me by the time we get to the end of this first section of the sermon.

So, do men build a building without a plan normally called a blueprint? Let us add another detail to this thought of a purposeful procedure. I want you to go with me to I Corinthians 12: Paul is talking here about the body of the church. The membership, those called to be members of that body; we will look at verse 17:

I Corinthians 12:17 If the whole body were an eye . . .

Maybe some human beings would do something like that. But God has a purposeful plan for every portion of everybody's body. Remember, He designed it. Jesus Christ performed the building of it, and every part of our body is needed in order for us to function the way that God designed us to function. Would you like to lose your liver? “Oops, forgot to put that one in there!” Not in the least. Remember what we are talking about here. God not only has a purpose He is working out, He has a plan that He is following. He is not putting this church, this family of His together without an idea, a very firm idea of where He is headed.

The apostles were specifically chosen by Jesus Christ. He chose the twelve men He wanted, and He did that after a night of prayer, going over people that He was associating with, even this early in His ministry. Later on, He said, “You have not chosen Me, I have chosen you.”

What I want us to think about is that there is a very strong possibility that we, like the apostles, were *chosen* because Christ wanted us and the Father wanted us. Let us not separate ourselves from this idea, because God is a designer and He is a builder. I know from my experience being in the building trades for a while, that if a builder is following a plan, he has got to do it the way the engineers designed it. I know that I have worked on enough of them to know that for those who are putting

these things together, they put it together exactly as the engineers designed it. The right nuts; the right bolts, the right height: Everything about it is gone over before the construction actually begins and they follow the plan that is put down on the paper.

I think we need to get away from the idea that God is just doing things randomly. No, He is not! He is following a purposeful plan. Why do you think Paul uses all those different metaphors that involve things like buildings and bodies and so forth? It is so that we can understand the order, the wonderful systematic order with which God is doing everything, and that is why he says there in Romans 1 that mankind is without excuse. Nailed into the corner by the incredible design in everything that God has made, that it took a magnificent Genius to put this all together, from the first thought to the facts when everything was put together.

I Corinthians 12:17-18 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now [look at this] God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

To me, that means not only the apostles, but each one of us was reviewed by God and Jesus Christ and we become wanted because that is what They wanted to be in the body, and that includes you and me. Let that roll around in your mind; to have that kind of personal attention from the Creator God: He looked at us and said, "I want that person." Drawing again on my experiences in building things, I know that person He chose was going to occupy a certain position that no one else may do. I say, *may* because I have to leave myself on opening there, because I do not know whether I am even going to be there, but I am sure going to try!

God has set the members each one in the body, just as He pleased. Who needs the Supreme Court when we have the supreme Designer, Judge, Mechanic, or anything you want? He is supreme. So let that roll around in your mind that He has personally evaluated and passed on us and sent us on to Jesus Christ. Let us just say, not chosen, but how about something a little more like *picked*? He *picked* us out after reviewing what was available. He chose us, selected us.

I think we can say fairly solidly that our calling was not merely random. "I'll take you and you and you," as if God was picking sides for a neighborhood softball game. It was a *studied* action that Jesus went through there, because all the pieces are there. That is why it says "He chose those He wanted." They had been evaluated, He passed on them, and so they became then His closest associates in the work that He was doing. Let us look at just a couple of more to add to this so that we understand that I am just not selecting a couple of places but there are others. Let us go back to the book of Ephesians.

Ephesians 1:21-23 Far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet [Christ], and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

There is another one where he uses a metaphor of a human body in order to show its parallel with I Corinthians 12 where we are part of the Body of Jesus Christ:

Ephesians 2:19-20 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built .

..

Is that not interesting? The church is *built*, and we have been built into it. In this case, the metaphor is a temple, not the body of Jesus Christ, but a temple:

Ephesians 2:20-22 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

That is pretty clear, and I can only give my experiences from when I was a great deal younger and I had to follow blueprints while I was working on what I was working on. I could not substitute things that were going to be permanently in that functioning building or whatever it was. I could put something in temporarily, but I had to follow the drawings that were given to me by the engineer.

I do not think that God would cheat on what is His pride and joy, which is His Family. Do you think God would cheat that way? Would He not want the best fits possible as He puts together that government that is going to function in managing the creation for who knows how long of a period of time?

There is a second reason that is reflected by Paul's statement in why He calls people like you and me. In I Corinthians once again this time in chapter 1. This is one that should be on our minds, and that is why does God call people like you and me into the church. In verse 26 Paul writes:

I Corinthians 1:26-29 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

A second reason why we can consider that God has chosen us. We fit into the design that He is putting together. He has chosen people that are common; let us put it that way! God clearly shows a tendency to call, as Paul says here, the foolish and weak of the world. This does not mean those called are illiterate idiots who do not know how to put one foot in front of the other. This means that He tends to call people into His service who do not have a worldly background of practical education and accomplishment through personal experiences; to understand, to grasp the greatness of the calling by comparing it with how the world is presently operating.

It takes time for one to factually evaluate the gift that is given with a clear understanding of what is at stake. That is one reason why I am giving this sermon. I want us to appreciate what God has done. We may think that we are weak, that we are dumb, that we have never accomplished anything or whatever. Because in our desire to be humble, we sometimes take things too far. On the other hand, we have been exalted to the high heavens by the fact that God, in His mercy, has chosen us to be part of this awesome thing that He is putting together. We do not have to get the big head. God takes care of that by calling us weak and foolish as well.

It takes time for one to factually evaluate this gift that we have been given with a clear understanding of what is at stake. So the next question would be this: Why would anybody come to Jesus? There is a reason. It is this drawing that is taking place. But there are a couple of things on the surface that we can give a broad answer to that question. It is because, through the drawing, we are beginning to truly

appreciate Christ's value to them toward achieving why the gift has been given in the first place. This is what God does to stir us on; He begins to put thoughts into our minds that we will act upon if we are wise.

We are going to take a look at the example of a man who was in the process of being drawn to Christ and perhaps we can learn something from his example. The specific issue that they discuss, that is Christ and this person, is not important to my thought right now but it is important to the overall reason of why the calling is so valuable to us. Let us turn to John 3 and we are going to look at Nicodemus here.

John 3:1 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

This was a man who had accomplished a great deal, and he held a pretty high position within the Sanhedrin, and therefore he was considered a ruler of the Jews.

John 3:2-3 This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

The answer to what I stated regarding Nicodemus is in one sense, quite simple. Like Nicodemus, the called are beginning to perceive Jesus Christ as a Person Who is, or has the means, to help them accomplish why they have been called. In other words, He is beginning to become important in our eyes, in our mind, and this is why we begin to be drawn to Him. God is putting thoughts in our minds about Christ and why He is necessary to us and our salvation. Jesus is and has something that we consider valuable.

That is obviously why Nicodemus has come to see Him and the same pattern was followed by us. We begin to see that a relationship with Jesus Christ is necessary to success in this that we are being drawn into. I do not mean that people like Nicodemus have everything all figured out, and neither did we at that time.

Nicodemus clearly shows that in this sequence. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God". Notice he also came at night; he did not want to expose himself to the ridicule of others, but it was still important for him to get in touch with Christ. Of course, we know that later, when Christ was crucified, Nicodemus was part of the group, he was a converted man, but it had a start.

We see a pattern here of why we are drawn to Christ and what God does. He begins to make us understand that this man, Jesus, has something that we need in our lives. Nicodemus was willing to risk whatever shame might have come upon him by his companions to go and see Him. Nicodemus muted it by at least making sure that they did not see that he was there.

Like Nicodemus, others are drawn to Christ by beginning to get the picture that He is an extraordinary Person of peculiar powers, and they are sincerely looking for further understanding. With peculiar powers, He was healing people. Besides, I am sure that the sermons that Jesus was giving were also part of the appeal; that he understood because God was giving him insight, right

meanings to what Jesus was saying. Those are the very thoughts that distinguished Nicodemus from others who may be attracted to Christ at some level, but never really follow through by truly seeking Him out, as Nicodemus did, for clearer understanding.

There is a catch to accepting this gift from God: By accepting this gift, that only God gives, with it comes the responsibility, on the receiver of the gift, of placing a value on what he has received in being introduced to Christ. Working our way around here to the word *treasure*: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” God begins to put thoughts in our minds that this Person is valuable to our success or to find the answers to questions that we might have.

Nicodemus is a very clear example. Accepting this gift that only God gives, lays the responsibility on the receiver of the gift, that is the one called, placing a value on what one has received. Here very plainly Jesus’ point regarding the term *treasure*, He uses in Matthew chapter 6, simply indicates that which a person personally values more highly than other things.

Eventually, Nicodemus got to the place where he could appear publicly to be part of Jesus’ retinue. Perhaps above all else, because history shows treasures tend to be carefully hidden, or at least carefully watched over; here is Jesus’ point regarding the term *treasure* as He intends us to understand. He admonishes us to labor to protect and increase the abundance of the treasure we are originally given.

In other words, we are attracted to Jesus to the place where we want to become part of what He is doing. We will begin to make the steps toward making our attraction concrete and public, in that we have accepted Him. But, the level of importance each of us places on this gift of our calling will pretty much determine (and here comes the point), the value that we place on this gift of our calling will pretty much determine the effective strength of the commitment and faithfulness we give to meeting the requirements of achieving the purposes of our being called.

It would do God and us no favor if the treasure did not appeal to us, to work at increasing it. What good is it to get a gift and then do nothing with it? The term *treasure* indicates something that we overall place a very high value upon; perhaps the highest of all the things that we have available to us. This is important because the higher the level of value to us, the greater the strength of commitment and determination to protecting and building whatever the treasure is. These words are coming together so that we can understand clearly what Christ is getting at through this teaching.

Christ warns us through comparisons, that earthly treasures are subject to deterioration and all sorts of kinds of thievery. Moth and rust, within the context of Jesus’ teaching there, simply stand for the means of potential losses to anything from the treasure. What would they represent? If our treasures are in foods, they become moldy, clothing wears out, houses need repairs, termites eat things away, hurricanes, floods, stocks lose their value, bank failures occur, earthquakes, diseases, and injuries destroy one's health. Nothing physical exists without any deterioration whatever, and the comparisons using the moth and so forth are valid.

We can think of things that we could lose that are physical. God is not forbidding us having these things; it depends on the value that we place on them. That is what is important. If they have overriding influence on our decision-making, then watch out because we will then put our treasure on earthly things and not in the Kingdom of God. This teaching is, of course, a simple and logical rule of thumb applied to our life in Jesus Christ.

Here is another way of stating this particular rule of thumb that Jesus is talking about. It is real simple; doing this produces or achieves that. We put a value on our treasure and if it fits us, we are going to work toward increasing it. If we do not, too bad! In order to force this particular lesson home, Jesus makes the statement that should clinch this for you and me, if we are spiritually minded at all and that is this: Where our treasure is, there will our heart be.

There is no way we can hide this; understand that. The heart, in this context in Matthew 6, is that aspect of our decision-making processes that leads us to determine what we decide to do. This principle of course can be applied in hundreds of things; maybe dozens every day. The heart in this context is that aspect of our decision-making processes that leads us to determine what we decide to do in any case. Heart, in this case, does not indicate the organ that pumps blood throughout our body. It is used by Jesus metaphorically to indicate or describe what makes us tick as a singular human being.

There is nobody else on earth quite exactly perfectly like you. That is hard to understand, because there are so many people on earth. Billions of people have lived and died. But God has ordered things so that every human being, though having the same basic of design, is *unique*. That is awesome! Let that one rattle around your cage every once in a while. There may be somebody who may look pretty close like us but they have not lived the life, had the experiences, had the parents, on and on and on, so that they are perfectly, exactly like you. That is one that I have a hard time wrapping my brain around.

Everybody has a heart as it is being used metaphorically here. I think the simple way that I stated it is about as close as you can get. It is what makes *you* tick. He is using the term heart to describe all those dynamic forces that are constructed from our previous experiences in life and work to make each one of us unique. One's heart, used in this way, includes such things as our intellect, our memories of experiences, our feelings, desires, fears, the emotional makeup, understanding, habits, will, age, and on and on it goes. You are unique in the kind of experiences that you have had, and you have reached different conclusions than somebody else would; and it has put a little bit of a twist on you that is a little bit different.

Let us go back to the book of Matthew once again:

Matthew 15:15-20 Then Peter answered and said to Him, "Explain this parable to us." So Jesus said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies [none of this is pretty there]. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

What is Jesus saying here? He is saying that in the natural human heart, if it is left to its own devices will, because of the carnality within us [the human heart will], be inclined to be self-centered; evil and destruction will be its primary course of action. Such a heart is also referred to in the Bible as being uncircumcised—the heart existing, unseen within a person without its evil and destructive propensities being cut away. That is why it is called uncircumcised.

Incidentally, this is an aside, but sometimes we do not quite get it here. Israel was not the only country in the world with circumcised people; According to the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* that

rite was practiced by other nations surrounding Israel including Egypt. First time I have ever seen where they were specifically stated as being circumcised, or in favor of it. However, there is a little thing we have to add here: The other nations' purpose in using it is not clear as it is with Israel.

In Israel, it was used to outwardly identify the person having it. Notice my wording here: In Israel it was used *outwardly* to identify the person having the circumcision as one who was seriously dedicated, the eighth day from birth, to keeping the agreement made with God to keep the Covenant. It was not to the outside world, but a reminder to the person who had it. And since women were not circumcised, when she married, the circumcision of the husband applied to the woman and to the children. Of course, if they were boys, they would get circumcised anyway. It is kind of interesting, because when they got circumcised, they did not know what in the world was going on, just crying through it. We will get to that too eventually because in Acts 15, circumcision becomes an issue.

I mentioned circumcision because it became an issue the church had to face in the period of time that we are approaching within the context of this introduction. (This is just my introduction. I am getting as bad as my son. I have been forty-five minutes on my introduction.) It is clear from what we know later in the Bible, God never intended circumcision to be practiced for all time, because it had no lasting good spiritual effects on the person having one. They could be just as evil as everybody else. It really did not do anything to change their heart unless they really understood what the circumcision was for. If they did understand, they were going to be a pretty good person to have living in your neighborhood.

This may surprise you. On the other hand, God, who is a spirit being and has no physical heart sustaining His life by pumping blood through the body, is also referred to in the Bible as having a heart. We are going to read one place where it very clearly says that. We are going to go back to the Old Testament in the book of Hosea. This is God speaking, and it takes a little brief explanation to make it this clear.

Hosea 11:1-2 “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. As they called them, so they went from them; they sacrificed to the Baals, and burned incense to carved images.”

The Israel that God is speaking of here is the ten northern tribes. Judea was still in its place, but the ten northern tribes had separated from Judea and they were living in the north. What is happening here is God is speaking of His relationship with Israel, located north of Judea in Samaria. Sometimes that Israel is also called Ephraim and apparently called that because Ephraim was the leading tribe of those ten tribes that comprised northern Israel. In the same manner, southern Israel is referred to as Judea because it was the leading tribe in that grouping.

The pronoun *they* in verse two, “as they called them” is a reference to the prophets God sent to speak to Israel even though Israel separated from Judea, God did not stop working with them, He still sent prophets here and there to them. So the first *they* in the first line of verse two is a reference to the prophets God sent to speak to Israel. Remember Amos was a prophet to the northern tribes. The second and the third *they* are the Israelites the prophets were sent to speak to; so we keep everything straight here.

In this context God says, via His prophet Hosea delivering the prophecies to the people, that He will indeed punish northern Israel for their rebellion but will not completely destroy them. The decision for Him to refrain from northern Israel's utter destruction was not easy but that decision resulted from

God's turmoil in his heart. We are going to go to verse one and we are going to read all the way through verse eleven and I hope that you will understand what is going on here now:

Hosea 11:1-4 “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. As they called them, so they went from them; they sacrificed to the Baals, and burned incense to carved images. I taught Ephraim [ten northern tribes] to walk, taking them by their arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love, and I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck, I stooped and fed them.”

[God] is describing how he provided for Israel the ten northern tribes, even though they separated in rebellion from Judah and the Davidic king line nonetheless:

Hosea 11:5-8 “He shall not return to the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king [here comes the punishment], because they refused to repent. And the sword shall slash in his cities, devour his districts, and consume them, because of their own counsels [they were following their heart]. My people are bent on backsliding from me, and though they call to the Most High, none at all exalt Him [there were false words]. How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart [God has a heart] churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred.”

When He looked at these people and He realizes what is going to happen, that he cannot go back on His warnings to them that they are going to be punished if they continue doing what they are doing, if they would repent then things would not get out of hand like the work. Notice how God expresses His feelings for Israel. My heart churns within me. He had heartburn; He had a pain going through His stomach because of what He was going to have to do in order to bring this repentance to pass.

Hosea 11:8-9 “My heart [God has a heart] churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred. I will not execute the fierceness of My anger . . .”

God chooses that He is still going to punish but He is not going to go as far as His anger at first told Him to do. What does He refer to? His heart. When you put that back into a human being, you can also see that the description of those concepts, ideas, experiences, intellect, and all the things that I gave, are such to any human being and together they make up the heart that leads us to decision making.

Hosea 11:9 “I will not execute the fierceness of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God . . .”

That is interesting. What would a man do? He would resort to evil and destruction because his carnality would drive him in that direction. The evil was in a man's heart. God's heart is not evil and what came out was a sympathetic understanding that still permitted Him to punish very severely the Israelitish people, but not to end them as a nation.

Hosea 11:9-11 “For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst; and I will not come with terror. They shall walk after the Lord. He will roar like a lion. When He roars,

then His sons shall come trembling from the west; they shall come trembling like a bird from Egypt, like a dove from the land of Assyria. and I will let them dwell in their houses,” says the Lord.

That is pretty touching. Are you not glad that God has a heart? I am certainly glad. In this context Hosea is quoting God as saying that while He will indeed punish northern Israel for his rebellion, but He will not *completely* destroy them. It is very likely that the bulk of the Israelites, who emigrated from that Caucasus area from Samaria to there and wandered into Europe, and from there they went to places like the United States and England.

As I neared the end of that first introductory sermon, I reached the point of time that Jesus ministry was completed: The church had been founded. In order to pick up the flow you would have to go back to the first sermon, but I will tell you where we had gone time wise. The church had been founded by Him. He had been crucified and resurrected, and the Holy Spirit given. However, there was no stopping what God had begun in Judea.

As you can begin to tell probably the sermon is taking a turn away from the introduction. God was about to stir the cultural pot more vigorously. Even though Jesus had returned to heaven, the die on the earth was cast, and the preaching of the gospel would be continued on by the apostles. However, open warfare did not break out between the Jews and Romans for several decades. It did not break out until the late sixties and eighty seventies; It never did ever entirely cool off as people, mostly Jews, began to become converted to Jesus and the gospel’s message.

It is also going to be another thirty plus years before the epistle to the Hebrews was written and made available for helpful instruction within the church. and this is probably where I will begin my next sermon so that we can flow right into this.

That instruction was needed because the church was having its own internal problems, somewhat matching what was going on in the world around them. Many Jews were converting and unconverted Jews were reacting with growing violence almost immediately after the Holy Spirit was given on that Pentecost day. Thus both within and without the church, Judea was teetering culturally on the edge of exploding.

This is where we are going to begin, because history really makes a radical change in that area in the world. What shall I call it? The fulcrum that was squeezing everything was God preaching the gospel through the apostles; and that changed the culture of that part of the world dramatically. That will be the major subject that we begin to get into next time I speak.

You will recall from the biblical accounts that just before Passover, on which Jesus was crucified, crowds in Jerusalem wanted to proclaim Jesus as king. Jesus encouraged this in a limited way, when He fulfilled the Scripture by riding a donkey into Jerusalem. But it was not yet the right time for His kingship to occur. That was not a mistake on Jesus’ part; He purposely prodded the people by doing that, and they would be able then, to say He was the promised Seed. He rode a donkey into Jerusalem.

Things really exploded in Judea about two months later, and the fuse that exploded the tension was lit when God gave his Holy Spirit publicly, and the general population became aware that something unusual was occurring in the Temple area. People wanted answers and thus they heard Peter’s sermon regarding what they were witnessing. God Himself was directly stirring the pot.

So in the next sermon, we are going to follow the overview as events occurred, as given in Acts, and it will eventually help us to understand more clearly, both from biblical and profane histories, why the epistle to the Hebrews was written as a magnificent spiritual guide for the church.

It is interesting that God did not do the persecuting. But God did stir the pot that brought the persecuting on the church to come to pass.