

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS – “THE SUPREMACY OF JESUS”

“...in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son...” – Hebrews 1:2

AUTHORSHIP: “God knows the truth” - Origen¹

Pauline: Many believers have embraced this view to advocate for its inclusion in the canon.²

- Some cite close association of the author with Timothy (13:23) and strong emphasis on the New Covenant.

Non-Pauline: Many scholars since the Reformation have rejected Pauline authorship.

- The author did not claim to be an Apostle, which would be uncharacteristic of Paul (2:3-4; cf. Gal. 1:1).
- The vocabulary and style of the author varies greatly from the Apostle Paul’s.³
- Augustine and Jerome accepted an anonymous author while others have suggested Luke,⁴ Barnabas,⁵ or Aquila.⁶
- Some suggest Apollos’ eloquence (Acts 18:24) and association with Paul (1 Cor. 16:12) make him a candidate.⁷

Conclusion: uncertainty is the most honest position. The testimony of the Spirit, its apostolic links (Heb. 2:3-4), unity with Scripture, exaltation of Jesus (Heb. 1:3), and ancient acceptance by the church give us certainty of its inspiration.

AUDIENCE: A mixed community of largely Jewish and proselyte Gentile believers, possibly in Rome (13:24).

- The church suffered strong social persecution that tempted them to forsake Christ and return to Judaism. The author is imploring them not to relent because salvation is only promised for those who persevere in faith until the end.
- It is doubtful the church was in Jerusalem because they had already shed blood for Christ (Acts 7:54-60; Heb. 12:4).

DATE: Due to ambiguity of author and audience, the dating of the book is not certain.

- The *external evidence* (quotation by Clement of Rome, 96AD) requires a 1st century date.
- The *internal evidence* also lends to a date prior to the end of the first century.
 - The author states the recipients of the letter heard the gospel directly from people who been with Jesus (2:3).
 - If the letter is written to a church in Rome, it must have been before Nero’s persecution began in 65AD (12:4).
 - The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70AD would have made a call to offer sacrifices unattractive.

Conclusion: Hebrews was likely written prior to 65AD and certainly before 70AD.

SALVATION: God promises to deliver people from the penalty, power, and presence of sin through faith in Christ.

- Believers *have been saved* from sins’ penalty through repentance and faith in Christ (Eph. 1:13, 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 1:9).
- Believers *are being saved* from sin’s power through abiding faith in Christ (1 Cor. 1:18; 2 Cor. 2:15).
- Believers *will be saved* from sin’s presence if we persevere in faith in Christ (Mt. 10:22, 24:13; Rom. 5:9, 13:11; 1 Pt. 1:5).
- In Hebrews, salvation is a future promise to be inherited by enduring faith (1:14; 2:3-5; 6:9-12; 9:27-28).
- A Christian is one who believes in Jesus. Those who persevere in belief inherit salvation and prove to be elect. Those who leave Jesus (apostatize) do not inherit salvation, despite any initial profession of faith.

¹ Quoted by Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.25.11-14

² Clement of Alexandria proposed it was written in Hebrew by Paul & then translated to Greek. (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.14.3)

³ For an excellent comparison, see Ellingsworth *The Epistle to the Hebrews* in the NIGTC, p. 7-12.

⁴ John Calvin

⁵ Tertullian, *On Modesty*, 20

⁶ Harnack

⁷ Martin Luther, *Preface to Hebrews*, 1522, p. 344; *Commentary on Genesis*, 1545, p. 709

WARNING PASSAGES: 5 warnings of judgment are given to exhort the church to persevere in faith.

- There varying views on how the warnings in Hebrews should be understood.⁸
- Hebrews is a pastoral book in which the author applies New Covenant promises to *warm the hearts* of the congregation toward faith in Jesus and *warn their hearts* against falling away and forsaking Jesus.

In our study, we will approach the warnings with the following assumptions:

1. The warnings are real. People must persevere in faith in Christ in order to be saved (Mk. 13:13). Forsaking Jesus is a real threat that believers must resist. To reject Jesus is to reject God and not inherit salvation.
2. The warnings are in regard to salvation, not just rewards. While it is true that rewards are forsaken when Christ is forsaken, these warnings pertain to eternal judgment and we should not lighten them in any way.
3. Believers cannot lose salvation. Since salvation is a gift from God, those who have been born again cannot lose salvation. God gives the gift of perseverance (**Phil. 1:6; 1 Thess. 5:23-24**), keeps those He calls to Himself (**Jn. 6:37-40, Rom. 8:29-30**), and promises that no one can steal us out of His hand (**Jn. 10:27-29**).
4. Persevering belief proves faith.⁹ There are people who have joined the church's community and have displayed signs of belief, but prove that their faith is not saving faith (**Matt. 13:18-30; 1 John 2:19**).¹⁰ God uses these warning passages to strengthen His people's faith in Jesus as the all-sufficient Savior.
5. The Role of the Church. One of the primary ways God helps believers persevere in faith is through the local church (**3:13; 10:24**). God uses intentional, committed, Christ-centered relationships to sustain our faith (**Eph. 4:15; Col. 1:28-29; 1 Thess. 2:8**).

OLD TESTAMENT USAGE: Hebrews serves as a remarkable exposition of how Jesus fulfills the promises, pictures, and prophecies of the Old Testament. Along with the Exodus narrative (**Exodus 1-19**) the author draws from **Genesis 14:17-24, 2 Samuel 7:12-16, Psalm 2, 8, 40, 45, 97, 102, 104, 110, Jeremiah 31:31-34**, among others.

NEW TESTAMENT PARALLELS: themes in Hebrews are echoed in **1 Corinthians 10:1-13** and **1 Peter 1-2, 4**

⁸ For an excellent resource on the warning passages, see *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, Herbert Bateman IV.

⁹ Aside from Hebrews, the NT is filled with commands to persevere: Matt. 5:13, 24:13; Jn 8:31, 15:6; Rom 11:22; 1 Cor 9:27, 10:12, 15:1-2; Col 1:22-23; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 2:12; 1 Jn 2:19; 2 Jn 1:9; Jude 20-21; Rev 2-3, 13:10, 14:12, 21:7.

¹⁰ Luke 8:13 (they believe but fall away and are not saved); Judas Iscariot (John 6:70-71; walks with Jesus, then betrays Him); Acts 8:14-24 (Simon the magician falsely believes); 1 Timothy 4:1 (people will depart from the faith to follow false teaching).

AN OUTLINE OF HEBREWS

1:1-4:13 – Jesus: The Ultimate Revelation

1:1-3a – Jesus: Greater than the Prophets

1:3b-14 – Jesus: Greater than the Angels

2:1-4 – Warning #1 “Do not drift”

2:5-18 – Jesus: The Founder of Our Salvation

3:1-6 – Jesus: Greater than Moses

3:7-4:13 – Warning # 2 “Do not harden your heart”

4:14-10:39 – Jesus: The Ultimate High Priest

4:14-5:10 – Jesus: Greater than Aaron

5:11-6:20 – Warning #3 “Do not fall away”

7:1-28 – Jesus: Greater Order of Priesthood

8:1-13 – Jesus: Mediates a Greater Covenant

9:1-10:25 – Jesus: Offers a Greater Sacrifice in a Greater Tabernacle

10:26-39 – Warning #4 “Do not trample the blood”

11:1-13:25 – Jesus: The Ultimate Object of Faith

11:1-40 – Inheriting the Promises of God through Faith

12:1-2 – Jesus: Our Ultimate Example of Faith

12:3-11 – Refining Our Faith Through Discipline

12:12-24 – Encouragement to Endure in Faith

12:25-29 – Warning #5 “Do not refuse Him”

13:1-19 – Offering Acceptable Worship to God

13:20-25 – Benediction and Brief Farewell

HELPFUL ACCOMPANYING SCRIPTURES

1 John 5:12 “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

Matthew 24:13 “But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”

John 6:37–40 “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never cast out.

³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me, but raise it up on the last day.

⁴⁰For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise Him up on the last day.”

John 10:27–30 “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one.”

Philippians 2:12–13 “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

2 Peter 1:10 “Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.”

2 Peter 3:14 “Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace.”