

Hebrews

First: The Author

The author of the letter to the Hebrews remains shrouded in mystery. Even early in the church's history, a Christian as learned as Origen had to admit his ignorance of the true author of Hebrews. Several theories regarding the author's identity have been proposed over the years, but all of them contain significant problems.

The author of Hebrews is unknown. Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Apollos, Luke, Philip, Priscilla, Aquila, and Clement of Rome have been suggested by different scholars, but the epistle's vocabulary, style, and various literary characteristics do not clearly support any particular claim. It is significant that the writer includes himself among those people who had received confirmation of Christ's message from others (2:3). That would seem to rule out someone like Paul who claimed that he had received such confirmation directly from God and not from men (Gal. 1:12). Whoever the author was, he preferred citing OT references from the Greek OT (LXX) rather than from the Hebrew text. Even the early church expressed various opinions on authorship, and current scholarship admits the puzzle still has no solution. Therefore, it seems best to accept the epistle's anonymity.

Most of the churches in the eastern part of the Roman Empire believed Paul to have authored the book, leading to its early acceptance into the Canon by the churches in those areas. Even though Clement of Rome drew much from Hebrews in his late-first-century letter to the Corinthian church, many in the Western church pointed away from Paul as the source of the book. **The unknown authorship of this book should not shake our confidence in its authority.** Hebrews makes important theological contributions to the biblical Canon, it has been drawn upon as sacred Scripture since the late first century, and Christians have for two millennia consistently upheld the divine inspiration and, therefore, the canonicity of the book of Hebrews. **Ultimately, of course, the author was the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21).**

Second: The Audience

The strongly Jewish character of the letter to the Hebrews helps to narrow down its date of composition. In addition, **the use of the present tense** in 5:1–4; 7:21,23,27,28; 8:3–5,13; 9:6–9,13,25; 10:1,3,4,8,11; and 13:10,11 **would suggest that the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system were still in operation when the epistle was composed.** Since the temple was destroyed by General (later Emperor) Titus Vespasian in A.D. 70, the epistle must have been written prior to that date. In addition, it may be noted that Timothy had just been released from prison (13:23) and that persecution was becoming severe (10:32–39; 12:4; 13:3). These details suggest a date for the epistle around A.D. 67–69.

Emphases on the Levitical priesthood and on sacrifices, as well as the absence of any reference to the Gentiles, support the conclusion that a community of Hebrews was the recipient of the epistle. Although these Hebrews were primarily converts to Christ, there were probably a number of unbelievers in their midst, who were attracted by the message of salvation, but who had not yet made a full commitment of faith in Christ. One thing is clear from the

contents of the epistle: **the community of Hebrews was facing the possibility of intensified persecution (10:32–39; 12:4)**. As they confronted this possibility, the Hebrews were tempted to cast aside any public identification with Christ.

The book of Hebrews addresses 3 distinct groups of Jews: 1) believers; 2) unbelievers who were intellectually convinced of the gospel; and 3) unbelievers who were attracted by the gospel and the person of Christ but who had reached no final conviction about Him.

The primary group addressed were Hebrew Christians who suffered rejection and persecution by fellow Jews (10:32–34), although none as yet had been martyred (12:4). The letter was written to give them encouragement and confidence in Christ, their Messiah and High-Priest. They were an immature group of believers who were tempted to hold on to the symbolic and spiritually powerless rituals and traditions of Judaism.

The second group addressed were Jewish unbelievers who were convinced of the basic truths of the gospel but who had not placed their faith in Jesus Christ as their own Savior and Lord. They were intellectually persuaded but spiritually uncommitted. These unbelievers are addressed in such passages as 2:1–3; 6:4–6; 10:26–29; and 12:15–17.

The third group addressed were Jewish unbelievers who were not convinced of the gospel's truth but had had some exposure to it. Chapter 9 is largely devoted to them (see especially vv. 11,14,15,27,28).

Third: The Main Theme

The epistle to the Hebrews is a study in contrast, between the imperfect and incomplete provisions of the Old Covenant, given under Moses, and the infinitely better provisions of the New Covenant offered by the perfect High-Priest, God's only Son and the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Included in the "better" provisions are: a better hope, testament, promise, sacrifice, substance, country, and resurrection. Those who belong to the New Covenant dwell in a completely new and heavenly atmosphere, they worship a heavenly Savior, have a heavenly calling, receive a heavenly gift, are citizens of a heavenly country, look forward to a heavenly Jerusalem, and have their very names written in heaven.

One of the key theological themes in Hebrews is that all believers now have direct access to God under the New Covenant and, therefore, may approach the throne of God boldly (4:16; 10:22). One's hope is in the very presence of God, into which the Savior is followed (6:19,20; 10:19,20). The primary teaching symbolized by the tabernacle service was that believers under the covenant of law did not have direct access to the presence of God (9:8), but were shut out of the Holy of Holies. The book of Hebrews may briefly be summarized in this way: Believers in Jesus Christ, as God's perfect sacrifice for sin, have the perfect High-Priest through whose ministry everything is new and better than under the covenant of law.

Throughout its pages, Hebrews makes clear that Jesus Christ exceeds all other people, pursuits, objects, or hopes to which human beings offer allegiance. Hebrews pictures Jesus as better than the angels, as bringing better lives to humanity through salvation, as offering a better

hope than the Mosaic Law could promise, as a better sacrifice for our sins than a bull or a goat, and as providing a better inheritance in heaven for those who place their faith in Him (Hebrews 1:4; 6:9; 7:19; 9:23; 10:34). Jesus is indeed superior to all others.

Hebrews 6:9 - *Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.*

Hebrews 7:19 - *(for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.*

Hebrews 7:22 - *This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.*

Hebrews 8:6 - *But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.*

Hebrews 9:23 - *Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.*

Hebrews 10:34 - *For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.*

Hebrews 11:16 - *But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.*

Hebrews 11:35 - *Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.*

Hebrews 11:40 - *...since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*

Hebrews 12:24 - *and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

This message of the superiority of Jesus would have been particularly important to Jewish Christians who were struggling under the social persecution of leaving Judaism and Nero's persecution and were considering moving back toward the Mosaic Law. The writer to the Hebrews showed these Jewish Christian believers that, though they were faced with suffering, they were indeed following a better way . . . and they should persevere.

Fourth: Hebrews and the Old Testament:

The writer expounds several, major Old Testament references that prove his point.

- 1:1 and 2:4 Exposition of verses from Pss.; 2 Sam. 7; Deut. 32
- 2:5 and 18 Exposition of Ps. 8:4 and 6
- 3:1 and 4:13 Exposition of Ps. 95:7 and 11
- 4:14 and 7:28 Exposition of Ps. 110:4
- 8:1 and 10:18 Exposition of Jer. 31:31 and 34
- 10:32 and 12:3 Exposition of Hab. 2:3,4
- 12:4 and 13 Exposition of Prov. 3:11,12
- 12:18 and 29 Exposition of Ex. 19, 20

Fifth: The Book's Importance

Hebrews clearly lays out the present priestly ministry of Christ in the life of the believer. Jesus is both the divine Son of God and completely human, and in His priestly role He clears the way for human beings to approach the Father in heaven through prayer (Hebrews 4:14–16). The priesthood of Jesus is superior to the Old Testament priesthood of Aaron, because only through Jesus, do we receive eternal salvation (5:1–9). Furthermore, Jesus became the permanent and perfect High Priest, going beyond all other priests by offering Himself as a sinless sacrifice on behalf of the sins of human beings (7:24–26; 9:28).

The book of Hebrews is a letter or epistle - a "word of exhortation" (Heb 13:22).

Exhortations designed to stir the readers into action are found throughout the text. Exhortations introduced by "Let us" 4:1; 11, 14, 16; 6:1; 10:22, 23, 24, 12:1, 28; 13:13,15

Key verses: Hebrews 6:1, 10:19-25 and 12:1-2.

Those exhortations are given in the form of 6 warnings:

- **Warning against drifting from "the things we have heard" (2:1–4)**
- **Warning against disbelieving the "voice" of God (3:7–14)**
- **Warning against degenerating from "the elementary principles of Christ" (5:11–6:20)**
- **Warning against despising "the knowledge of the truth" (10:26–39)**
- **Warning against devaluing "the grace of God" (12:15–17)**
- **Warning against departing from Him "who speaks" (12:25–29)**

Sixth: The Application

The letter to the Hebrews makes clear that only one Person deserves to hold the primary place in our lives. While we are busy idolizing our move up the corporate ladder or placing all our hopes in our kids, Jesus offers us a better position, a better priest, a better covenant, a better hope, and a better sacrifice. Only when we give Jesus His rightful place in our lives will everything else in life fall into its rightful place.

Hebrews 4:1-11

Seventh: The General Outline. (This is John MacArthur's outline)

I. The Superiority of Jesus Christ's Position (1:1–4:13)

A. A Better Name (1:1–3)

B. Better Than the Angels (1:4–2:18)

1. A greater messenger (1:4–14)

2. A greater message (2:1–18)

a. A greater salvation (2:1–4)

b. A greater savior (2:5–18)

C. Better Than Moses (3:1–19)

D. A Better Rest (4:1–13)

II. The Superiority of Jesus Christ's Priesthood (4:14–7:28)

A. Christ as High-Priest (4:14–5:10)

B. Exhortation to Full Commitment to Christ (5:11–6:20)

C. Christ's Priesthood like Melchizedek's (7:1–28)

III. The Superiority of Jesus Christ's Priestly Ministry (8:1–10:18)

A. Through a Better Covenant (8:1–13)

B. In a Better Sanctuary (9:1–12)

C. By a Better Sacrifice (9:13–10:18)

IV. The Superiority of the Believer's Privileges (10:19–12:29)

A. Saving Faith (10:19–25)

B. False Faith (10:26–39)

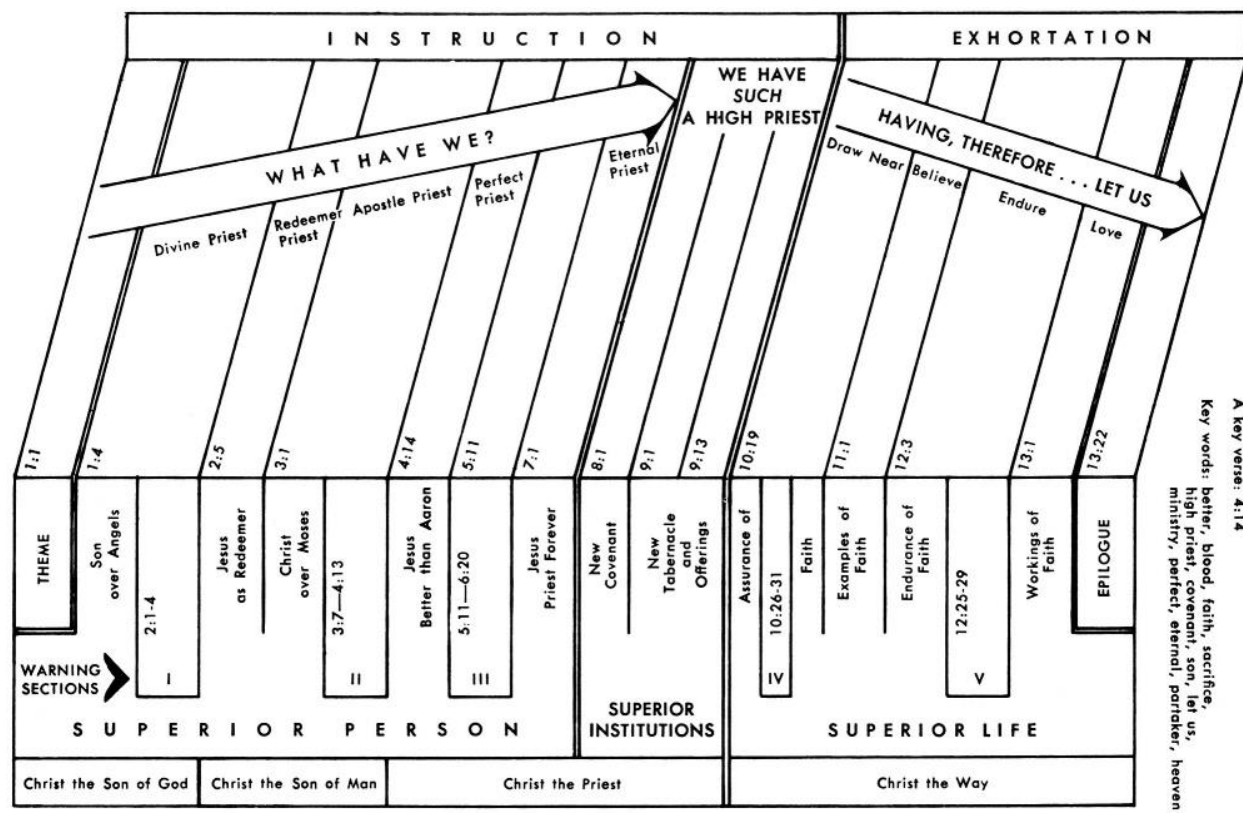
- C. Genuine Faith (11:1–3)
 D. Heroes of the Faith (11:4–40)
 E. Persevering Faith (12:1–29)

V: The Superiority of Christian Behavior (13:1–21)

- A. In Relation to Others (13:1–3)
 B. In Relation to Ourselves (13:4–9)
 C. In Relation to God (13:10–21)
 Postscript (13:22–25)

HEBREWS

<i>Prologue (1:1–4)</i>	Jesus Christ: Superior in His Person Superior to: Prophets Angels Moses The Sabbath Other priests <i>CHAPTERS 1:1–4:13</i>	Jesus Christ: Superior as Our Priest Better than: Earthly priesthood Old covenant (Mosaic system) Animal sacrifices Daily offerings <i>CHAPTERS 4:14–10:18</i>	Jesus Christ: Superior for Life Let us have: Faith to believe God Hope to endure trials Love to encourage others <i>CHAPTERS 10:19–13:25</i>	<i>Epilogue (13:20–25)</i>
Emphasis	Instruction			Exhortation
Key Words	“Much better than” 1:4	“Better” 7:19		“Let us” 12:1
Warnings	2:1–4	3:7–4:13	5:11–6:20	10:19–39 12:25–29
Theme	The absolute superiority of Jesus Christ			
Key Verse	4:14			
Christ in Hebrews	Jesus is the absolutely superior revelation of God and our eternal High Priest (1:1–14; 3:1).			



Jensen's Survey of the Bible

The Epistle to the Hebrews				
INSTRUCTION Hebrews 1-10:18			EXHORTATION Hebrews 10:19-13	
Superior Person of Christ Hebrews 1:1-4:13	Superior Priest in Christ Hebrews 4:14-10:18			Superior Life In Christ Hebrews 10:19-13
BETTER THAN PERSON Hebrews 1:1-4:13	BETTER PRIESTHOOD Heb 4:14-7:28	BETTER COVENANT Heb 8:1-13	BETTER SACRIFICE Heb 9:1- 10:18	BETTER LIFE
MAJESTY OF CHRIST	MINISTRY OF CHRIST			MINISTERS FOR CHRIST
DOCTRINE			DUTY	
DATE WRITTEN: ca. 64-68AD				