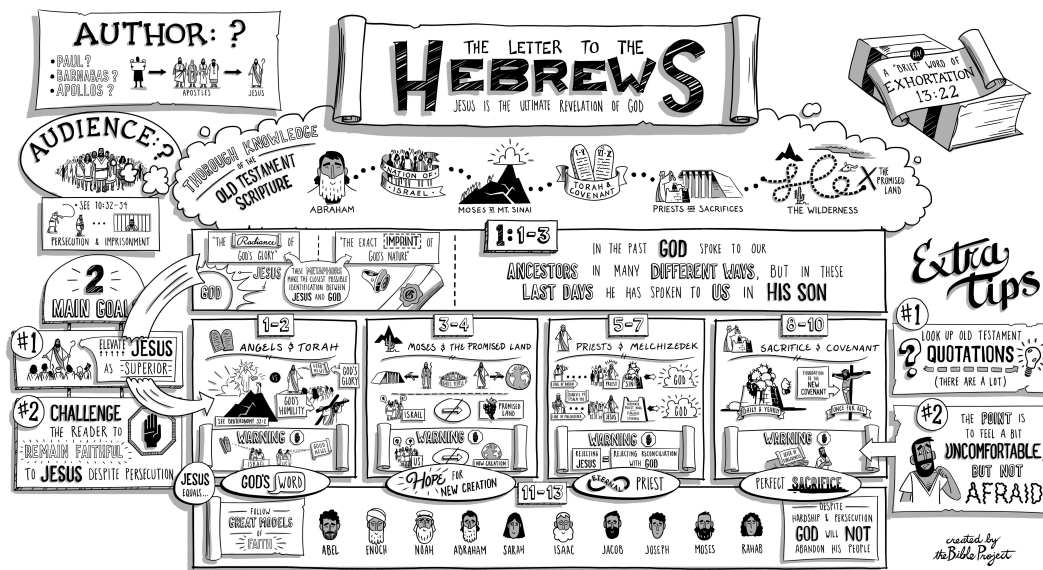


Themes in Hebrews

Introduction

Introduction



[Hebrews Overview by The Bible Project](#)

I. Author

- Paul?
 - Eastern church, Alexandrians
 - Acceptance as Pauline authorship helped confirm Hebrews as canonical, but it is unlikely that Paul was the author. Paul typically identified himself and asserted his apostolicity which the author of Hebrews does not. The author of Hebrews affirmed that he had heard from first hand witnesses, Heb 2:3, implying that he was not a first hand witness.

How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us **by those who heard**,
Heb 2:3

- Paul affirmed that his message came directly from the Lord, Gal 1:12.

For **I did not receive it from any man**, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.
Gal 1:12

- Luke?
 - Calvin

- Did Luke translate Paul?
- F.F. Bruce says Hebrews does not bear the marks of having been translated.
- Apollos?
 - Luther
 - Alexandrian Jewishness, use of Septuagint favors Apollos, but we have no writings from Apollos and no testimony that he could have been the author.
- Barnabas?
 - But Barnabas was from Jerusalem and would likely have heard and seen Jesus first hand, contra Heb 2:3
- Priscilla and Aquila?
- Clement of Rome?

Why do we care?

Canonicity - The books of the Bible are recognized as genuine and inspired. "Canon" means standard or rule. The Bible is our standard for faith and practice. The canonical books are the books that are recognized as those that comprise the Bible.

apostolic authorization

More important — in fact, crucial — was the criterion of apostolicity, which means authorship by an apostle or by an apostolic associate and thus also a date of writing within the apostolic period.

(Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, p. 55)

"apostle" - one sent forth to convey the message of the sender. The Lord appointed the apostles to take His message to the world. He trained and taught them His message.

Jesus Himself affirmed the full authority of the Old Testament as Scripture. Then He made His own words and deeds equally authoritative, and **promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would remind them of His ministry and teach them its significance (John 14:26, 16:12-15)**. The canon of the New Testament, then, is the authoritative record and interpretation of God's revelation of Himself through Jesus Christ — an interpretive record predictively authenticated by our Lord Himself, whose view of His own words and deeds, now written and expounded by the apostles and their associates, was certainly no lower than His view of the Old Testament as the Word of God. **The closing of the Canon by limiting it to the apostolic books arises out of recognition that God's revelation in Christ was sufficient.**

(Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, p. 56)

"God's revelation in Christ was sufficient" **therefore no new revelation is needed.** We see a shadow of that in Heb 1:2.

Apostolicity is not limited to apostolic authorship. It means canonicity extends to other writings authorized by the apostles.

Warfield quotes

Does not knowing who the author of Hebrews is undermine its authority?

- No.
 1. We know that the author heard from those who heard from the Lord, Heb 2:3.
 2. Men much wiser than us have concluded that Hebrews is an authentic word from the Lord.
 3. Calvin's assessment

I class it without hesitation among the apostolical writings. I do not doubt that it has been through the craft of Satan that any have been led to dispute its authority. There is, indeed, no book in Holy Scripture which speaks so clearly of the priesthood of Christ, which so highly exalts the virtue and dignity of that only true sacrifice which He offered by His death, which so abundantly deals with the use of ceremonies as well as their abrogation, and, in a word, so fully explains that Christ is the end of the Law. Let us therefore not allow the Church of God or ourselves to be deprived of so great a benefit, but firmly defend the possession of it.

Calvin quoted in F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*

II. Type of Literature

A sermon in a letter, Heb 13:22, cf. Acts 13:15

Outline

- I. The Superiority of Christ Over the Old Testament Prophets (1:1-3a)
- II. The Superiority of Christ Over Angels (1:3b-2:18), and a Warning Against Apostasy (2:1-4)
- III. The Superiority of Christ Over Moses (3:1-6), and a Warning Against Apostasy (3:7-19)
- IV. The Superiority of Christ Over Joshua (4:1-10), and a Warning Against Apostasy (4:11-16)
- V. The Superiority of Christ Over the Aaronites and Warnings Against Apostasy (5:1-12:29)
 - A. Christ's human sympathy and divine appoint to priesthood (5:1-10)
 - B. Warning against apostasy with exhortation to maturation (5:11-6:20)
 - C. The Melchizedek pattern of Christ's priesthood (7:1-10)
 - D. The transitoriness of the Aaronic priesthood (7:11-28)
 - E. The heavenly realities of Christ's priesthood (8:1-10:18)
 - F. Warning against apostasy (10:19-39)
 - G. Encouragement from Old Testament heroes of faith (11:1-40)
 - H. Encouragement from the example of Christ (12:1-11)
 - I. Warning against apostasy with the example of Esau (12:12-29)
- VI. Practical Exhortations (13:1-19)

From Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*

The author of Hebrews is making an argument to the readers as to why they should persevere in Christ. The structure of his argument is to build up arguments layer by layer from various aspects and perspectives, undermining or overwhelming the readers' reasons for leaving Christ, and making them ashamed or fearful for their unfaithfulness, or building up their courage and resolve to remain faithful. But the arguments (layers) are not distinct. They are interleaved. So it is difficult to cleanly separate the lines of thought. This may be one reason why people think Hebrews is a difficult book.

III. Recipients

- A. Christians - Heb 6:9, Heb 12:1,2
- B. Hebrews - Many references to Judaism and Jewish history
Heb 1:1, "**our** fathers"
- C. Experiencing Persecution - Heb 10:32-34

struggle
suffering
public ridicule
public affliction
partnering with others afflicted
property plundered

D. Tempted to Turn Back - Heb 2:3, Heb 6:4-8, Heb 10:26-31

To retreat in the face of persecution
To escape the pressure from the world
To retreat to the old covenant

IV. Purpose

To exhort the Hebrew Christians to remain faithful

Heb 11, Heb 12:1,2

Hebrews is an exhortation not to fall away.

[It has a hortatory structure](#)

exposition -> exhortation

exposition -> exhortation

exposition -> exhortation

Its [Hebrews'] primary purpose is to insist on the absolute and unrivalled supremacy of Christ as our unique Savior and Lord, and to warn against the extreme danger of imagining that this position can be compromised without cutting oneself off from Christ and his salvation.

(Philip E. Hughes, *The Christology of Hebrews*, Southwestern Journal of Theology, Vol. 28, Fall 1985)

V. Date

We can assume Hebrews was written prior to A.D. 70.

- The author contrasts Jesus as the eternal high priest with the temporal high priests
- The author contrasts Jesus' sacrifice to the animal sacrifices
- The author contrasts the heavenly tabernacle with the earthly tabernacle
- The author contrasts the new vs the old covenant
- There is no mention of the destruction of the temple

VI. Central Theme

The Supremacy of Christ

As a deterrent to apostasy from Christianity back to Judaism

[Hortatory structure](#)

The Superiority of Christ Over ...

VII. Secondary Overall Theme

Perseverance in Christ

and the cost of discipleship - Heb 10:32-34, Heb 12:3-11, Heb 13:13