

## Hebrews: Its Background (Part Eight)

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We are going to begin this sermon in Isaiah the 40th chapter. You really do not have to turn there because I am just going to be there long enough to read the verse. Isaiah says in verse 8, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever."

**I Peter 1:22-25** Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever."

The eternal truth that is at the heart of what Isaiah first recorded, and then James as well as Peter picked up on it and used it in their thoughts, has much to do with understanding a major truth that is part of correctly grasping what resulted from the church conference reported in Acts the 15th chapter. That truth is that, just because men of prominence say something from the Bible is done away, does not mean that that is the end of the story regarding these words. How is something that never withers, never fades away, in any way compared with something that does, or is done away, as a man might say.

This sermon is the eighth and will be the final one of this series covering the cultural and church background of the writing of the epistle to the Hebrews. I do not apologize that this introductory series has been so long. The epistle to the Hebrews has been a major key of great importance to the salvation of virtually everyone saved since God inspired its writing. And from my point of view, it deserves more and even greater attention. When written, it was very much needed for the spiritual stability and salvation of all within the

church because God's called out ones were being transitioned from the tangled ritualism of Judaism and the outright Gentile pagan organizations to Christianity. Those being converted needed its persuasive instruction.

Now, this epistle provides understanding of worship changes instituted by Christ, during that period the church was in its infancy. It was learning how to perform the preaching of the gospel as the cultural turmoil was underway throughout the Middle East, but especially in Judea. It was like being schooled on the battlefield.

My introductions have only covered to the end of Acts the 15th chapter. According to researchers, this conference took place in AD 49. That is about 28 years after the official founding of the church on that Day of Pentecost, when God dramatically gave His Holy Spirit to those already following Christ. Now, according to my plan, I am going no further in Acts in this introductory series. Acts 15 is at a critical spot because the church had just concluded its first major conference regarding a doctrinal position that needed to be clarified by Christ through the apostles, because the disagreement was endangering church unity.

Now, the world's view of what that conference decided is twisted, woefully incomplete, and has opened the way to mass misunderstandings of God's law and their practical uses in daily life. By now, it is about 1900 years later, the general public that is mostly located in Israelite nations and that considers themselves members of the church, is at best only even mildly aware of the subject of Acts 15 and badly misjudges its correct decision and its effects.

To state what the general membership carelessly believes regarding the Acts 15 decision is that the apostles ratified the doing away with the laws of God in terms of their importance to salvation. No, it most assuredly did not. To teach that is to make Christ a liar. Was it not Jesus who said in Matthew 15: 17-20 that not one jot or tittle would be removed until all is fulfilled? How does that compare to what the Protestants mostly are saying? Jesus says, not one jot or tittle will be removed, and general Christianity out in the world is saying that the law is basically done away. How much more specific could Jesus get than what He said? What Jesus said includes Moses' declaration that we are to live by every word of God.

Also, some claim that salvation by grace, with the emphasis on grace, became a new means of saving people with this conference's decisions and introduction of the New Covenant as God and mankind entered into the church era. Again, no, it was not. Salvation has always been by grace through faith from the very beginning. Nothing new under the sun with God.

Now, not a single person has ever deserved salvation, including outstanding personalities like Abel, Enoch, and Noah. The Acts 15 conference's decision did indeed immediately set aside the need for circumcision of new converts. And there are logical spiritual reasons given why it was set aside. But at the same time, that decision, or I should say the discussion while that decision was being discussed at that time, did indeed immediately set aside the need for circumcision of new converts.

Please turn to Acts the 15th chapter. I am going to read several verses right from Acts 15 where the decision was made. I am going to read verses 15 through 20.

**Acts 15:15-20** And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written [The speaker here is not Peter, it is James. James was putting a conclusion on what Peter started.]: 'After this I will return and rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things.' [remember this is in the discussion about the decision that was just about ready to be made] "Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore [James says] I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God [that is, not trouble them regarding the issue about circumcision], but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood."

Now to encapsulate what James said, God has been working toward the same end, the same goals from the very beginning. That is why He says "known to God from eternity are all His works." God has been working toward the same goal from the very beginning, is what he said there. He then mentions the Gentiles. Now you apply God working toward the same goals, God

talking about rebuilding the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and that God is still working on. That is what James is concluding. God is still working toward the same end, but now it includes Gentile folks.

To put a conclusion on what James said. He said, we are not going to bother them with circumcision because the testimony given by the speakers who spoke before James is valid. For example, Peter spoke: God did not require circumcision of Cornelius and those in his family. They also had testimony from the apostles that Jesus never required any circumcision when He was baptizing people either. So it was very clear to James that they were not to require circumcision of the Gentiles. That much is clear.

Here is what I am aiming toward. It is this in verse 20. "But" [the but is in retrospect of the phrasing that appears just before it] "Therefore, I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God." There is plenty of information from the apostles, from Jesus, that it is not required, "but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted from idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood."

Now, here is a conclusion that can be very easily reached. And that is, where do those four things in verse 20 that they were supposed to abstain from come from? They came from the same book that talked about circumcision.

Remember how I opened this sermon because they basically, out there in the world, worldly Christianity, we will call it, said that the law is done away. Here is James refuting it because he pulled those four things that the Gentiles were to abstain from right out of the Old Testament. Circumcision was an anomaly now. There are good reasons for that. The biggest one being that Jesus never required it. That was plenty of proof for the apostles. If He did not require it, then it is not part of Christianity anymore.

But what about the idea that comes from the world that the law is done away? James refutes that because he took those four things right out of the Old Testament that the Gentiles were to abstain from. [Editor: Not sure this is exactly what JWR meant/wanted to say. (They were not abstained at all. I should not say that. They are not biblical at all. Let me get that straight.)]

Now, let me add one more thing. And that is, that it says, "Known to God from eternity are all His works." What James is saying there in different wording is that God, knowing from the beginning, never planned on dropping those laws out of the Old Testament because the Gentiles that He was calling needed to understand them for their conversion. Do you get what I am getting at here? The Old Testament is *not* done away. The laws that are in there are not done away. But at the same time, there were some worship practices that the Israelites were to do under the Old Covenant they are not to do anymore. They are simply set aside but they still appear in the Old Testament.

Do you get the fine line there? Because those things remained in the Old Testament so that they could provide background for instruction that was going to go to the new converts. It was a good plan.

So God never planned on dropping those laws because the Gentiles He was calling needed to understand them for their conversion. Old Testament worship regulations were not done away with. They still appear in the Bible. How could this be clearer? So, all four of those commands named in verse 20 are in the Old Testament, and one of them, brethren, appears as early in the Bible as Genesis the ninth chapter, and it is still binding to this day. But circumcision was immediately erased as no longer binding on the church.

Now, the conference decision did eventually help clarify and set aside a number of other Old Testament worship practices. These still appear in the Old Testament. They are still written there. They are part of the history of God's people from the very beginning. They are not binding on us, but they are still there. They are not done away, they are still there. The conference decision did eventually help clarify and set aside a number of other Old Covenant worship practices like: the sacred ceremonial use of the Temple. Can you imagine that? It did away with that, in that sense, as a means of worshipping God. The Levitical priesthood no longer binding; animal sacrifices no longer binding (although Paul sacrificed an animal during a time and it was not wrong for him to do it, but it would have been wrong if his salvation depend upon it because it does not. But he used it in order to show that he had nothing against the Jewish practices).

What about the Sabbath? Prominent people in the religious world said that the Sabbath is simply ceremonial. God calls it "*My Sabbath*, set apart from other days. It is *Mine*." So just because men declare that it is ceremonial, does not mean it is not only ceremonial. It is one of the ten eternal spiritual laws. You cannot get a law higher than those Ten.

But those specific elements and more were not more fully clarified until much more preaching was done, that is, within the church, until what became The New Testament was written and made available for study by the membership. What helped immensely was that the epistle to the Hebrews was written and distributed to the congregations. It filled in the gap of the lack of understanding of our need for daily contact with our High Priest in heaven.

What I have given you here now is just a brief overview. Let us continue by going back to that brief and blunt statement from Jesus. Jesus intended what became Matthew 5:17-20 to be a general overall statement of a reality for His way of life. He most certainly did not mean that nothing would ever be changed or even set aside for a period of time within the Father's and Son's creation procedures.

Now, we will go from here to the conclusion of a very interesting discussion Jesus had with a Gentile woman, a Samaritan woman, that appears in the book of John. It is in John the fourth chapter and it was a long conversation between the two. It takes up almost the entire chapter.

**John 4:19-21** The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet [the highest one that ever God ever sent. But she was pretty sharp, this lady]. Our fathers [she goes on] worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming [now, look at this] when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father."

When did Jesus say this? It was long before Acts 15 was written. But here He is prophesying that there is a time coming when the people would not, including this Samaritan woman, worship at the Temple nor in Jerusalem worship the Father.

**John 4:22-24** "You worship [Jesus goes on] what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth."

What we have here is an ever so brief preview from Jesus Christ that some pretty radical changes were not very far in the future from that point of time. That probably took place somewhere between the first and the second year of His ministry. Now, as you are thinking about this, it is helpful to know that there existed a measure of competitiveness between the Jews and the Samaritan versions of correct religious practices. And I believe that this competitiveness is partly why the Samaritan woman raised this specific "which mountain" issue. It was a doctrinal difference between the two.

Now, Christ responded to her question in an interesting way. He did not answer her question bluntly and directly. Her question was, should God be worshipped on the mountain the Temple in Jerusalem is erected on, or should He be worshipped on the mountain here in Samaria, which was probably Mount Gerizim?

Note this: in light of the context of the content of the discussion covered in the Acts 15 conference regarding a change being sought regarding a single doctrine, that is, circumcision, recall that God directly charged Abraham with doing this. Therefore, the practice of this act of worship had been part of Israel's religious history for well over 1,500 years, going back from Jesus to Abraham. But still circumcision was no little issue, something that had been practiced by the Israelite people all that period of time, a millennium and a half at least.

Thus Christ's reply to the woman takes on much greater significance, because Christ's reply is clearly signaling that changes regarding the worship of God are indeed coming. Probably before the second year of His ministry He was telling this Gentile woman changes are coming. Actually, that was, you might say, doing her justice for the level of the questions that she was asking and the perception that she was in touch with Somebody who was a

prophet of God. And she wanted to know, at least to some degree, I want to be right in my worship. Which mountain are we supposed to worship on? Jesus' reply was very interesting. Neither one! And you know that came to pass. The most shocking one is the one that the Temple was on. And that came to pass too. The people were worshipping there not for very much longer because the Jews went kaput when the Romans finally smashed them for good in 70 AD and that ended worship in the Temple.

Jesus clearly stated, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father." The Jerusalem aspect of His reply is rather shocking for a major, major descendant of Abraham. Jesus is thus signaling that some significant changes were going to occur involving worship practices and structure. He did not mean that the changes would happen all at once, but some worship issues were going to change.

Now did the circumcision decision wipe the Old Testament away? Absolutely not. Let us go back there to Deuteronomy 8 just to clarify one particular point.

**Deuteronomy 8:1-3** [Moses is speaking. He says] "Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to your fathers. And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, to test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna, which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord."

Nothing there is done away. Moses gave no indication that these things were done away. I think you should be able to tell to this point, I am at least trying at *this* point to clarify something. It is really a minor point. There is a big difference between "done away" and simply "set aside" and still be part of the story flow of the Bible itself. Those things are needed for a broad and

deep understanding of what has been going on from the beginning, and they fit in to the story so that we carry with us, not just a bunch of rules, but we have within us God's approach to saving mankind with all of its dressing from one end to the other.

Now, consider these round numbers. Moses wrote that in the last month of his life, roughly 1500 years before Christ was born, and thus Israelite males were circumcised all that time. Now add to that another 50 years or so to bring us to roughly 49 AD and the church conference. And after all this time, here is the church's leadership seeking clarification regarding a doctrine that has been practiced long before Israel even became a nation. And the church has existed only 30 years by the time this issue surfaced. And yet after Christ and Deuteronomy 8:3, it is still in the Bible. And God says there that we are to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord, and that includes the Old Testament.

Now, do I believe that the apostles made the correct decision? Absolutely. They made the correct decision. As a foundation to begin thinking, consider that we did not make the Old Covenant through Jesus Christ, we made the New Covenant. Some things are different there. It does not require circumcision. It requires baptism and its symbolism of rising to a new life. And though some Old Covenant practices are indeed set aside in terms of actual practice, the broader instruction that includes the Old Testament is still needed by His children to give depth and breadth to our understanding.

It might be good to take just a couple of minutes to be reminded of where *we* are headed in our life, and where we are headed in our life requires that we know all about circumcision, requires that we know what the Old Testament says. Let us go back to Revelation 5.

**Revelation 5:4-10** So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders,

stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

And then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. Now when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song [remember we are looking forward to the Kingdom of God], saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and open its seals; You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests [or it could say a kingdom of priests, either way is correct] to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

Do not you want to be ruled by rulers who know what they are doing? Who know where they are going, who know how they are to accomplish these things? That is what God is doing in order for us to be prepared for our destination. Here, we have to have a good, broad, and as deep as possible understanding of God's Word from the beginning to the end. Now, there is an additional reason why we need it. It is because of our destination.

**Revelation 14:1-4** Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpers playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.

That is an awesome destination for our lives—following the Lamb wherever He goes! Do you not think those people are going to need to be prepared to be right in with that squad of 144,000 who are carrying out the Lamb's orders?

**Revelation 14:4-5** These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

What we are looking at in Acts the 15th chapter is the beginning of a long but practical process of forming the more rigid doctrinal structure of the church—the Israel of God—in order to prepare the called-out ones for what we just saw at the conclusion of a creative process of the Father and Son in Revelation 5 and Revelation 14. But we are seeing it at a critical juncture in the church's life.

Now, you might recall that the church is the Family instrument God is creating, and at one and the same time, using to reeducate the entire world into the way everybody must live—God's way. The real issue in Acts the 15th chapter conference is: At a critical time in the life of the church, will the apostles and other church members follow Christ or the world of Judaism? If they had caved on the issue of circumcision, they would have chosen the world. That is sobering.

But instead, they decided to follow what they were taught by Jesus Christ. That was their main point. Peter gave it. The apostle Paul was in on that conference and he got the point pretty quick because he was already teaching it: that circumcision was not needed. It was not part of the New Covenant. And so the apostles decided it would be Christ.

How did the apostles accomplish the changes? They used the tried and true method. They sought the Boss is what they did.

Go with me now first to II Timothy chapter 2. Paul writing to Timothy says,

**II Timothy 2:15** Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

That is what they did. They rightly divided the word of truth flowing from the Scriptures and their experiences with Christ for those three and one-half years. We do not want to leave that out. That was set up by Christ to make sure that those Twelve that He chose had the kind, the quality of instruction that was undiluted, from Him, right to their minds.

Let us go back to the book of Mark. And when they were put to the test, they passed with flying colors. Do not forget that one thing I said that was the real issue in Acts 15. It was critical and the apostles made the right choice.

**Mark 13:35-37** "Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"

The key to understanding what He is driving at here is this: who is speaking? It is Christ who is speaking. Now, the key word here is in verse 37. "And what I say." The keyword is *I*. What is important was what Christ said and that is what the apostles paid attention to. They learned their lessons under Jesus Christ. They remembered what *He* said, not what others said about the Bible or about Him or about government or whatever it happens to be. Christ's direct command is: "And what *I* say to you." That is what is important.

This is what is important to the church. Christ's words are to be accepted by *all* in the church.

The epistle to the Hebrews is inspired. It is very close to being the final piece of legislation by Christ, through the apostles, to create a doctrinal program fitting for New Covenant membership. And so the book of Hebrews, it *is* Christ speaking. That they recognized from the time that they spent with Him. It is Christ speaking. So the epistle was passed around to all of the

congregation when it was finally written. Its instruction was most certainly not restricted only to Jewish Christians. It is fully intended for *all* Christians because the instruction is vital to God's creative program under the New Covenant. But it went first to the Jews because of what was happening to them, both spiritually and culturally within their nation, because of their faith in Jesus as their Savior, as contrasted with the uncalled's belief.

We can be very thankful that the apostles recognized the Word of Christ. And so they made the right choice and went in that direction despite the fact that the church was splitting. How big the split was going to be, I have no idea. But the pressure that the Judaizers were putting on was great. And they had all these arguments: "We've been doing this since Abraham and you're going to wipe it away. No wonder they say that you're the people who have turned the world upside down!"

That was a major, major doctrine. It identified who the Israelitish people were and it had identified then the nations that God had made a covenant with. No other nations on earth; and circumcision was the sign, the seal, that they were the ones that God had favored. And so whenever this issue came up, those people had strong arguments that were worth roughly 1500, 1600 years of practice. And it was brushed aside because of the Word of Christ. That is how much stock that the apostles put in it. His word, plus the example that He gave them for three and a half years. And when that was put to test, they found out that not having to circumcise Cornelius and his household matched perfectly with what Christ had done during the three and a half years that He and His group were baptizing people there in the Judean area. They recognized it and they followed it.

Now, I have here some of the characteristics of that mostly Jewish congregation and what they were going through. And I am going to go first to Hebrews 5, verse 12. Just some of the characteristics of that congregation. We can glean something from this. The author writes here in verse 12,

**Hebrews 5:12** For though by this time [they had been converted by this time] you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

One of the additional characteristics at the time the book of Hebrews was written was that it was a congregation that had quite a number of older members within it. They were not young in the faith. In some cases, they probably would have been considered as old timers in the faith, especially as compared to some Gentiles.

This section of the sermon is kind of a bit of a tangent, but I want to want us to make sure that we understand the characteristics of this congregation.

**Acts 8:1** Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time, a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles.

Not only were they older in the faith (that congregation), they had also gone through some difficult periods of time suffering a great deal of persecution. Let us go to Acts 13, verse 24. Now this verse here is not something that just jumps right out at you. But we do know this,

**Acts 13:24** After John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

That verse gives us pretty strong information that the Jerusalem congregation was apparently large in numbers. So it is entirely possible that the epistle to the Hebrews first went to the congregation in Jerusalem. In Acts 11:22 it gives the indication that it was very probably considered the headquarters church. It does not say that directly, but it leans in that direction.

That is a quick summary of the kind of people who were in the congregation there in Jerusalem when the epistle to the Hebrews first came to them.

Now, what is the epistle's most direct purpose? As you can see, we are moving away from Acts 15 to bigger concepts that are within the epistle. So what is the epistle's most direct purpose? Well, there were clearly urgent needs brewing for the teaching contained within the epistle to the church because it deals with maintaining our relationship with our Savior and High Priest. You might recall to mind John 15:1-5 when Jesus made His, "I am the vine, you are the branches" statement and "Without Me you can do nothing."

What this statement amounts to is this: the convert's growth in the glorification of God by means of our producing the fruit of the Spirit hinges to a great degree upon the quality of the convert's relationship with Christ. Now, this one specific relationship, a spiritual one, is in all of life that important.

I went through some of the characteristics of the congregation there so that you would see that it was just like many congregations that we might have here in this period of time. There were people in the congregation who were older in the faith, there were people who were younger in the faith. There were those who were well educated spiritually, some who were not. But the book, that is, the epistle to the Hebrews, clarified above all what the church member needs in order to produce the fruit that Jesus was speaking of, regardless of whether they were old time members, new members, or whatever.

That epistle makes it clear that we must have the relationship, a spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ. And that relationship is the most important relationship in all of life—whether they were new members or old members, whether they were male, whether they were female, whatever. And though that statement that I make here is never directly stated within the epistle, it is the overall thought the epistle to Hebrews conveys to those who seriously study its contents.

The epistle was primarily intended to first, instruct Jewish converts and then Gentile converts as God began calling them, to thoroughly grasp that the entire Old Covenant priesthood and their responsibilities at the Temple had in fact been supplanted by the single High Priesthood of Jesus Christ. He was indeed God as a man.

My next sermon is going to be covering this in more detail. But the epistle to the Hebrews is introductory. That He was God as a man, He—Jesus Christ—was indeed the Messiah. He is our Savior. He remains God as our High Priest, seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven, in addition to being our King. Now, that is a bare bones summary, but it is also true. It was their responsibility, if they were to continue following Christ, like the apostles did, and at the same time, lead those who are being converted in the right way, to rightly divide the truths they were already possessing.

Remember, there is about 18 or 20 years between the conference in 49 <sup>AD</sup> and the very probable date of the publishing of the epistle to the Hebrews. It is about 15-16 years between the two that they had to go without any written instruction regarding the position of Jesus Christ. And yet here we are, talking about *the most important relationship any of us will ever have*. If you get nothing out of these sermons, I hope you will get that. And this is where I am going to pick up when I begin my next sermon because we are going to spend a little bit of time on Jesus Christ and how important He is to us.

Now, given first consideration of the teaching is what Christ has already said on the question, whatever it might be, doctrinal question at hand, and whatever they happen to be about. What Christ said is for all Christians. Here is an example. What did Christ say in Matthew 5:17-20? What Christ said there is when people come into the church, that relationship with Christ is where Christians begin their evaluations regarding their conduct.

If they are being told that the law is done away, where are they headed when Christ said it is not done away! Whose word is important? The prominent theologian or Christ? The most important words ever uttered to us are the words of Jesus Christ. That is why I said partway through this sermon: What was the real issue in Acts the 15th chapter? Though it was all about one doctrine that had been practiced by Judaism for well over 1500 years, the real issue there was who were the apostles going to listen to? The life of the church in one sense was at stake right there.

You know very well, you have picked up enough knowledge in your time in attending services in the church of God to know that those words are not done away, that the laws are not done away, that the relationship with Jesus Christ is what keeps us attached to God and this way of life. It keeps us in touch with our Commander in Chief. That was the purpose of the epistle to the Hebrews: how to maintain that relationship and how important that relationship is to us.

Now, this is just about where I probably am going to pick up my sermons as we actually get into the epistle to the Hebrews. It is probably going to take

me two more sermons. They will not be introductions. They will actually be out of the epistle to the Hebrews. But, brethren, there is such depths to the material there! Spiritual depth. It is almost unbelievable.

How are you going to deal with that Somebody who is greater than angels, who is greater than prophets, who is greater than all of those great people in the 11th chapter of Hebrews? Greater than Moses, greater than Joshua, greater than Abraham. We will see when we get into that. And I will tell you, brethren, He is really something. It is wonderful to have Him on our side.