



HEBREWS

An Introduction

Is Hebrews...

- A Letter?
- A Sermon?
- A Position Paper?

No other book in the New Testament presents the challenges that Hebrews does, and as Calvin said, “no book...speaks so clearly of the priesthood of Christ, which so highly exalts the virtue and dignity of that only true sacrifice which He offered by His death...and...so fully explains that Christ is the end of the Law.”

No Internal Evidence

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- For example, Romans 1:1, 7 –

“Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God...to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Unique Content

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- It is not typically Pauline, Johannine, or Petrine, and yet, it presents one of the most majestic presentations of Christology in the NT.
- **It begins and reads like a sermon.**
 - 13:22a – “But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation”
- **But it concludes like an epistle.**
 - 13:22b-25 – “for I have written to you briefly. Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. Grace be with you all.”

Hebrews as Sermon

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- Hebrews is a biblical, text-driven exposition of Psalm 110:1 & 4.
- Its application to the church is drawn from its exegesis of Old Testament texts.
- It is also an example of pastoral preaching that addresses the needs of the local church by satisfying exposition, exhortation, and encouragement.

Why No Salutation?

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- The original introduction was lost.
- The prescript was omitted for canonical reasons.
 - Barnabas, Apollos
- The one who delivered the letter orally would have supplied the missing introduction.
- The introduction was deliberately omitted by the author.
 - Paul, Priscilla

Why the Postscript?

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- A late addition by the church in the canonization process.
- The author added it to make the letter appear to be a Pauline prison epistle.
- The book was translated from a Hebrew or Aramaic original, and only the postscript is originally Greek.

My Position

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1. There was never an introduction.

2. The author was known to the hearers.



Origen:

**“As to who
wrote the
epistle, truly
only God
knows.”**

Candidates Receiving Votes

- **Paul**
- Luke
- **Barnabas**
- Apollos
- **Priscilla**
- Clement of Rome
- **Mary**
- Anonymous



History of the Text

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The oldest extant text of Hebrews is found in p46 (c. AD 200) where it occurs immediately following Romans (most likely due to its length) in a 14-letter Pauline collection.

Early Church Witness

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- Hebrews is mentioned in 1 Clement (late 1st century), but no authorship is ascribed.
- **Pantaenus (late 1st century) ascribed Hebrews to Paul.**
- Clement of Alexandria, student of Pantaenus (late 2nd century) is quoted by Eusebius as saying that Paul wrote Hebrews originally in Hebrew and Luke translated it into Greek.
 - **This is why, he said, there are stylistic similarities between Hebrews and Luke-Acts.**
 - **He also conjectured that Paul did not prefix his name to the epistle because the Jews were prejudiced against him.**

Early Church Witness

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- The Muratorian Canon (c. 180 A.D.) referred to the 13 epistles of Paul but did not include Hebrews.
- **Tertullian (late 2nd / early 3rd century) ascribed authorship to Barnabas.**
- Origen (mid-3rd century) allowed for Pauline influence on the thoughts of the epistle, but he ascribed the style and actual writing to someone else.
- **The Shepherd of Hermas, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Gaius of Rome, and Hippolytus all made use of Hebrews and none ascribe authorship.**

Early Church Witness

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- In the 4th century, Eusebius informed us that there were 14 well known and undisputed Pauline letters, including Hebrews.
- **Athanasius included Hebrews in the Pauline epistles, placing it after the letters to the churches and before the letters to individuals.**
 - Hebrews is found in this position in Codexes Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus (all produced in the 4th and 5th centuries).

Later Church Witness

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- In the Latin Vulgate, Jerome identified Hebrews as Pauline (although tentatively), as did Augustine.
- This is the case through the Middle Ages, as Aquinas accepted Pauline authorship along with the Luke translation theory.
- The Reformation brought a renewed discussion: Luther championed Apollos; Calvin preferred Luke or Clement of Rome.

Modern Views

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- In the 17th century, Grotius suggested independent Lukan authorship.
- William Leonard again asserted Pauline authorship in a masterful piece in 1939.
- The 20th century brought a flurry of authorship theories, including Priscilla and Mary, the Mother of Jesus (assisted by Luke and John).

3 Main Pauline Arguments HEBREWS

1. Similar Vocabulary
2. Similar Theology
3. Historical Testimony of the Church Fathers

However, these same arguments (especially #1 and #2) can be made to support contrary positions, as well.

Anti-Pauline Arguments HEBREWS

1. Paul's name does not appear in the prologue (or anywhere else) as is the custom with his 13 other NT epistles.
2. **Hebrews lacks Paul's customary salutation.**
3. Stylistically, Hebrews is divergent in many ways from the other 13 Pauline epistles.
4. **The theological focus of Hebrews is different than his other letters.**
5. The use of the OT is different than other letters.

2 Peter 3:15-16

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15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, **16** as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

John Owen said:

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- Since Peter wrote to Jewish Christians in the diaspora, the question arises, Which Pauline epistle is in view here? Perhaps, it is Hebrews.
- Some argue Peter's that some of Paul's writings are "hard to understand" parallels Hebrews 5:11 –
“Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.”

Recipients

Is this letter written to Jewish Christians, Gentile Christians, or a mixed multitude? Was it for believers at large or a specific congregation?

1. **A congregation in or near Jerusalem (dominant view until the 19th century)**
2. A congregation in Rome (dominant position now)
3. **A mixed congregation in Antioch (John MacArthur)**
4. A separate Jewish congregation in Antioch (see Gal. 2:11-12)

J.V. Brown (1923)

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- The recipients were a group of Jewish priests, i.e., those of Acts 6:7 –

“The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.”

David Allen:

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“Luke records in Acts 6:7 that a significant number of the priests became followers of Jesus. With the persecution recorded in Acts 8:1 raging in Jerusalem at the time of Stephen’s martyrdom, some of these converted Jewish priests would no doubt have been forced out of Jerusalem along with other Christians. The question is, Where would they have gone? Luke did not tell us what became of these former priests mentioned in Acts 6:7, probably out of concern for their safety. If his volume had fallen into the wrong hands, it could have easily furnished a clue to their location. Perhaps this is why the recipients of Hebrews are never identified in the letter, though it is clear that the author knew their exact circumstances. That Jewish-Roman relations were strained to the point of war would be ample reason to protect former priests likely to be viewed by the Roman government as potential leaders in the Jewish cause.”

Date of the Epistle

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1. Pre-A.D. 64

2. A.D. 67-69

 3. A.D. 96

Factors: Paul's authorship (died in 67), location of recipients, **correlation with external historical data (which persecution in view, Nero or Domitian?)**, internal factors (such as, present tense in reference to the Temple)

“If the temple at Jerusalem had been destroyed decades before, as the hypotheses under consideration suppose, the fact would have been well known, and the employment of language which implied that its cult was still going on would have made the Epistle ridiculous in the eyes of its first readers. To refuse to be guided by this, the most tangible and definite of all the clues which exist for determining the date of Hebrews, is to throw away the key to the problem and open the door to fruitless speculation and confusion.”

My Position:

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- **Author:** Paul (with Luke as amanuensis)
- **Place of Writing:** Mamertine Prison, Rome
- **Date:** A.D. 67
- **Recipients:** Converted Hebrew priests at Antioch

Psalm 110:1 & 4

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1 The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”

4 The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, “You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.”

4 Major Divisions

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- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| 1. Prologue | 1:1-4 |
| 2. The Son | 1:5-4:13 |
| 3. The Priest | 4:14-10:18 |
| 4. The King | 10:19-13:21 |

“Christology is intertwined with eschatology and applied pastorally...”

Use of the OT

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- 38 quotations from the Old Testament, and numerous allusions (perhaps 55) to the Hebrew Scriptures.
 - 11 from the Pentateuch
 - 1 each from the historical books & Proverbs
 - 7 from the prophets (3 from Jer. 31:31-34)
 - 18 from the Psalms
- Core texts: Psalms 8; 95; 110; Jeremiah 31
- Almost exclusively uses the LXX

The Value of Hebrews

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- Understanding Christology and Eschatology contribute to the church's theological well-being
- The use of the Old Testament by New Testament authors binds the two testaments together.
- Pastorally, this epistle teaches us that life's internal and external problems can only be met and solved by clear thinking about Christ and his finished work of atonement, including persecution, spiritual maturity, and faithfulness.
- And finally, knowledge of the security of one's salvation and the certainty of eternal life give hope to the believer.

Next Week:

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The Prologue

Hebrews 1:1-4

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