

The Letter to the Hebrews

Introduction

What Say You?

W.G. Moorehead called Hebrews, “the profoundest epistle of the New Testament.”

P.E. Hughes described it as the most fully developed doctrinal writing in the whole of the New Testament.

Jewish Christian Adolph Saphir called it a “grand and massive book.”

E.F. Scott called Hebrews “the riddle of the New Testament.”

Why Study Hebrews?

1. It exalts the Lord Jesus Christ in a special way, as David Gooding said, Hebrews is “ablaze with His glory.”
2. It insists on His full deity, His true humanity and the complete sufficiency of His work on the cross.
3. Hebrews refers to the priestly work of the Lord Jesus.
4. It is important for understanding the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.
5. It puts emphasis on the need for endurance in the Christian life.
6. It focuses on the doctrine of faith and the life of faith.

Why Study Hebrews? (continued)

People of God need to be reminded that they are pilgrims (11:10, 13:14)

We live in a day of “diverse and strange teachings” (13:9) - answered by the letter’s portrait of the eternal Christ (13:8)

Many believers are drifting from biblical teaching on the Christian life and drift toward unbiblical emphasis on religious rituals and ceremonies

Believers need to be reminded of the free access and welcome that is theirs at God’s throne of grace (4:14-16)

The Christian life is one of mutual encouragement and fellowship with other believers (10:24-25, 13:1, 7, 17)

Who Wrote Hebrews?



Paul?

Perhaps the oldest guess concerning the author.

Most scholars today have backed off the idea.

There are several things that don't fit Paul's style when compared to his other books.



Why Not Paul?

His name is not attached (spoiler alert, Hebrews is anonymous).

There is no greeting to a group of people.

From the earliest of times there have been Christians who have denied Paul wrote it.

Compare Hebrews 2:3 and Galatians 1:12.

Hebrews 2:3, “how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard”

Galatians 1:12, “For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Others?

Barnabas - a fellow-worker of Paul
(Acts 4:36, 13:1)

Clement of Rome - a church leader
at the end of the 1st century AD

Apollos (Acts 18:24-25) -
suggested by Martin Luther

Too many others to list!

One writer said, “But who knows who
wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows.”

That should be good enough for us.

What We Can Say About the Author

It was important to him that God had spoken.

He was a Christian who heard the Gospel from the apostles (2:3-4).

He was well versed in the Old Testament, because he quotes it often.

He knew Timothy (13:23)

To Whom Was Hebrews Written?

Christians, no doubt.

“Beloved” (6:9)

“Holy brothers who share in a heavenly calling” (3:1)

More specifically, the original readers were most probably Jewish Christians.

The author seems to assume the readers are very familiar with the Old Testament.

Reference to believers as “the offspring of Abraham” (2:15).

Reference to the “fathers” of the Jewish race (1:1, 3:9).

Uses mostly Jewish examples in Chapter 11 when illustrating the life of faith.

Where Did the Original Readers Live?

Most biblical scholars say either Rome or Palestine.

Earliest quotations of Hebrews are found in a letter by Clement, the Roman church leader (AD 95).

The conclusion reads, “Those who come from Italy send you greetings.”

The author of our study falls in the group that believe it was written to believers in Palestine.

Hebrews gives the impression the readers lived near the temple.

Early Christian writers called the Jerusalem church, “the church of the Hebrews”.

Hebrews 1:2, 3:13, 10:25 and 12:27 imply a crisis is about to take place, perhaps a reference to the siege of Jerusalem.

When was Hebrews Written?

Most likely in the AD 60's.

Hebrews 5:11-14 leads us to believe there had to be sufficient time for believers to mature in the faith.

Hebrews 13:7 leads us to believe the 1st generation has passed away.

There had to be some time for persecution before it's writing (10:32).

Timothy, and not Paul, is mentioned in chapter 13, suggesting that Paul would have been dead at the time of its writing (Paul died between 62 and 68 AD).

No later than 70 AD - the sacrificial rituals are spoken of in the present tense (7:8, 8:3-5, 9:6-7, 9, 13, 10:2-3, 13:10).

No mention of Jerusalem's fall in 70 AD.

Why was Hebrews Written?

The spiritual condition of the audience it was written to:

- They “have become dull of hearing” (5:11).
- They want “milk” and not “solid food” and are “unskilled in the Word of righteousness” (5:13)
- He wants to lead them to maturity (6:1) - a doctrinal and practical understanding of the high priesthood of Christ.
- They lived in a time of transition and change.
- They needed to break with Judaism and go to Christ “outside the camp” (13:13).
- The 1st covenant had been taken away and the 2nd established (10:9).
- They need not be deceived by Jewish arguments (13:9), but understand saving power is not in sacrifices and laws of the Jewish religion but in Jesus Christ alone.

Why was Hebrews Written? (continued)

- There are 5 warnings to not break with Christianity and fall back into Judaism (2:1-4, 3:7-4:13, 6:4-8, 10:26-31, 12:18-29).
- There is an expectation of suffering - if we hold to the timeline of 67-68 AD and the Palestinian audience, the Jews were in a war at that time with the Romans.
- Some are beginning to neglect the weekly meetings (10:25), hospitality (13:2), care for believers (13:3) and are showing a love of earthly things (13:5)
- Some have become bitter and rebellious (12:15).

Why was Hebrews Written? (continued)

1. To establish the Supremacy of Christianity
 - a. Christ is superior to the law
2. To exhort a break with Judaism
 - a. Christ's work has put an end to sacrifices
3. To encourage the renewal of effort
 - a. Press on!
4. To emphasize the danger of falling away
 - a. Rest only in the work of Jesus

What's the Theme?

The high priesthood of Christ

Hebrews 8:1-2, “Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.”

Our Outline

1. Christ as High Priest: Superior in His Person (1:1-7:28)
 - a. Superior to the Prophets (1:1-2)
 - b. Superior to the Angels (1:4-2:18)
 - c. Superior to Moses (3:1-4:16)
 - d. Superior to Aaron (5:1-7:28)
2. Christ as High Priest: Superior in His Functions (8:1-10:18)
 - a. He Serves a Better Sanctuary (8:1-6)
 - b. He Mediated a Better Covenant (8:7-13)
 - c. He Performed a Better Ministry (9:1-28)
 - d. He Offered a Better Sacrifice (10:1-18)
3. Christ as High Priest: Superior in His Resources (10:19-13:25)
 - a. A Call to Steadfastness: Based on new Access (10:19-39)
 - b. A Call to Faith: Based on Historical Illustrations (11:1-40)
 - c. A Call to Hope: Based on Christ's Endurance (12:1-29)
 - d. A Call to Love: Based on God's Grace (13:1-25)

The image features a hypnotic spiral background composed of concentric circles in shades of red and black. The spiral starts from a dark blue center and expands outwards. Overlaid on this background is the text "That's all Folks!" written in a white, elegant cursive script. The text is positioned diagonally across the center of the spiral.

That's all Folks!