

Introduction to Hebrews (Courtesy of the International Bible Society)

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AUTHOR

The writer of this letter does not identify himself, but he was obviously well known to the original recipients. Though for some 1,200 years (from c. a.d. 400 to 1600) the book was commonly called "The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews," there was no agreement in the earliest centuries regarding its authorship. Since the Reformation it has been widely recognized that Paul could not have been the writer. There is no disharmony between the teaching of Hebrews and that of Paul's letters, but the specific emphases and writing styles are markedly different. Contrary to Paul's usual practice, the author of Hebrews nowhere identifies himself in the letter—except to indicate that he was a man (see note on [11:32](#)). Moreover, the statement "This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him" ([2:3](#)), indicates that the author had neither been with Jesus during his earthly ministry nor received special revelation directly from the risen Lord, as had Paul ([Gal 1:11–12](#)).

The earliest suggestion of authorship is found in Tertullian's *De Pudicitia*, 20 (c. 200), in which he quotes from "an epistle to the Hebrews under the name of Barnabas." From the letter itself it is clear that the writer must have had authority in the apostolic church and was an intellectual Hebrew Christian well versed in the OT. Barnabas meets these requirements. He was a Jew of the priestly tribe of Levi ([Ac 4:36](#)) who became a close friend of Paul after the latter's conversion. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the church at Antioch commissioned Barnabas and Paul for the work of evangelism and sent them off on the first missionary journey ([Ac 13:1–4](#)).

The other leading candidate for authorship is Apollos, whose name was first suggested by Martin Luther and who is favored by many interpreters today. Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, was also a Jewish Christian with notable intellectual and oratorical abilities. Luke tells us that "he was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures" ([Ac 18:24](#)). We also know that Apollos was associated with Paul in the early years of the church in Corinth ([1Co 1:12](#); [3:4,6,22](#)).

One thing is evident: The author was a master of the Greek language of his day, and he was thoroughly acquainted with the pre-Christian Greek translation of the OT (the Septuagint), which he regularly quotes.

DATE

Hebrews must have been written before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in a.d. 70 because: (1) If it had been written after this date, the author surely would have mentioned the temple's destruction and the end of the Jewish sacrificial system; and (2) the author consistently uses the Greek present tense when speaking of the temple and the priestly activities connected with it (see [5:1–3](#); [7:23,27](#); [8:3–5](#); [9:6–9,13,25](#); [10:1,3–4,8,11](#); [13:10–11](#)).

LITERARY FORM

Hebrews is commonly referred to as a letter, though it does not have the typical form of a letter. It ends like a letter ([13:22–25](#)) but begins more like an essay or sermon ([1:1–4](#)). The author does not identify himself or those addressed, which letter writers normally did. And he offers no manner of greeting, such as is usually found at the beginning of ancient letters. Rather, he begins with a magnificent statement about Jesus Christ. He calls his work a "word of exhortation" ([13:22](#)), the conventional designation given a sermon in a synagogue service (see [Ac 13:15](#), where "message of encouragement" translates the same Greek words as "word of exhortation"). Like a sermon, Hebrews is full of encouragement, exhortations and stern warnings. It is likely that the author used sermon materials and sent them out in a modified letter form.

→ Hebrews Chapter 1

1. How is the author indicating that the LORD used to communicate?
 - a. How are things different now?
2. In considering Hebrews 1:2, what does the phrase "last days" pertain to?
 - a. In viewing Peter's speech during Pentecost, in Acts chapter 2:14-21, to what time period does Peter apply the phrase "last days"?
 - b. James 5:1-3. How does James apply the phrase "last days"?
 - c. Although the phrase "last days" can apply to the entire church age, how does it appear to apply in these passages: 1 Peter 2:1-7 and 2 Timothy 3:1-5
3. In the Old Testament temple, the priest's work was never done. In the context of the first several verses of Hebrews, what is stated that confirms that Jesus' work has been completed?
 - a. So, if Christ's work is completed, what is the responsibility of His Body, the Church?
4. Read John 1:1-18. What is similar about the opening to John's gospel and the first chapter of Hebrews?
 - a. What do John's passage and Hebrews 1 have in common concerning Jesus?
 - i. What do they both say concerning the Word?
 - ii. What does each of the passages say concerning creation?

5. Read Psalms 2:6-7 and Psalms 104:4. How does the author distinguish Jesus' authority from the angels?
 - a. Looking at Paul's communication concerning Psalms 2 in Acts Chapter 13:33, what does Paul indicate "begotten" applies to?
 - i. Also, looking at Revelation 1:17-18 and Colossians 1:18, how do these passages confirm that we shouldn't look at "begotten" or "firstborn" to reflect Jesus as a created being?
6. Read 2 Samuel 7:8-17. How does this passage apply to Jesus Christ, yet also, in part, to Solomon as a shadow of Christ?
7. Read Psalms 45:6-7. How is this used in Hebrews 1 and who does the author of Hebrews confirm it is regarding?
8. Read Psalms 102:25-27. How does this apply to Hebrews chapter 1 and what does it mean?
9. Read Psalms 110:1. What does this passage indicate concerning Jesus?
10. From books of Moses to the book of Revelation, we learn that angels are not to be worshipped. What 2 rhetorical question in Hebrews chapter 1 also supports this and confirms Jesus' supremacy?
 - a. Some have concluded that Michael the Archangel is Jesus. How do these passages also help refute this idea?

→ Hebrews Chapter 2

1. What are we told to pay close attention to and why?
2. Read verses 2 & 3. Explain how punishment and salvation are contrasted in these verses:
3. How does God testify to His salvation?
4. Read Psalms 8. What is subject to Christ?
 - a. Why don't we see all subject to Him at the present time?
 - b. What does it say Christ tasted and for whose benefit?
5. Read Isaiah Chapter 53. Now read Hebrews 2:10. What do these passages have in common?
 - a. What is the message of these verses in both passages?
6. Read Hebrews 2:11. What has Jesus done for us?
 - a. What does he call us?

7. Read Psalms 22:1-22. In the context of Psalms 22, what has Christ accomplished and for what reason did the author of Hebrews make reference to verse 22 of that Psalm?
8. Hebrews makes reference to Psalms 18 as well. Look at Psalms 18:1-2 and explain how this applies to the ministry of Jesus:
 - a. Read Isaiah 8:17-18. How does the author of Hebrews use verse 18 from this chapter in Isaiah?
9. Who holds the power of death?
 - a. Read 1 Corinthians 15:45-57. How was death destroyed?
10. Read Leviticus 16:29-34. What was the job of the Levitical priest once a year?
 - a. How did Jesus become a merciful and faithful high priest?
11. Read Hebrews 4:15. Also read Hebrews 2:18. Why is Jesus able to help us with temptation?

→ Hebrews Chapter 3

1. Read Acts 4:8-13. Read Hebrews 3:1. What do these verses have in common and what is the message of these passages?

2. Read Psalms 95:6-11. What period in the Judaic history is this passage referencing?
 - i. What are we asked to learn from it?

3. Read Numbers 13:25 – 14:24. Jesus is the true fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17). How did Moses' actions demonstrate a foreshadowing of grace that Jesus would eventually bring to completion?
 - i. How is the Promised Land symbolic to Heaven based on the consequences that occurred to the Israelites?

 - ii. Who was granted entrance into the Promised Land and why?

 - iii. How are challenged in our belief in the salvation from Christ?

4. The author of Hebrews indicates that the builder of the house has greater honor than the house. The building up of the church or The Body of Christ was Jesus Himself. What does the author of Hebrews say about those who hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end?

In looking at each section of verses below, what is being told of the church/ Body of Christ (explain the areas that concern unity, giftings, servanthood, etc.)?

- a. 1 Peter 2:4-10

- b. 1 Corinthians 3:9-16 (note that the use of "You" is in the plural form in the Greek)

- c. 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

- d. 2 Corinthians 6:14-20 (note that the use of "You" is in the plural form in the Greek)

- e. Romans 7:1-6

- f. Romans 12:3-8

- g. Ephesians 4:1-16

5. Read Hebrews 3:13. How are we hardened by sin's deceitfulness?

- i. What is "Today" in this verse?

→ Hebrews Chapter 4

1. Read verses 1-3. How do we fall short of God's rest?
 - a. How do we enter His rest?
 - b. What was the "rest" that Joshua, through the hand of God, brought the Israelites to?
2. Reference Numbers 13:25 – 14:24. Did all of them know who God was?
 - a. Did they witness His power?
 - b. Did all enter His rest? Why or Why not?
 - c. In looking at this example and understanding why they didn't enter His rest, how is this compared to the church age and how those don't enter His rest?
 - i. Explain the connection, similarities and differences between unbelief and disobedience.
 - a. Is it possible to have unbelief but not disobedience or vice versa?
3. Read James 2:14-26. How do these verses tie into Hebrews chapter 4?
4. What does it mean that the Word of God is living and powerful?
5. With all of the struggles and failures we deal with in our life, why are we able to approach the throne of grace with confidence?
 - i. In what aspects can Jesus relate to us with a depth of understanding noted in this passage?

→ Hebrews Chapter 5

1. From where is a high priest selected?

a. Why is a high priest able to deal gently with those who lack knowledge?

2. Who did the past high priest offer sacrifices for?

a. How is this different than Jesus, our new, eternal High Priest?

3. In what order was Christ made priest forever?

a. Read Genesis 14:14-20. Who was the priest of God during this time?

i. Since "Salem" means Peace, who was this priest?

ii. What did Abraham do on his behalf?

4. Knowing that Jesus did not replace the High Priest until His mission and ultimate sacrifice was made, how are we to understand Hebrews 5:5 especially with reference to the word "today"? Reference Acts 13:26-35.

5. How did Christ learn obedience?

a. Read Ezekiel 14:1-20. Why can't an ordinary human who has lived a righteous life be the source of salvation?

b. How did Jesus become the source of eternal salvation?

6. Read Hebrews 5:7. Also read Matthew 26:36-44. What did Jesus pray?

a. What ended up being the will of the Father?

7. What is milk in the chapter?

a. What is solid food?

b. In looking at 2 Corinthians 3:1-4, why was Paul restricted to "Milk" as the spiritual food that he was feeding the Church?

c. Why is the American Church, in many ways, on a steady diet of "Milk"?

→ Hebrews Chapter 6

1. What does the author of Hebrews indicate are the elementary teachings of Christ?

2. Read verses 4 – 8. This has been interpreted in several different ways by biblical scholars over the centuries. Look at the interpretations below and indicate if there is an interpretation you agree with and explain why:
 - i. A belief that salvation can come through works even after understanding that true salvation comes by grace through faith.
 - ii. Christians who reject their salvation after coming to the knowledge of the truth of the Gospel but walk away from it, have lost their ability (hardened heart) to be saved again and remain in unbelief.
 - iii. Christians who reject their salvation and, by their own free will, choose never to return to again due to unbelief.
 - iv. It pertains to investigators and supposed followers of Christ, like Judas, who see, understand and live in the midst of the truth, but choose not to be in agreement with the message of the Gospel.

Note that one challenging piece to finding the interpretation is also similar phrasing in Hebrews 2:9.

- v. Read Matthew 7:15 – 23. Read also Luke 15:11-32. What additional perspective do Jesus' words give us on these passages?

3. What does Hebrews 6 tell us that God is definitely NOT?
 - i. Why is this important to remember?

4. Read verses 9-12 again. What is the message that is being conveyed here?
5. Who did God swear by when he made his promise to Abraham and why?
6. What is it impossible for God to do?
 - i. Why is this limitation good and how can it impact hope in our lives?
 - ii. Those who look to hold God guilty of deviating from his character site the following passage: 1 Kings 22:1-28. Does this passage prove God is breaking His own character?
7. The Israelite High Priest was only allowed to enter the Most Holy Place (or the Holy of Holies) once a year (Yom Kippur – the “Day of Atonement”). The Most Holy Place was covered with a thick curtain about 3 inches thick. Read Hebrews 6:19-20. Also read Matthew 27:45 – 54. What happened in these passages that indicate the change in the High Priest and His role?

→ Hebrews Chapter 7

1. Who was Melchizedek?

i. What are the meanings of his name?

2. Who are his descendants?

i. Who is he compared to and why?

3. How is Melchizedek compared to Abraham?

i. According to the Judaic law, what genealogical line were the priests to be descendants of?

4. Was perfection attainable through the Levitical priesthood? Why or why not?

5. Which of the twelve tribes of Israel did Jesus human ancestry come from?

i. What does this mean concerning the law?

ii. Read Genesis 49:8-10. How does Jacob (Israel's) blessing relate to this chapter of Hebrews?

iii. Read Revelation 5:1-14. How does this relate the text of this chapter in Hebrews?

6. What did the law make perfect?

i. How is the law described when compared to a better hope found through Christ?

ii. What was set aside?

7. Read Psalm 110:1-7. What does this prophecy state concerning the Messiah and how does it pertain to this chapter of Hebrews?

8. Read Hebrews 7:22. What is said concerning Jesus and the "better covenant"?

9. Why is Christ's priesthood unchangeable?

10. How do we draw near to God, according to this chapter of Hebrews?

11. How is Jesus Christ, as High Priest described?

i. How often does Jesus need to offer up sacrifices and why?

→ Hebrews Chapter 8

1. Who is our High Priest?
 - i. Where does our High Priest serve and why does the author of Hebrews indicate that He would not be our High Priest if he was on earth?
2. What two things are necessary for High Priests to offer?
3. This chapter indicates that our High Priest is our mediator. Read Galatians 3:19-25. What is said concerning our mediator and the purpose of the law which was a shadow of what would be fulfilled through Christ?
 - a. Read 1 Timothy 2:1-7. How many mediators do we have?
 - i. What does God, our Savior, desire according to this passage and how are we instrumental in this process?
4. When reflecting upon the Old Testament, which individuals come to mind as mediators as a shadow of what was to be fulfilled in the New Testament and how was their mediation incomplete?
5. What was Moses commanded to do and why was he commanded to do this?
 - i. Read Mathew 6:9-13. How does this passage relate to Hebrews 8?

6. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. What is The LORD's first promise in this passage?
 - i. How is the New Covenant or New Testament compared to the Old Covenant and what is the New Covenant?
 - ii. Why won't people say "Know the LORD"?
 - a. How, according to Christ are we to receive this knowledge (reference John 16:12-13)?
 - iii. What is the tremendous gift that is given in this New Testament?
7. Read 1 Peter 2:4-10. How is this passage related to the New Covenant that Jeremiah prophesied concerning?
8. Read Isaiah 11:6-9 and reference Hebrews 12:18-24. How might these verses in Isaiah find spiritual fulfillment in the New Covenant and how does this relate to Hebrews 8?
9. Read Hebrews 8:12. In Jeremiah's prophecy, what magnificent gift would all future generations have access to and by what means?
10. Most scholars believe that the epistle to the Hebrews was written in the early to mid-60s A.D. Read Hebrews 8:13. What would soon happen in Israel's history that would bring this verse to fulfillment?

→ Hebrews Chapter 9

1. In the Tabernacle, what is in the "Holy Place" or "Sanctuary"?
 - a. Read Psalm 100:4. Knowing that Christ is the "Head" of the Church, which is His Body, and that we, as believers, signify the new temple, how are we to come before presence of God?
2. What is in the "Most Holy Place" or Holy of Holies" or "Holiest of All" and where is it?
 - a. In the Most Holy Place or Holy of Holies, who was allowed to enter and how often?
3. What was the purpose of the items that were included in or by the Ark of the Covenant below and how do these relate to the new Covenant?
 - a. Gold jar or pot of manna
 - b. Aaron's rod or staff that budded
 - c. The stone tablets of the covenant (reference, also, 2 Corinthians 3:4-11)
4. What did the Holy Spirit signify, according to this chapter, had not yet been disclosed while the tabernacle was still standing?
 - a. What is indicated that the old tabernacle is not able to do?
5. What tabernacle, according to this chapter, did Christ enter?
 - a. In reviewing Acts 6:14, what was reported of Stephen's words of what would happen to the present tabernacle during the mid-AD 30s?

6. Read Matthew 27:50-51. What important leadership transfer finalized after this moment?
7. Read Hebrews 9:16-17. What is necessary for will and testament to be put into place and what is the significance in this chapter?
8. Read Exodus 24:7-8. Also, by referencing the 9th chapter of Hebrews, what is necessary in order to put the covenant in place?
 - a. Read Hebrews 9:22. What is necessary in order for forgiveness to occur?
9. What is man (or humans) destined to do once and how does this refute the idea of reincarnation?
 - a. Some have mistakenly taken this passage in an absolute sense to mean that since Enoch and Elijah did not experience this, that they must be the 2 witnesses in Revelation 11 that have to die. However, in looking at 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, how does this passage refute this idea?
 - b. What occurs after this thing that is destined for humans to experience?
10. Why did Christ only have to provide the sacrifice for all once?
 - a. What is Christ's doing on our behalf when he returns the second time?

→ Hebrews Chapter 10

1. What can the law never do?
 - a. Why?
2. What are the sacrifices reminders of?
 - a. What can the blood of bulls and goats NEVER do?
3. Based on the answers to the previous questions, does this mean that the Old Testament is false? Why or why not?
4. Read Psalms 40:6-9. Some skeptics have concluded that Hebrews 10 has the quote wrong. However, when you read the earliest Greek version of the Old Testament (The Septuagint), here's how it reads (translated in English): *6 O Lord my God, you have multiplied your wonderful works, and in your thoughts there is none who shall be likened to you: I declared and spoke [of them]: they exceeded number. 7 Sacrifice and offering thou would not; but a body you have prepared me: whole-burnt-offering and [sacrifice] for sin you did not require. 8 Then I said, Behold, I come: in the volume of the book it is written concerning me, 9 I desired to do your will, O my God, and your law in the midst of mine heart.*

The Septuagint is what Jesus most often quoted in the New Testament so we can know that it is reliable. How are these passages similar and how does the Septuagint differ from our modern translations?

 - a. Where is the law found in Him, according to these passages?
5. By Jesus sacrifice what has been done for us once and for all?
 - a. What effort is required on our part (also read Romans 4:1-8 and John 3:16-17)?
 - b. Read also, James 2:14-26. Explain how can these verses be in harmony with those above?

6. Read Hebrews 10:8-9. What does this mean and what did Christ do with one offering?
 - a. Since priest were always working and no chair was in the temple, what is the symbolic meaning to Christ sitting down at the right hand of God?
 - b. What sacrifice are we, as members of Christ, to bring now (reference Romans 12:1-2)?
7. What does the Holy Spirit, according to these passages, testify to us?
8. In reading verses 19-20, what is the veil of the temple symbolic of?
9. How are we able to draw near to the throne of God?
 - i. In what manner can we draw near?
10. The New Testament does not have any scriptures that state we are required to attend a "church". However, what passage, in this chapter of Hebrews, is about as close as you can get?
11. Verses 26-27 have many scholars debating as to its meaning. Though we can't be certain, we can consider the context of the entire letter to the Hebrews as well as this chapter. What type of sacrifice should they never return to and would never take away their deliberate sins?
12. What was necessary to judge those under the Law of Moses and what can be expected if we reject the sacrifice of Christ?
13. What did the recipients of Hebrews do that was commendable and that they were encouraged to continue in?
14. What are the just called to live by and what does this mean?