

Bible Study Guide – Hebrews: Introduction
Bellevue Church of Christ – Fall / Winter 2017-2018

Introduction

Author: Unknown - The author of this work does not state his name, though he assumes the audience knows him (cf. 13:19, 22, 23).

– The author of Hebrews would have to meet these requirements.

- Very familiar with the Septuagint (LXX)
- A Biblical theologian familiar with redemptive history
- A Jew familiar with Hellenistic culture and Jewish Tradition
- Not an immediate disciple of Christ (2:3)
- A friend of Timothy (13:23)

What About Paul?

– Pauline Authorship is the oldest and widest held:

- In the earliest manuscript editions of the New Testament books (C2nd and C3rd), Hebrews is included after Romans among the books written by the apostle Paul.
- Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150 – 215) claimed a Pauline association for the book and suggested that Paul wrote the book originally in Hebrew and that Luke translated it into Greek (Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 6.14.2-4).
- The King James Bible included the title: “The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews.”
- The epistle closes in a typically Pauline fashion (13:25)
- The overall structure of the epistle is similar to Paul’s style (doctrinal, followed by practical)
- There are several strong hints both of Paul’s point of view and even his wording in this letter.

– The arguments against Pauline authorship, however, are strong:

- The letter is anonymous and lacks Paul’s customary greeting.
- The style of writing is dramatically better than Paul’s (though a scribe could have been used)
- The logical development is much more tightly woven than is Paul’s
- The church in Rome (C4th) did not regard Paul as the author (Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 3.3.5; 6.20.3).
- The author appears to suggest that he was taught the gospel by “those who heard” (2:3), though Paul adamantly argued that he received the gospel directly from Jesus (Gal 1:11-24)
- Timothy’s imprisonment (Hebrews 13:23) simply does not seem able to fit within Paul’s lifetime, since he is mentioned repeatedly both in Acts and in Paul’s letters and always as a free man.

Other’s Suggested: Barnabas, Apollos, Priscilla, Clement of Rome, Luke

According to Origen: “Who wrote the epistle of Hebrews? In truth, only God knows!” (Hist. eccl. 6.25.14).

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Recipients: Jewish Christians who were in danger of reverting to Judaism. Precise destination is unknown.

Time and Place of Writing: Most likely between the death of Paul (~ 64 A.D.) and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (70 A.D.).

Outline:

Christianity Has...

- I. The Greater Mediator (1-7)**
 - a. Greater than the Angels (1:4 – 2:18)
 - b. Greater than Moses (3)
 - c. Greater than Joshua (4:1-13)
 - d. Greater than Priests (4:14 – 7:28)

- II. The Greater Covenant (8-10)**
 - a. The Greater Promises (8)
 - b. The Greater Sanctuary (9)
 - c. The Greater Sacrifice (10)

- III. The Greater Response (11-13)**
 - a. The Definition of Faith (11)
 - b. The Duties of Faith (12-13)

Teacher Notes

Audience Knows the Author

Hebrews 13:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

Hebrews 13:22 (ESV)

²² I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.

Hebrews 13:23 (ESV)

²³ You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.

Not an Immediate Disciple of Christ

Hebrews 2:3 (ESV)

³ 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,

A Friend of Timothy

Hebrews 13:23 (ESV)

²³ You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.

Clement of Alexandria

Eusebius: Ecclesiastical History – Book VI, Chapter 14, Verses 2-4

*-regarding Clement of Alexandria and his writing, The Hypotyposes (Outlines of Canonical Books)
-lost since the 9th century.*

2. He says that the Epistle to the Hebrews is the work of Paul, and that it was written to the Hebrews in the Hebrew language; but that Luke translated it carefully and published it for the Greeks, and hence the same style of expression is found in this epistle and in the Acts.

3. But he says that the words, Paul the Apostle, were probably not prefixed, because, in sending it to the Hebrews, who were prejudiced and suspicious of him, he wisely did not wish to repel them at the very beginning by giving his name.

4. Farther on he says: *“But now, as the blessed presbyter said, since the Lord being the apostle of the Almighty, was sent to the Hebrews, Paul, as sent to the Gentiles, on account of his modesty did not subscribe himself an apostle of the Hebrews, through respect for the Lord, and because being a herald and apostle of the Gentiles he wrote to the Hebrews out of his superabundance.”*

King James Version

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE
TO THE
HEBREWS

1 *GOD, who at sundry times and ^ain divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, ²Hath ^bin these last days ^cspoken unto us by ^dhis Son, whom he hath ^eappointed ^fheir of all things, ^gby whom also he made ^hthe worlds; ³Who being ⁱthe brightness ^jof his glory, and ^kthe express image of his person, and ^lupholding all things by the word of his power, ^mwhen he had by himself purged our sins, ⁿsat down ^oon the right hand of the Majesty on high;

Close of the Letter

Hebrews 13:25 (ESV)

²⁵ Grace be with all of you.

The Church in Rome

Eusebius: Ecclesiastical History – Book III, Chapter 3, Verse 5

5. Paul's fourteen epistles are well known and undisputed. It is not indeed right to overlook the fact that some have rejected the Epistle to the Hebrews, saying that it is disputed by the church of Rome, on the ground that it was not written by Paul. But what has been said concerning this epistle by those who lived before our time I shall quote in the proper place. In regard to the so-called Acts of Paul, I have not found them among the undisputed writings.

Eusebius: Ecclesiastical History – Book VI, Chapter 20, Verse 3

3. There has reached us also a dialogue of Caius, a very learned man, which was held at Rome under Zephyrinus, with Proclus, who contended for the Phrygian heresy. In this he curbs the rashness and boldness of his opponents in setting forth new Scriptures. He mentions only thirteen epistles of the holy apostle, not counting that to the Hebrews with the others. And unto our day there are some among the Romans who do not consider this a work of the apostle.

Those Who Heard

Hebrews 2:3 (ESV)

³ 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,

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Galatians 1:11–24 (ESV)

¹¹ For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. 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. ¹³ For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰ (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³ They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they glorified God because of me.

According to Eusebius

Eusebius: Ecclesiastical History – Book VI, Chapter 25, Verse 14

14. But who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows. The statement of some who have gone before us is that Clement, bishop of the Romans, wrote the epistle, and of others that Luke, the author of the Gospel and the Acts, wrote it. But let this suffice on these matters.

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Hebrews – Expositor’s Bible Commentary

The epistle was used by Clement of Rome (e.g., 1 Clement 17; 36) probably also by Polycarp (*To the Philippians* 6; 12) and Hermas (*Visions* 2.3.2; 3.7.2; *Similitudes* 9.13.7). Therefore the author was an early Christian. The earliest reference to authorship is a statement of Clement of Alexandria that Paul wrote it in Hebrew and that Luke translated the work into Greek (quoted in Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.2). When it was accepted as part of the NT, this was partly at least because contemporaries held Paul to be the author. This view, however, appears to rest on no reliable evidence but rather to be a deduction from the facts that Paul was a prolific writer of epistles and that Hebrews is a noble writing that must have had a distinguished author. But both the language and thought forms are unlike those of Paul. The Greek is polished; Paul’s is rugged, though vigorous. This book moves in the context of Levitical symbolism, about which Paul elsewhere says nothing. The same argument also tells against Clement of Alexandria’s view that Luke translated it. While there are some interesting coincidences of language between Hebrews and Luke-Acts, there are also some differences. And it is incredible that if Luke knew Hebrews, he should have made no reference whatever to its teaching either in his Gospel or in the Acts.

None of the early writers who cite the epistle mentions its author. Nor does internal evidence help us much. The author was plainly a teacher, a second generation Christian (2:3). The style is unlike that of any other NT document; consequently, we have nothing more to go on to determine authorship than conjecture. Though many suggestions have been made, it will suffice to mention only a few of them. The allegation that Barnabas was the author is as old as Tertullian (*De Pudicitia* 20), but little can be said in its support. Barnabas was a Levite (Acts 4:36), and there is much about Levitical ritual in the epistle. Again, in Acts 4:36 Barnabas was called *huios paraklēseōs* (“Son of Encouragement”); and in Hebrews 13:22 the epistle refers to itself as *tou logou tēs paraklēseōs* (“my word of exhortation,” NIV). But it is hard to see 2:3 as applying to Barnabas.

Luther suggested that Apollos was the author. A number of modern scholars support this view. Apollos was an eloquent man (Acts 18:24), and there is indeed eloquence in this epistle. Apollos came from Alexandria, a center where allegorical interpretation, which might be said to be akin to the method used in Hebrews, flourished (cf. Philo). Apollos had “a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24), a description particularly appropriate for the author, who did not simply use the “proof-text” method but applied a thorough knowledge of Scripture in an original manner. Apollos must remain a possible author, but the evidence is far from conclusive.

Harnack thought that Priscilla probably wrote the epistle. His strong point is that this would account for the suppression of the author’s name. It was a man’s world, and there would be every reason for keeping it quiet that a woman had written an epistle intended to be authoritative and to have wide circulation. Priscilla and her husband were cultured Hellenistic Jews, and the woman who could instruct Apollos in the faith (Acts 18:26) was no mean teacher. The interest in the tabernacle would be natural in a family whose living came from tentmaking (Acts 18:3), and the outlook of a pilgrim would be natural to one who did so much traveling. All this is interesting but plainly it falls far short of proof. And against it stands the masculine participle *diēgoumenon* (“to tell”) used of the author in 11:32.

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In the end we must agree that we have no certain evidence about the authorship of Hebrews. Who wrote it remains unknown to us. We can scarcely improve on the words of Origen's conclusion, that "who wrote the Epistle, God only knows the truth" (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.14)¹

¹ Morris, L. (1981). [Hebrews](#). In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation* (Vol. 12, pp. 6–7). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

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Who Wrote the Book of Hebrews? (Karen Jobes)

When you consider the wide agreement among biblical scholars about who wrote every other book of the New Testament, it's a little mysterious that we don't know who wrote Hebrews.

There are a handful of contenders. Let's take a look at the reasons each of them might be the author.

Did Paul write Hebrews?

It is possible Paul wrote the book of Hebrews. There are a couple reasons why this might be the case.

First, in the earliest manuscript editions of the New Testament books, Hebrews is included after Romans among the books written by the apostle Paul. This was taken as evidence that Paul had written it, and some Eastern churches accepted Hebrews as canonical earlier than in the West.

Second, both Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150 – 215) and Origen (AD 185 – 253) claimed a Pauline association for the book but recognized that Paul himself probably did not put pen to paper for this book, even though they did not know the author's name.

Clement of Alexandria suggests that Paul wrote the book originally in Hebrew and that Luke translated it into Greek, though the Greek of Hebrews bears no resemblance to translation Greek (e.g., that of the Septuagint).

The King James Version assumes Pauline authorship

The nuanced position on the authorship question by the Alexandrian fathers was obscured by later church tradition that mistook Pauline *association* for Pauline *authorship*.

The enormously influential King James Bible took its cue from this tradition. In fact, in the KJV, you'll find the title translated as it was found in some manuscripts: "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews." The tradition of Pauline authorship continued.

Parallels between Hebrews and Paul's writings

It's certainly reasonable to conclude Paul wrote the book of Hebrews. Many of the thoughts of Hebrews are similar to those found in Paul's writings:

Hebrews	Paul's writings
Hebrews 1:3 "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word."	Colossians 1:15 – 17 "The Son is the image of the invisible God. . . . For in him all things were created . . . and in him all things hold together."
Hebrews 2:4 "God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."	1 Corinthians 12:11 "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines."

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Hebrews	Paul's writings
Hebrews 2:14 – 17) “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death. . . .”	Philippians 2:7 – 8 “Being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!”
Hebrews 8:6 “But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.”	2 Corinthians 3:6 “He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant — not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”
Hebrews 10:14 “For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”	Romans 5:9; 12:1 “Since we have now been justified by his blood”; “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.”

The soteriology of Hebrews is quite consistent with Paul’s own teaching. For instance, the statement in Hebrews 10:14 that those who have been “made perfect” are in the process of being “made holy” sounds very much like Paul’s teaching on justification (e.g., Rom. 3:21 – 5:9) and sanctification (e.g., Rom. 8:1 – 17). Moreover, both Paul and the author of Hebrews thought of Abraham as the spiritual father of Christians in similar ways.

Reasons Paul did not write Hebrews

In spite of all this evidence for Pauline authorship, few New Testament scholars today believe Paul wrote it.

Both John Calvin and Martin Luther shared this judgment as far as the sixteenth century.

Even centuries earlier in the fourth century, the church of Rome did not believe Paul wrote Hebrews, possibly retaining a latent memory of the actual author (Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 3.3.5; 6.20.3).

In other words, the rejection of Pauline authorship of Hebrews is a long-standing position in the church.

What can we infer from the book of Hebrews itself?

The internal evidence presented by the book of Hebrews itself indicates an author other than Paul.

- The style of Hebrews, except in the closing verses (13:18 – 25), is quite unlike any other writing of Paul’s that has survived.
 - In keeping with the **style** of a person well educated in formal rhetoric, the Greek of Hebrews is highly literary and very ornate.
 - The **vocabulary** is sophisticated, and it includes 150 words that are not found elsewhere in the New Testament and 10 that do not occur in any other Greek writings that have survived for our study.

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- The **structure** of the epistle conforms to conventions found in Greek rhetoric used when a speech was designed to persuade its audience to action. Much of this rhetorical achievement is lost when the original Greek of Hebrews is translated into modern language, but in the original it is elegant and euphonious Greek prose. The high rhetorical quality of Hebrews indicates that its author most likely had the most advanced literary education of any of the New Testament writers.
- The author does not introduce himself as Paul typically did (cf. 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; and 2 Tim. 1:1).
- Its theology, though very compatible with that of the Pauline letters, is very distinctive. The apostle Paul, for instance, never alludes to Jesus as a priest, which is the major motif of Hebrews. In fact, Hebrews is the only New Testament writing to expound on Jesus as the Great High Priest and final sacrifice.

The most persuasive argument against Pauline authorship

An even more persuasive argument that the apostle Paul was not the author of Hebrews is the way the author alludes to himself in Hebrews 2:3, stating that the gospel was confirmed “to us” by those who heard the Lord announce salvation.

The apostle Paul always made the point that, even though he wasn’t one of the twelve original disciples who walked with Jesus during his earthly life, he was nonetheless an apostle of Jesus Christ, and usually identifies himself as such in his letters. It seems unlikely that Paul here in 2:3 would refer to himself as simply someone who received the gospel from those who had heard the Lord.

If not Paul, then who are the other possible authors?

We’ve established that someone other than Paul wrote the epistle.

But it is possible—even likely—that because of some of the parallels with Paul’s epistles, we know the following things about the author:

1. The author was likely a close associate of Paul
2. The author was able to write in a rhetorically ornate Greek style
3. The author had become a Christian out of Judaism
4. The author’s understanding of the doctrine of salvation was highly compatible with what the apostle Paul taught, though creatively distinctive.

Connection to Alexandria

Christianity reached Alexandria at a very early date. The missionary impetus of the Christian gospel arose in Jerusalem following the stoning of Stephen when a great persecution broke out and Christians began to scatter (Acts 8).

When Acts 6:1 mentions both Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews, the phrase *pros tous hebraious* is used in that context, the exact phrase by which Hebrews is later known. One twentieth-century scholar named William Manson suggested that Christians who were of the same mind as

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Stephen brought the Christian message to Alexandria, noting several elements common to Stephen's speech in Acts 7 that are also shared by the book of Hebrews.

- its high rhetorical style,
- its use of the Septuagint, and
- its possible conceptual constructs

These connections make it very likely that the author was originally from the Alexandrian church, regardless of where he was when he penned the letter, and regardless of to whom it was originally sent.

Because of this, a possible author is Apollos, a native of Alexandria, according to Acts 18:24.

Why Apollos might have been the author of Hebrews

Here's what we know about Apollos from the Bible:

- He was from Alexandria and traveled in the Apostle Paul's orbit (Acts 18:24).
- He was taught by Paul's companions, Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:24 – 28),
- Paul knew Apollos personally, and encouraged him in his ministry (1 Cor. 16:12).
- He was a highly educated Alexandrian who would have been schooled in the literary style exemplified by Hebrews.
- Moreover, as a Jewish believer (Acts 18:24), he had the thorough knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures in their Greek version that the book of Hebrews exclusively uses.
- Apollos was a great defender of the Christian faith, vigorously refuting the opposing Jews in public debate and proving from the Old Testament that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 18:28).
- He eventually became as influential as the apostles Paul and Peter (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4 – 6, 22; 4:6; 16:12).

We also know from the very early history of the church that Apollos would also fit the memory handed down to both Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150 – 215) and to Origen (AD 185 – 253), who claimed a Pauline association. Origen also recognized that Paul himself probably did not write Hebrews.[5]

For these reasons, Apollos of Alexandria has been a leading contender for the authorship of Hebrews at least as far back as the great Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, but he has not been the only contender.

Clement

Eusebius, the great historian of the church, recognizes that the letter Clement wrote from Rome to the Corinthian church in the late first century contained many allusions to and quotations from Hebrews and notes that on that basis some believed that Clement himself was the translator or author of Hebrews (Hist. eccl. 3.38.2).

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However, scholarly examination shows that the Greek text of Hebrews could not be a translation of a Semitic text — at least as we understand “translation” today — because its rhetorical features would be possible only when composed in Greek.

And so if either Clement or Luke were involved in the production of the extant book of Hebrews, he would have had a very free hand in working with Paul’s material, to the point that he would be an author, not a translator by any modern definition.

Barnabas

The church father Tertullian (AD 160? – 220?) mentioned that Barnabas, Paul’s traveling companion on his first mission to the Gentiles, authored Hebrews (Pud. 20). The association of Barnabas with the book of Hebrews may be because he was described as a “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36), and Hebrews 13:22 describes the letter as a word of encouragement (or exhortation). Moreover, Barnabas is referred to as an “apostle” (Acts 14:14) and, being a Levite (Acts 4:36), would have had the interest in and knowledge about the priesthood that forms such a dominant theme in Hebrews.

Timothy

A recent theory suggests that Timothy wrote Hebrews, except for the closing verses that Paul appended himself where Timothy is mentioned by name.[6]

While Timothy was a close associate of Paul, he was from Lystra, a small town in Asia Minor where it is unlikely he could have received the formal rhetorical training reflected in Hebrews.

Furthermore, it is doubtful that Timothy had any connection to Alexandria, though that connection may not be necessary. What we know of Apollos matches more closely what we see in Hebrews than does what we know of Timothy.

Priscilla

The intriguing theory presented in more modern times by the German biblical scholar Adolf Harnack argued that Hebrews was written by Priscilla, the woman who, together with her husband, Aquila, was a close associate of Paul’s.

Although Harnack’s idea generated much discussion in its day, the author refers to himself in Hebrews 11:32, using a masculine participle in the Greek original, and there is no manuscript evidence for a feminine variant reading.

Harnack’s argument that Priscilla deliberately disguised her gender by using the masculine gender is sheer speculation, and his theory remains a curiosity of New Testament scholarship.

So who really wrote the book of Hebrews?

Clement? Paul? Luke? Timothy? Barnabas? Apollos? In spite of the weight of scholarly inference, the book of Hebrews does not in fact name its author. And so if you were ever asked about the authorship of Hebrews, the correct answer is well expressed by the church father Origen (AD

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185? – 254?), who said, according to Eusebius, “Who wrote the epistle of Hebrews? In truth, only God knows!” (Hist. eccl. 6.25.14).²

² Jobe, Karen. “Who Wrote the Book of Hebrews?” Zondervan Academic. 2017-04-17. Harper Collins Publishers. <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/who-wrote-the-book-of-hebrews/>