

# *A Survey of the Letter to the Hebrews*

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## Author:

The book of Hebrews is different. There may not be a more debated book, in regards to authorship, date, and audience greater than the book of Hebrews. This book, the letters of John, the gospels, and Acts are the only books in the New Testament with no name attached. Therefore, we have to err on the side of tradition if we hope to establish authorship. Of course, with the aforementioned books scholarship and tradition are usually in agreement. With Hebrews, things are much different. Origen was once quoted saying, "God alone knows who wrote Hebrews." However, that doesn't stop us from speculating.

Since it is an anonymous book almost everyone mentioned in the New Testament has been nominated as its author. Tertullian nominated Barnabas (as a close associate of Paul's this has merit). Clement of Alexandria and Origen suggested Luke as the translator (the fantastic grammar and language gives this merit), but eventually concluded it could have been Paul. Martin Luther suggested Apollos who was an Alexandrian Jewish convert with much influence in the first century. A. Harnack and modern day scholars believe the letter is anonymous because a woman wrote it. Therefore, they nominated Priscilla (and Aquila). Even others have suggested Timothy, Clement of Rome, or another disciple. Many will argue that it could have been Paul (Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas), but this seems doubtful. Why is it unlikely that Paul wrote this letter? Paul always identified himself in the introduction or benediction of his letters to prove its authenticity. The style is different. The book deals with lots of theology, which Paul avoided. The fact is that it was inspired by the Holy Spirit (**II Timothy 3:16-17**).

## Date:

It is generally accepted it was written in the mid 60's AD. A latter date is unlikely because the book seems to be written by an eyewitness to Christ's death or acquainted with those who walked with Jesus (**Hebrews 2:3-4**). The writer encourages the readers to remember the former days (**Hebrews 10:32**), showing that the church was still in its infancy. It seems that the first leaders, possibly the apostles, were dead (**Hebrew 13:7-9**) and now new leaders had arisen to take oversight (**Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24**). The word used here means to lead or guide (**Matthew 2:6, Luke 22:26, Acts 7:10, 14:12, 15:22**). It seems, therefore, that the author is helping congregations see the transition from the leadership of the apostles to local elderships.

## Theme:

This book is about the supremacy of Christ, especially the first seven chapters. Christ is greater than the prophets and angels (**Hebrews 1:4-14**), greater than Moses and Joshua (**Hebrews 3:1-4:13**), and greater than the Levitical priesthood (**Hebrews 4:14-7:28**). Specifically, the priests were to come from the tribe of Levi but Christ came from the priesthood of Melchizedek (**Hebrews 7, Genesis 14**).

This letter is about how life can be better in Christ, compared to Judaism. It is often classed with Romans and Revelation as one of the most difficult. It demands an accurate knowledge of the Old Testament, especially the Hebrew sacrificial system. The reader must understand the five books of Moses and how they compare with the transition Jesus describes in the Sermon on the Mount. The old law was being fulfilled and a new law was ushering in a new covenant (**Hebrews 8-10**).

Audience:

The letter is traditionally titled “Hebrews” because it seems to be addressed to Jewish Christians. It is hard to know who it was intended for and why it was written, but clearly much preparation went into it. Between the scholarship and language it is a fascinating book and it would have been well circulated in Jewish circles.

The last three chapters discuss how practical and faithful living is required of all disciples. The author described how life in Christ requires suffering. If the Christians who received this letter had not yet felt the effects of Roman persecution, they were suffering at the hands of the Jews. Clearly, the author wants them to realize that this would continue to get worse.

Heroes of the faith are put on a pedestal in the book. The author includes a brief synopsis about Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and others who conquered kingdoms and accomplished great things because of their faith in God (**Hebrews 11:32-40**). Then, in chapter 12 the author tells of how those who have gone before us now stand as witnesses to our Christian race. The suffering of Christ and the final victory of his immovable kingdom are now our focus. This is why the author expresses the necessity of being thankful to God for salvation in Christ. Because of what God has done, and will do, we should live by faith, be kind to our neighbor, pray for our government, and be loyal to the church leaders.

Key Verses:

**Hebrews 1:1-2, 2:3, 2:14-18, 3:16-19, 4:1-3, 4:14-16, 5:12-14, 6:4-6, 6:13-18, 7:11-13, 7:26-28, 8:3-6, 9:1-5, 9:23-28, 10:19-25, 10:30-31, 11:1, 11:6, 11:32-40, 12:1-2, 12:12, 12:28-29, 13:1-3, 13:7, 13:17, 13:22-24**

Outline:

- I. *The Basis for Christ's Superiority (1:1–10:18)*
  - A. *Christ is Superior to the Prophets (1:1-4)*
  - B. *Christ is Superior to the Angels (1:5–2:18)*
  - C. *Christ is Superior to Moses (3:1–4:13)*
  - D. *Christ is Superior to Aaron (4:14–7:28)*
  - E. *Christ's New Covenant is Superior to the Old Covenant (8:1–10:18)*
- II. *The Practicality of Christ's Superiority (10:19–13:17)*
  - A. *Exhortation to Enter the New Sanctuary (10:19-31)*
  - B. *Exhortation to Endure Persecution (10:32-39)*
  - C. *Exhortation of Heroes of the Faith (11:1-40)*
  - D. *Exhortation to Endure Chastening (12:1-29)*
  - E. *Exhortation for Christian Living (13:1-17)*
- III. *The Concluding Instructions (13:18-25)*
  - A. *The Request of the Author for Prayer (13:18-19)*
  - B. *The Readers of the Letter are Blessed (13:20-21)*
  - C. *The Readers of the Letter are Exhorted (13:22)*
  - D. *The Release of Timothy (13:23)*
  - E. *The Romans Send Their Greetings (13:24-25)*