



I once heard of a father who gave his 3-year-old daughter a play necklace made of plastic pearls. It was one of her favorite dress-up toys. Any time that she hosted a tea party with her stuffed animals or dressed up for a special occasion, she put on the pearls. They were very special to her.

Over the course of the next several years, the plastic pearl necklace got a lot of use and wear. Even after the young girl grew out of it, the necklace was still a prized possession. As she was about to turn 12, her dad decided he would give her a new pearl necklace, but this one would be made of actual pearls. Still, he wanted her to value the giver of the gift and not just the jewelry. He wanted her to see the string of pearls as an expression of love and trust between father and child.

So, he asked her to do something he knew would be difficult for her. Before giving her the new pearls as a present, he was first going to ask her to give the old plastic pearl necklace to him, without knowing why he was asking and without expecting to get them back.

He purchased the new necklace and was ready to approach her. Upon asking her to trust him by giving up her prized plastic pearl necklace, she initially said no. He asked her again the next day. She again said no but looked at him with less skepticism. When he asked her the third day, she asked why. He told her that he had a gift he had always wanted to give to her. He saw that she was ready to receive it, but she would need to show that she can trust her father by giving up the original gift of the plastic pearl necklace.

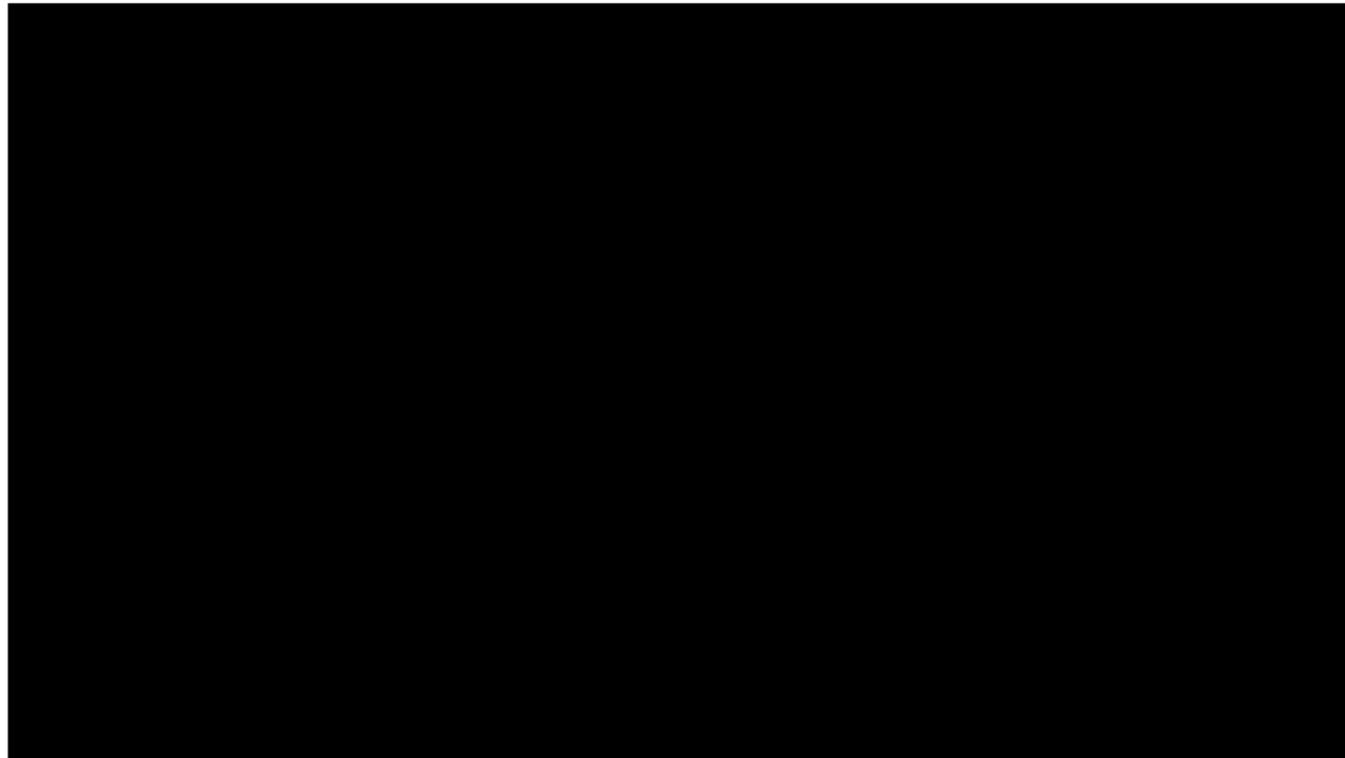
She felt some reluctance, but her dad had always shown himself as loving and true. So, she gave up her toy. Asking her to close her eyes and put her hands out, her dad gave her the real string of pearls. Opening her eyes, she was over the moon excited. He had allowed her to interact with the toy pearls for years, having her learn the value of such jewelry, wanting her to see how she should value a real pearl necklace from her father.

As we enter into our study of the book of Hebrews, we need to realize that we are hearing a message. We are hearing a message that was spoken to a particular people

at a particular time who were struggling. They questioned whether they should give up the real treasure of Christ Jesus for that which foreshadowed and prepared them for Christ. As great as the Mosaic covenant and system was, it was only a string of plastic pearls in comparison to the pearl of great price. As Jesus told a parable of a merchant who sold all that he had for the priceless pearl he had found, so those receiving this message in letter form needed to realize the worth of Christ as being far beyond anything else they could have.



**1:1 God, having spoken in  
former times in fragmentary and  
varied fashion to our forefathers  
by the prophets...**



Pray

I've titled this series: Promises Faithfully Kept

Hebrews will teach and remind us that God has remained faithful to His character and purposes, that He has fulfilled His promises of salvation by means of the Son, and that we in turn are to keep our promise of faith in Christ.

# God has spoken and remained faithful to His character and Word.

- God has spoken and remained faithful to His character and Word
- o Storyline of Scripture

- The same problem but finally and fully answered

When a book is unfamiliar and you want to understand it better, it is good to keep reading. Most of the time, interacting with the author of the book through his or her words, concepts, and style will over time make you more familiar with what the author is trying to say.

Have you ever read through a book and then later started that book over? The second time around usually brings to light the pattern of how the author was preparing you for what was still to come. You now see why certain people and relationships were highlighted. It now becomes apparent why some scenes or instructions are included and not others.

The author of Hebrews writes to his audience to say, “Let’s look at THE Book again. Let’s look at it in light of Christ Jesus, who is the culmination of all of God’s revelation. All of Scripture and all that it contained was leading us to Him. So, let’s go back to look at it again and see the Son.”

One of the reasons the elders felt led to choose Hebrews is that it will prepare us for reading the Old Testament in light of Christ. It is good and healthy for a church to take in all of Scripture together. Jesus taught about himself in light of the whole of the Old Testament in Luke 24. Paul disciplined the Ephesian elders in light of the whole counsel of God’s Word. We, like Timothy, are charged to proclaim the Word of God, and by the way, ALL Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ. So, Hebrews will prepare us to see that God has consistently been communicating to us about salvation in His Son through history and through every stroke of Scripture.

## ■ Promise-fulfillment

One way in which God would keep his promises was by means of declarations or predictions that would be ultimately fulfilled in Christ. The particular promises that the author of Hebrews is interested in talking about are the ones regarding the Son or Messiah. Some declarations are explicitly pointing us forward to Jesus, others not so clearly until after the Incarnation.

In looking at Hebrews 11, we see that the author understood that even the creation of the heavens and earth was intended to be a matter of faith that looked forward. Even as we look back to it, the original creation of the heavens and earth are intended to point us to the Son. God created by means of a Word. As John, Paul, and the author of Hebrews point out, the Son is that powerful Word.

Of course, there are more explicit prophetic utterances, such as in the Psalms regarding the Son, whom David refers to as his Lord. Even the very Scriptures themselves are seen by the author as being the very breathed out word of God that has bearing for us now in light of Christ. Within Hebrews Scripture is sometimes referred to as being the Word of the Father, sometimes the Word of the Son, and sometimes Word of the Spirit, all of which is intended to point us to the Son by faith so that we follow Him.

## ■ Antitypes—Types

God also used the author of this New Testament book to point out particular people, structures, and events that were intended to lead us to anticipate Jesus. In a good book that tells a story, the author will use foreshadowing to prepare us for what is to come. One of the ways that God foreshadowed in history and Scripture is that he brought into place particular people or structures that filled a certain role in a way that was intended to make us look for a greater reality. Jesus is our great high priest, but not like Aaron, more like Melchizadek. Jesus brings us into the presence of God how a high priest came into the presence of God in the Temple but in a greater way. We shouldn't want to go back to the shadows. We shouldn't want to go back to plastic pearls. Once the reality is present, we must choose to go with the Son, the Messiah, our only hope of salvation and rest with God.

## ■ The End Times

The author of Hebrews holds together a now-and-not-yet understanding of salvation. Jesus has ushered in the end times. We are in the final stages of history prior to Christ's return. We have been in the end times for nearly 2,000 years since Jesus's death and resurrection. He wants us to see that we are able to find rest in Christ, who is the means by which we are able to come into God's presence now, even as we await the fullness of this reality.

If you think that you are going through hard times in your life, you can identify with the original recipients of this letter. We do not actually know where they were based. The most likely answer is Rome, based on the final words of this letter that mention greetings from those from Italy, appearing as if some from Rome were with the author when he sent the letter. The audience appears to have a strong Jewish background but also appear to have been influenced by Greek culture, meaning many were likely of a Hellenistic Jewish background prior to coming to faith in Christ.

If they were based in Rome, they likely had been expelled from Rome by Claudius because of disputes between Jewish groups over Christ, returning only after Claudius had died. And yet the letter was apparently written prior to the Temple being destroyed in Jerusalem, based on how the author talks about it the Tabernacle/Temple structure. At that point, Judaism was an accepted religion, and Christianity was seen as a Jewish sect. So they were living in a time and place in which Judaism was viewed as acceptable, but Christians were treated as outcasts.

Jewish Christians were rejected by Jews as chasing after a blasphemous imposter, but Christians knew that Rome would not look kindly upon a new upshoot religion that was not already endorsed by the government. So, the recipients were feeling strong social pressure.

They felt like they had lost many of their foundational relationships with family and social identity. Others were losing financially because of how their employers looked down upon their new faith in Christ. They apparently had also lost a generation of leaders to help guide them. They were tempted to go back to a religious system that they knew had no real power to save but could help them fit in better within culture.

As Jim Elliot would later say, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to keep that which he cannot lose.” The recipients of Hebrews needed that same encouragement in the face of difficulty. Jesus has conquered all, but it does not yet look like everything is subjected to Him. So, we need to have a now-and-not-yet view toward the end of all things. We need to keep that which we cannot lose.

Jesus has already won salvation for us. He has already made the way for us to rest with God. But we are in a time of testing. We are like the wilderness generation who was promised a land but who had to go through the wilderness, trusting God to get them there. We need to be like those who trusted God and not like those who fell away because they never actually believed God.

# God kept His promises by bringing forth His Son as the True Author and Finisher of salvation.

- God promised to bring forth His Son as the True Author and Finisher of Salvation

- o Prophetic bits, pieces, and facets

In today's verse that we looked at earlier, we see the beginning of the author's grand assumption, that God has spoken. When we open God's written Word, we hold copies and translations of God's very Word. When you read it, you are reading what God said by means of prophets and apostles.

But the author starts with a statement about how God was speaking. Basically, you never got the full picture or full message prior to Jesus. Everything up to the Incarnation, was preparing us for the Son to come and identify with us, reveal God to us, and bring us to God, making the way by means of His sacrifice that He offered up to the Father.

So, don't be shocked when you read through the Old Testament if you end up asking, "What is this all about?" or "How does all of this come together?" The Hebrew Bible is not just a history of the Israelite people relating to God. It is God revealing Himself in various ways at various points, never in fullness, along a progressive line looking forward to a true and greater Israel and greater prophet, priest, and king, who reveals God in every way, because He is God.

- o Identification with his brothers in our weakness

One of the most audacious things about God coming to us is the means by which God came. The Son identified with us in our weakness. His becoming like us gives hope both for salvation and for overcoming sin. As John Owen said, either we are to put sin to death or it will be putting us to death. Jesus had every opportunity to sin like we did but never did. By looking to Him by faith and consistently following Him according to His Word, the Spirit makes us able to overcome sin.

But even if we say no to every temptation for the rest of our lives, we would still need a rescuer to save us from all our previous sins. God is holy. You do not want to fall into the wrath of God when you have the opportunity presented to you to believe in Christ, the one and only way to salvation with God.

o Access now to God with boldness and one day in fullness

So we have confidence now to enter into God's rest. You are able to have salvation now. You are able to find acceptance in Christ now. You do not need to question whether you are loved or accepted now.

But...after you have made it past the initial excitement and joy of having faith in Christ, how do you handle disappointing circumstances? Do you run to God?

The recipients of the letter had a strong respect and understanding for the Temple structure. They understood very well about God's holiness. But now they have this message of the gospel. They were failing to see that this good news expresses God's holiness in a way the Temple could only anticipate.

The gospel is not some get out of jail free card that you are supposed to present at the judgment seat of Christ. It is the declaration that the holy presence of God in heaven is accessible to you by means of the Son's perfect sacrifice. It is the news that you are now adopted and belong by faith.

There are very few people I am okay with tapping me on the shoulder to wake me up in the middle of the night. That is because those are the few people I know who are supposed to be in my house at night. If my daughter wakes me up because she had a nightmare, I will understand and help her go back to sleep.

If someone who is not supposed to be in my house wakes me up that way, I'm probably going to come out of the sheets swinging. God never sleeps, but He does have expectation for how we are to approach Him. Because of Christ Jesus, we have the right to approach God with full confidence that we belong like a child belongs in the house of her parents.

But we also know that there is a time still to come when we will not have to approach God about the nightmares we live through sometimes. As Jonathan Edwards said, heaven is a world of love. Our full experience of that new reality is still to come for us, if we are truly shown to have been in Christ.

**If we are truly in salvation, we must persevere in keeping our promise of faith.**

If we are truly in salvation, we must persevere in keeping our promise of faith.

o The hope of eternal salvation is salvation in Christ now.

If we are to have confidence that Christ will judge us as faithful before His throne, we must look to Him with faith in this life. Do not wait. Do not toy around with the gospel. Maybe you have been around church. Maybe you grew up attending the worship services of a particular congregation weekly. But have you personally ever responded to the hope of salvation in Jesus?

I've never met someone who is truly saved who was glad they WAITED to give their life to Christ.

Don't buy into the lies of this world about what will fill you up or comfort you. You cannot finally fulfill yourself with another app or another appetizer. You will regret your one-night stands, but you will never regret following the One who stands for you before the Father. You will never find complete acceptance among any group within this world, but you will find acceptance by the Creator of all things when you identify with the Messiah rejected by men.

o We must identify with Christ and show our identity through our lives.

We will show our faith through our actions. Who or what we worship will show up in what we desire and pursue. We are not saved by works, but our works will show if we are saved. Your life, then, needs to be set apart from this world's standards and conformed to God's standard revealed in Christ. He is the Son we are to be like. If God disciplines us when we act outside of that standard, it is an expression of loving discipline. One of the ways that God formatively disciplines us is through warning us.

o Warnings are for the saved, for legitimate children.

There are several warning passages within the book of Hebrews. They have frightened many a Christian, even causing some to question if they can be confident they are saved. Yes, you can and should be confident in God's salvation in Christ. But you should be critical of yourself. Sometimes we confuse confidence in self for confidence in Christ. If you are left to your own devices, you will fall away. But if you belong to Christ, he will keep until that day.

So what are the warning passages for? Or should I ask, who are the warning passages for? They are for those who will listen. Who will listen to the message of the Lord?

We want to be people who have ears and who hear, not like those who fell in the wilderness who would not listen with hearts of faith. So, take the warnings to heart, but in the right way, as means of grace that God uses to propel you toward himself and away from sin. There are many who have traveled this road before you. They can help you in persevering in the faith.

o We have a lineage of Christian faith we should learn from: From the canon and the church.

We'll have the opportunity to reconsider some OT saints and the storyline of Scripture in light of Christ. The author of Hebrews will teach us to see Abraham, Sarah, and Moses as exemplars of Christian faith, not because they understood what the Messiah would be like in every way. No, they trusted that God was leading them toward the means of salvation, toward the Messiah who would save His people from the oppression of sin and build them a city to reside in with God forever.

We have all of the faithful in both the Old and New Testaments to learn from about persevering in faith. We also have those whom God has given to the church, both those who have encouraged us from afar and those in this local church. The author of Hebrews did not come to faith within the church receiving the letter. He was writing to encourage them from afar. And so we will see how we can be encouraged by those distant from, either by time, culture, or geography. But he also highlighted past and current elders of the church, for the church to look up to them for their faith in Christ, their teaching about him, and their examples of perseverance.

Speaking of elders, this letter is not a typical letter but a sermon. It is intended to encourage the hearers of it in keeping faith in the One who has kept His promises and who will keep us. While it was written with a particular audience in mind, the Spirit also intended it for us. By it He exhorts to persevere in Christian faith.

So, basically, throughout our time in Hebrews together, you will be getting sermons based on a prior sermon. Please see this as an opportunity to hear and believe in Jesus and the message of the gospel now. Maybe you have thought of Christianity as showing up for Sundays so you could check your box of religion and somehow prove to God that you are worthy. Maybe you have had a false hope that God would somehow give you whatever you want in this life now, much like a genie, making God your servant.

If either of those views of Christianity describe you, it is time to trade in your plastic toy for the real thing. It is time to move beyond shadows and come face to face with your Creator. Please don't think that He will be impressed by your holiness. Instead, place your life into His hands by trusting the crucified and risen Christ. Open your eyes and be amazed by His grace.