

The Book of Hebrews

Who Wrote Hebrews?¹

Scholars say that the author of Hebrews is much like the mysterious figure of Melchizedek in its pages. Though the older King James Version editions contain the heading: "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews," few conservative Bible scholars hold that Paul could have written Hebrews. In Hebrews 2:3 the author places himself under the same umbrella as his readers ("*confirmed to us*") as belonging to a group who received its initial view of Christianity from "*those who heard*" Christ personally, namely, from the apostles. By contrast, the apostle Paul bends over backward to assure all his audience that he never borrowed his Christian message from the original apostles (Galatians 1:12, 15-17). This data would seem to rule out Paul's authorship of Hebrews.

Certain other authorial candidates might seem to be a hand-in-glove fit. Barnabas, a Levite from outside of the land (Acts 4:36), might well be a "*Son of Encouragement*" (Acts 4:36) supplying a "*message of encouragement*" (Hebrews 13:22, TEV). Apollos was an eloquent Jew versed in Old Testament Scripture (Acts 18:24) who found he needed to move forward in his supplementary understanding of who Christ was (Acts 18:25-28). Even Priscilla (if one is willing to ignore the masculine participles in Hebrews) makes a viable candidate for Hebrews' authorship, as one who engaged in the very process (with Apollos) of bringing someone progressively along to a fuller view of Christ (Acts 18:26). In the final analysis, one pretty much has to conclude with the early church leader Origen who stated: "Who wrote the book of Hebrews, God alone knows the truth of the matter."

To Whom Was Hebrews Written

In Hebrews 10:32-34 the original readers were traumatized by trials. They were persecutees. However, (according to Hebrews 12:4) no martyrs could be numbered on their roster. The early Greek manuscripts tell us that the target audience were "Hebrews" (that is, Jews), and the extensive citations from our Old Testament in the book reinforce this conviction. Richard Longnecker counted thirty-eight citations from the Old Testament in the New Testament book of Hebrews.

One of the principal clues for our Sherlock Holmes is like the mythical head of Janus (which faces two directions): it can be interpreted in two opposite ways. Hebrews 13:24 refers to "*those from Italy*" sending greetings to the book's readership. In Acts 18:2 it is clear that those "from Italy" are people who are from Rome but at that time were away from Rome. They are like friends "from Illinois" on vacation in Florida who are sending back a postcard to those they know in Illinois. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that the readers of Hebrews were Jewish believers in Christ living in or near Rome who were feeling the aftershock of persecution quakes. If this scenario is the case, then the date must be set prior to Nero's Christian-killing pogrom of A.D. 64.

"We will need to remind ourselves again of the historical background and analysis of the book, and the purpose of the author in writing it. He was writing to the visible professing Church made up of saved and unsaved. There is no greeting to the saints like we find in most of the epistles. The concern of the writer is with those of his unsaved Jewish readers who under stress of persecution were in danger of renouncing their professed faith in Messiah and returning to the abrogated sacrifices of the First Testament. These he repeatedly warns against this act, and repeatedly exhorts to go on to faith in the New Testament sacrifice, Messiah."

Kenneth S. Wuest, Hebrews in the Greek New Testament, Hebrews 6:9-12

"First of all, there was in this Jewish community a congregation of true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ...In the group of Hebrews to whom this epistle was written, there were such non-Christians...these Hebrew non-Christians, intellectually convinced but spiritually uncommitted are the object of some of the things that the writer has to say...Not only does the Holy Spirit in this book speak to Christians in order to strengthen their faith and to the intellectually convinced in order to push them over the line to saving faith, but He also speaks to those who have not believed at all, to those who may not yet be convinced of any part of the gospel. He seeks to show them clearly that Jesus is in fact who He claimed to be..." Hebrews, John MacArthur, Introduction, page xi - xiv

Why Was Hebrews Written?

If the portrait we have painted is correct, then these Jewish readers may have been wondering: Isn't it "better" if we go back to just being garden-variety Jews rather than "Jews for Jesus"? Emphatically "no!" spouts the author of Hebrews. You (the readers) must "*not drift away*" (Heb. 2:1) or "*shrink back*" (10:38), for renouncing Jesus would be tantamount to turning "*away from the living God*" (3:12). Don't go back; "*go on to maturity*" (6:1). The principal point of Hebrews is encapsulated in two book titles — John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and C. S. Lewis's *The Pilgrim's Regress*. Not regress, but progress is what it's all about. Not back to apostasy, but "*on to maturity*" (6:1)."

"To stimulate the readers to "forward march," the author shoots up a series of warning flares — 2:1-4; 3:7-19; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; and 12:14-29. It's not "better" to regress to Judaism; Christ and everything about Him is "*better*" (see 1:4; 6:9; 7:19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; and 12:24 in the King James Version). The book of Hebrews doesn't easily align itself with "political correctness" or most classes in Comparative Religions, for it asserts that God's Son is *superior to all else* in the spiritual sphere.

We may coin a term for what Hebrews is: it is a *homiletter*, meaning a hybrid that's part "*letter*" (13:22) and partly sermon (since a "*word of exhortation*" in Heb. 13:22 is seen to be a sermon in Acts 13:15, where the same essential expression is employed in Greek). The unique focus of Hebrews spotlights Christ's high priesthood. In fact, "with the exception of Romans 8:34, only Hebrews explains [Christ's] present [priestly] ministry."

Primer for Jewish Evangelism

In Hebrews chapter 1 we are introduced to the Son whom God has spoken through in the last days. This one is the Messiah and many prophecies are given in the first chapter to establish that the Son is the Messiah as well as God. No mention is made of the identity of this One until chapter 2 verse nine when it is said, "But we see Jesus..."

The Warning Passages

Hebrews 2:1-4; 3:7-19; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; and 12:15-29

"The view many, including myself, hold is that those who fall away are not true believers, but rather men and women who only appear so. They are people who have received a thorough exposure to the gospel - for example, the catechized Jewish believers of the preceding verses - and have made an ostensible profession of faith and have been received into the fellowship of God's people. However, at a later point they have abandoned their profession, even becoming opponents of Christ." [Hebrews](#), Vol. 1, R. Kent Hughes, page 156-57

- 4:1 *Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.*
- 2 *For unto **us** was the gospel preached, as well as unto **them**: but the word preached did not profit **them**, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.*

¹ *Who Wrote Hebrews, To Whom Was Hebrews Written, and Why Was Hebrews Written*, except for a few quoted sections from other sources, are from [Emmaus Journal Volume 9](#), Summer, 2000, [A Structural Synthesis of the Book of Hebrews](#), James A. Townsend

Hebrews 1:1-3

The Hebrew word *maschiach*, translated *anointed*, is used as a noun 39 times in the Old Testament. As many as 12 times (Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. sees 9 uses and Michael Rydelnik sees 12 uses - The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic, Michael Rydelnik, page 2) *mashiach* is used referring to the future Messiah (1 Samuel 2:10,35; 2 Samuel 22:51; 23:1; Psalm 2:2; 20:6; 28:8; 84:9; 89:51; Habakkuk 3:13; and Daniel 9:25, 26).

The word "Messiah" is defined by W.H. Rose, as "a future royal figure sent by God who will bring salvation to God's people and the world and establish a kingdom characterized by features such as peace and justice." (Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch, editors T.D. Alexander and D.W. Baker). There are many other terms that refer to the coming Messiah - servant, rock, prince of peace, etc.

- 1 Samuel 2:10 *The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.*
- 1 Samuel 2:35 *And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever.*
- 2 Samuel 22:51
Rydelnik *He is the tower of salvation for his king: and sheweth mercy to his anointed, unto David, and to his seed for evermore.*
- 2 Samuel 23:1
Rydelnik *Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said,*
- Psalms 2:2 *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying,*
- Psalms 20:6 *Now know I that the LORD saveth his anointed; he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand.*
- Psalms 28:8 *The LORD is their strength, and he is the saving strength of his anointed.*
- Psalms 84:9 *Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed.*
- Psalms 89:51
Rydelnik *Wherewith thine enemies have reproached, O LORD; wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed.*
- Habakkuk 3:13 *Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah.*
- Daniel 9:25, 26 *Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah [maschiach] the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah [maschiach] be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.*

There are 2 passages that are the best to use when showing a Jewish person that Jesus is Messiah - Psalm 2:2 (coupled with at a minimum verses 6-7 and 10-12) and Daniel 9:25-26 considering some of the 12 as speaking of Jesus/Messiah are questionable.

Hebrew verb (*mashach* מָשַׁח): "to smear, to anoint"

- 1) Priest (Exodus 28:41)
- 2) Prophet (1 Kings 19:16)
- 3) King (1 Samuel 16:13)

Occurrences of noun (*mashiach*, מָשִׁיחַ): "anointed one"

- 1) Priest (Leviticus 4:3)
- 2) Prophet (Psalm 105:15)
- 3) King (1 Samuel 12:3)
- 4) Cyrus (Isaiah 45:1)

- Priest - Represented man before a holy God.
- Prophet - God's spokesman to the people.
- King - God's appointed ruler over the people.

Hebrews 1:

- 1 **God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,**
- 2 **Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;**
- 3 **Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;**

Verse 1: The Son is God's Prophet

God spoke in past by prophets — Now, *"in these last days spoken unto us by his Son"*

Verse 2: The Son is God's King

"whom he hath appointed heir of all things"

Verse 3: The Son is God's Priest

"when he had by himself purged our sins"

"sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (see Hebrews 10:12)

Thus, Hebrews starts in the first 3 verses presenting "the Son" as the promised "anointed One" of Israel.

The Son is Deity (Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2)

- 1) *"by whom also he made the worlds;"* John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-16
- 2) *"Who being the brightness of his glory,"*

The Son is not a reflector of that light He is the source of that light

"All that God is - not merely in His ways, but in His being- is expressed absolutely by the Son...No one has grasped what the Son of God is until he has prostrated his soul before Him 'God over all, blessed forever'! (Romans 9:5). I would that I could put it so strongly that every soul would bow to the truth of it, the absolutely essential, perfect divinity of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. We admit not one iota of a question, not one shadow of a doubt, not one bit of tarnish upon that glory which God has spread before us on this page." Samuel Ridout, Lectures on Hebrews

- 3) *"the express image of his person,"*

χαρακτηρ charakter {khar-ak-tare'} Meaning: 1) the instrument used for engraving or carving 2) the mark stamped upon that instrument or wrought out on it 2a) a mark or figure burned in (Lev. 13:28) or stamped on, an impression 2b) the exact expression (the image) of any person or thing, marked likeness, precise reproduction in every respect, i.e. facsimile

The Son is everything God would be, in substance, if God took on human form.

Colossians 2:9 *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."*

"Exact representation translates the Greek term used for the impression made by a die or stamp on a seal. The design on the die is reproduced on the wax. Jesus Christ is the reproduction of God. He is the perfect, personal imprint of God in time and space. Colossians 1:15 gives a similar illustration of this incomprehensible truth: 'He is the image of the invisible God.' The word 'image' here is *eikon*, from which we get *icon*. *Eikon* means a precise copy, an exact reproduction, as in a fine sculpture or portrait. To call Christ the *eikon* of God means He is the exact reproduction of God. 'For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form' (Col. 2:9)." John MacArthur, Hebrews, pg. 16

- 4) *"upholding all things by the word of his power"*

Colossians 1:17 *"And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."*