

New Testament Survey

Hebrews

I. Attestation and Authorship¹

A. External

1. Clement of Rome quotes Hebrews extensively.
2. Polycarp calls Jesus our “everlasting High Priest” in his *Epistle to the Philippians* (chapter 12).
3. Justyn Martyr speaks of a “new law and a new covenant” in *Dialogue with Trypho* (chapters 34 cf. 67).
4. Dionysius of Alexandria quotes it as an Epistle of Paul.
5. It is omitted by Marcion and the Muratorian Fragment.

C. Critical Objections - Authorship

1. Some early church fathers thought it to be written by Paul.
 - a. Eusebius says that Clement of Alexandria held that it was written by Paul.
 - b. Origen repeatedly says that it was authored by Paul.
 - c. Eusebius says that it was originally written in Hebrew and translated by Clement of Rome.
 - d. Athanasius included it as one of the fourteen epistles of Paul.
2. Other church fathers say different.
 - a. Tertullian says that it was written by Barnabas.
 - b. Hippolytus and Cyprian both say it was not written by Paul.
3. Internal evidence as to authorship.
 - a. Pro-Pauline evidences.
 - 1). Reference is made to Timothy - Hebrews 13:23.
 - 2). Affinities in language between Hebrews and the rest of Paul's epistles, for example Hebrews 1:4-Philemon 2:9, Hebrews 2:2-Galatians 3:19, Hebrews 2:10-Romans 11:36.
 - 3). The centrality of the person and work of Christ as in Paul's other epistles.
 - b. Anti-Pauline evidences.

¹ Henry C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Co., 1987), p p. 297-300.

- 1). The writer of Hebrews does not mention his name whereas Paul always affixed his name to the epistles he wrote.
 - 2). The writer in Hebrews 2:3 seems to indicate he was dependent on others who heard the word of the Lord whereas Paul heard it directly.
 - 3). The writer exclusively uses the LXX, whereas Paul often quotes from the LXX and the Hebrew OT.
 - 4). Hebrews 13:23 indicates Timothy had been released from prison. We have no record at all of Timothy's imprisonment in any of Paul's letters nor in 2 Timothy which was the last letter penned by Paul shortly before his death.
 - 5). The style and vocabulary of Hebrews does not fit Paul's.
- c. The bottom line is that we have no idea who wrote Paul.

II. Background and Destination

A. Written to Jews.²

1. MSS Aleph, A, and B have the title *Pros Hebraiouis*. This must have been a title assigned very early.
2. The author assumes a distinctively Jewish point of view.
3. An understanding of intimate details of the Old Covenant are assumed by the writer and reader.

B. Support for the idea of a Jewish Readership.

1. No reference is found in Hebrews regarding Gentiles or Gentile controversies, like the eating of meat offered to idols, etc.
2. Abraham, not Adam, is singled out for help from God (Hebrews 2:16).
3. The readers had heard the gospel from the immediate disciples of Christ, not Paul (Hebrews 2:3).
4. The readers witnessed many signs, wonders, and manifold powers (Hebrews 2:4).
5. The readers were made partakers of Christ, which seems to indicate that they knew Christ first-hand.
6. They endured persecution, probably during the first few years of the life of the Church (Hebrews 10:32-34, 12:4).
7. They had a good understanding of the first principles of Christ (Hebrews 6:1).
8. The writer fears some are in danger of apostasy (Hebrews 3:12).

² Thiessen, pp. 301-303.

- C. Jews in General, or Jews at Large?
 - 1. Most likely the destination is to Jews in a particular location. The description of the Jews in Hebrews would most likely not refer to all Jews everywhere.
 - 2. The two most probable destinations are Jerusalem or Rome. Jerusalem is probably the most likely because the readership is assumed to have had intimate details regarding Jewish worship as well as the facts surrounding the life and ministry of Christ.

- III. Occasion and Date
 - A. The problem faced by the readership of Hebrews is that many were in danger of apostasizing from the truth. Instead of going on to spiritual maturity in the New Covenant, they were considering on returning to the Old.
 - B. Probably written in the mid-sixties.
 - 1. There is no indication the temple had been destroyed which would place the writing of Hebrews prior to A.D. 70.
 - 2. The reference to Timothy being in prison and released would probably place the writing after the death of Paul which occurred in the mid-sixties A.D.

- IV. Purpose and Plan³
 - A. To establish the supremacy of the New Covenant over the Old.
 - B. To warn those considering returning to the Old Covenant of the danger of apostasy.
 - C. To encourage the Jewish believers to make a clean break with the Old Covenant.
 - D. To explain the Eternal Priesthood of Christ and the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for sin.

- V. A Basic Outline⁴
 - A. Introduction - 1:1-4.
 - B. The Superiority of the Son to Angels - 1:5-2:18
 - 1. The Proofs from the Old Testament - 1:5-14.
 - 2. The Obligation Resulting Therefrom - 2:1-4.
 - 3. The Reasonableness of the Humiliation of Christ - 2:5-18.
 - C. The Superiority of the Son to Moses and Joshua - 3-4.
 - 1. The Superiority of Christ to Moses - 3:1-6.
 - 2. The Failure of Israel under Moses and Joshua - 3:7-4:2.

³ Thiessen, pp. 304.

⁴ Thiessen, p. 305-306.

3. The Proofs that the Rest is Still Available - 4:3-10.
 4. The Need of Striving to Enter this Rest - 4:11-13.
 5. The Triumph of Christ, our High Priest, and Incentive to Drawing Near - 4:14-16.
- D. The Nature and Scope of Christ's High-Priesthood - 5-7.
1. The Qualifications of Christ as High-Priest - 5:1-10.
 2. The Need of Effort to an Understanding of Spiritual Truth - 5:11-6:20.
 3. The High-Priesthood of Christ Prefigured by Melchizedek - 7:1-25.
 4. The High-Priesthood of Christ Contrasted with the Levitical - 7:26-28.
- E. The Ministry of Christ as High-Priest - 8:1-10:18
1. The Circumstances of His High-Priestly Ministry - 8
 2. The Sanctuary and Service under the Two Covenants - 9
 3. The Contrast between the Levitical Sacrifices and the Sacrifice of Christ - 10:1-18.
- F. The Application of these Truths to the Readers - 10:19-12:29.
1. The Exhortations to Faithfulness to the New Covenant - 10:19-39.
 2. The Encouragement by the Achievements of Others - 11:1-12:4.
 3. The Consolation by the Fact of Sonship - 12:5-13.
 4. The Warning Against Failure and Apostasy - 12:14-17.
 5. The Enforcement by the Greater Position of the Christian - 12:18-29.
- G. Conclusion: Social and Religious Duties: Personal Instructions - 13
- VI. Chapters To Remember
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| Hebrews 1 | The Superiority of Christ over Angels |
| Hebrews 4 | Our Great High-Priest |
| Hebrews 9 | One Sacrifice for All Time |
| Hebrews 11 | Faith's Hall of Fame |
| Hebrews 12 | Run Well! |
- VII. Points and Peculiarities
1. Hebrews is written to three audiences: believers, unbelievers, and those uncertain about the New Covenant.

2. Hebrews contains five warning passages against apostasy: 2:1-4, 3:7-4:16, 5:11-6:20, 10:26-36, 12:12-29.
3. Hebrews is the only book outside of Psalms and Genesis that mentions Melchizedek.

VIII. A Closer Look

A. Hebrews 1

1. Christ is better than the Angels - Hebrews 1:1-14.

B. Hebrews 2

1. First Warning Passage - Hebrews 2:1-4.
2. Christ's work of Redemption - Hebrews 2:5-18.

C. Hebrews 3-4

1. Christ Superior to Moses - Hebrews 3:1-6.
2. Second Warning Passage - Hebrews 3:7-4:16

D. Hebrews 5-6

1. Christ - Our Priest - Hebrews 5:1-10
2. Third Warning Passage - Hebrews 5:11-6:20.

E. Hebrews 7

1. Christ's Priesthood Greater than Melchizedek's - Hebrews 7:1-10.
2. Christ's Priesthood Greater than Aaron's - Hebrews 7:11-28.

F. Hebrews 8

1. Christ our Heavenly High Priest - Hebrews 8:1-5
2. The New Covenant - Hebrews 8:6-13

G. Hebrews 9

1. The Old and New Covenants Contrasted - Hebrews 9:1-14.
2. Christ's Eternal Sacrifice - Hebrews 9:15-28.

H. Hebrews 10

1. The Failure of the Old Covenant - Hebrews 10:1-17.
2. Exhortation to Hold Onto the New Covenant - Hebrews 10:18-25.
3. Fourth Warning Passage - Hebrews 10:26-36.

I. Hebrews 11

1. Faith's Hall of Fame - Hebrews 11

J. Hebrews 12

1. Run Well - Hebrews 12:1-2.

2. The Discipline of God - Hebrews 12:3-11.

3. Fifth Warning Passage - Hebrews 12:12-29.

H. Hebrews 13

1. Exhortations to Godly Living - Hebrews 13