

# HEBREWS

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# HEBREWS

I. AUTHORSHIP: It is anonymous.

But it seems the 1st-century readers knew who the writer was:

- a. Plural in 2:1-4; 4:14-16 suggests the writer & readers shared experiences
- b. 6:9-11; 10:25, 32-34 suggest the writer knew intimate details about the readers' spiritual lives
- c. 13:23 suggests the readers knew the writer's identity, who was coming to visit them

d. Request for prayer in 13:19 suggests the readers knew the writer.

1. Paul -

for (internal):

a. traditional view accepted through the Protestant Reformation

b. doctrinal similarities to Paul

c. stylistic similarities to Paul

d. The letter reflects authorship by a Jewish Christian, learned in OT, with an effective ministry with Jews & Gentiles

**against (internal):**

a. the letter is **anonymous**. None of the other Pauline letters are anonymous.

b. no claim made in letter to apostolic **authority**, unlike Paul. Appeal made to eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry (2:3).

c. highly polished **Greek** different from Paul's abruptness

d. theological emphasis not characteristically **Pauline** (Jesus as great high priest: 4:14-16)

e. OT quotations are usually from the LXX, but Paul did not always follow this practice.

f. its place in NT seems to question authorship

against (external):

a. Council of Hippo (AD 393) & 3rd Council of Carthage (AD 397) listed Heb. separately from the 13 letters of Paul.

b. During Reformation, Calvin said Clement of Rome or Luke wrote Hebrews.

## 2. Barnabas

for:

- a. Tertullian attributed Hebrews to him
- b. Barnabas was a Jew & a friend of Paul whose theology must have resembled Paul's. Also, he was a man who could minister to both Jew & Gentile alike
- c. His Levitical background (Acts 4:36) would explain the interest in priestly functions found in Hebrews.

**against:**

- a. Barnabas probably heard & saw Jesus, but the author of Hebrews depended upon the **testimony** of others (2:3)
- b. It is hard to explain how the name of a leader like Barnabas could have been **lost**. The lack of early references to him as the author is a strike against him.

### 3. Apollos (favored by Martin Luther)

for:

- a. He was a friend of Paul, so this would explain theological similarities.
- b. He was known as an eloquent speaker (Acts 18:24-28), which would explain the polished literary style.
- c. He was a Jew, an Alexandrian, learned in the OT, which would explain the use of the LXX (which was written in Alexandria)
- d. He had a successful ministry to Jews
- e. contacts with Timothy, considerable influence in various churches.

against: no early evidence. If it were written by so prominent a person, why is his authorship forgotten (same as Barnabas postulation)?

#### 4. other choices:

##### a. Luke

for: Similarities of the polished Greek to Luke-Acts.

against: Since Luke was a Gentile, it is less likely he would write with such a Jewish outlook

**b. Priscilla (Adolf Harnack proposed)**

**for:**

- 1. She had close ties with Paul**
- 2. Since she was a woman it would explain the anonymity.**

**against:**

- 1. Little external evidence to support this**
- 2. Reference to self in 11:32 with the masculine participle of the word “tell.”**

**c. Clement of Rome, Silas, Acquilla,  
Philip, Mark, Titus**

## II. DATE: mid to late 60s

1. no mention of fall of Jerusalem or temple.
2. use of present tenses in referring to ritual of sacrifice (7:8; 9:6-7, 9, 13; 13:10).
3. mention of Timothy (13:23) (if this is the Tim who was Paul's companion)

## III. DESTINATION / SETTING

1. "to the Hebrews" - either Jewish believers or Gentile believers interested in the OT
  - a. many appeals to the OT
  - b. assumes readers knew Jewish ritual
  - c. warned against a return to Judaism

## 2. reflects Hellenistic Judaism

- a. avoids Jewish rabbinical interpretation
- b. refers to tabernacle rather than Temple
- c. use of the LXX
- d. in 2:3 it seems the readers did not see or hear Jesus in His earthly ministry
- e. in 6:10 they assisted poverty-stricken Christians (so, they were not the poor Palestinians)

3. 13:24, "those of Italy salute you." So, was Hebrews written to or from Italy?

#### **IV. THEME (1:2-3): the supremacy & finality of Jesus Christ.**

- He is superior to the OT prophets, angels, Moses & Joshua, & to the OT priesthood

#### **V. PURPOSE - several possibilities:**

1. warning Jewish Christians against apostasy: relapsing to Judaism.
2. a challenge to break out of a restricted Jewish outlook.
3. to announce the absolute character of Christ to Gentile Christians.
4. a polemic against a heresy like in Col.

## VI. LITERARY FORM / STYLE

1. a written sermon w/ an epistolary closing
2. the most literary book in the NT (a literary koine Greek)
3. the only true epistle in the NT (public; general). Pauline writings are more like common letters (private; personal).

## VII. WARNING PASSAGES:

### 1. 2:1-19

- teaching: Christ > the angels
- warning: the peril of drifting

## 2. 3:7 - 4:13

- teaching: Christ > Moses
- warning: the peril of a pagan heart

## 3. 5:11 - 6:12

- teaching: Christ is the ever-living
- warning: the peril of rejecting Christ

## 4. 10:26-31

- teaching (Holiness Section): Draw near to Jesus!
- warning: the peril of sinning willfully

## 5. 12:12-17

- teaching: discipline
- warning: the peril of coming short of God's grace

## VIII. INTERPRETATIONS OF HEB. 6:1-12

a. Apostasy: You can lose your salvation.

1. Strength: the participles in vv. 4-5 seem to describe a Christian.

2. Weaknesses: a. the consequences: “impossible” for them to become a Christian again.

b. Reprobate: those who never accept Christ but are exposed to Christianity & may even be part of the group of believers for a period of time.

1. Strength: the “impossible” for them to become a Christian

2. Weakness: vv. 4-5 seem to be describing a Christian.

c. Backslider: Christians who live in carnality. It is impossible to restore them to their previous place of service.

1. Strength: it is consistent with the interpretation of Hebrews.

**2. Weakness: this seems to make the problem too small.**

**d. Community: the group of apostates will be separated from the community of the faithful**

**1. Strength: There is no individual loss of salvation.**

**2. Weakness: The warning passages are to individuals, not to a community.**