

New Testament Survey—Hebrews

Discuss: At the end of the book, 13:22 says, "Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter." Without using any Study Bible helps, think about that word "short." Why would the writer call a 13 chapter book "short" (of the 27 NT books it's longer than 17 others)?

Clue: It has to do with Christ. Compared to all that could be said about the "superiority of Christ" (which is the theme of the book), 13 chapters doesn't scratch the surface!

- **Who wrote the book?**

--Anonymous (though known to his readers)

--Paul, according to some (from A.D. 400 to 1600 the book was commonly called "The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews")

Q: Why not Paul, then?

1. There was no agreement in the first 3 centuries regarding the authorship of the book. Since the Reformation there has been wide agreement that Paul did not write it.
2. There is nothing in the book that contradicts Paul, but the emphases and writing styles seem different.
3. Paul's customary practice was to identify himself in his letters. This author does not.
4. The statement in 2:3 indicates the author had neither been with Jesus, nor received special revelation directly from the risen Christ, as had Paul (Gal. 1:11-12.). The author seems to identify himself as a second generation Christian.

Other possibilities:

--Barnabas (Around 200 A.D., Tertullian quoted from "an epistle to the Hebrews under the name of Barnabas"). What makes Barnabas a possible candidate? (see *NIVsb*)

1. The book itself indicates the author must have had authority in the early church (13:17).
2. The writer appears to have been a Hebrew Christian well versed in the OT (many OT references in the letter). Barnabas meets this requirement. He was a Jew of the priestly tribe of Levi (Acts 4:36).
3. He was a close friend of Paul (they worked together on the first missionary journey; Acts 13). This could account for the Pauline flavor of the book.

--Apollos (His name was first suggested by Martin Luther and is favored by many scholars today). Why Apollos?

1. He was an Alexandrian by birth, but also a Jewish Christian with brilliant intellectual and oratorical abilities (In Acts 18:24, Luke says "he was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures").
2. He, too, was an associate with Paul in the early years of the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4-6, 22).

Conclusion: Gromacki (321), "In the final analysis, only God knows for sure who the author was. Although the book is nameless, this fact does not detract from the authenticity or inspired authority of its contents. If the book was not written by Paul, then it must have been composed by a close associate of the apostle with or without his direct supervision."

- **When was the book written?**

--Before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70

The writer uses the present tense when speaking of the temple and priestly activities (5:1-3; 7:23-27).

--A.D. 67-68

Who received the letter?

--We don't know for sure.

--They were apparently Jewish converts. He calls them "brethren" (3:1, 12) and "beloved" (6:9).

--They were immature (5:11-14). They'd been saved a long time, but hadn't grown.

Discuss: What was the indicator of their immaturity according to 5:12? They still needed a milk diet? A mark of maturity is the willingness and ability to learn new truth. A fear of truth, or a contentment with where we are is evidence of immaturity.

--They were wavering in their faith. One suggestion is that these professing Jewish Christians were thinking of merging with a Jewish sect, such as the one at Qumran near the Dead Sea (*NIVsb*). Some had already defected from the Christian community (10:25). The majority had not yet made up their minds.

- **Why was the book written?**

--The letter is intended to show the superiority of the person and work of Christ when compared with the OT sacrificial system.

Problem: People are prone to want to "go back." Why is that?

Key Words: "Let us"

Discuss: What do those words indicate?

--the book is full of warnings (13 times he uses the hortatory subjunctive)

(Heb 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."

(Heb 4:11) "**Let us** labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."

(Heb 4:14) "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, **let us** hold fast our profession."

(Heb 4:16) "**Let us** therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

(Heb 6:1) "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, **let us** go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,"

(Heb 10:22) "**Let us** draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

(Heb 10:23) "**Let us** hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised:)"

(Heb 10:24) "And **let us** consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:"

(Heb 12:1) "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, **let us** lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and **let us** run with patience the race that is set before us,"

(Heb 12:28) "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, **let us** have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:"

(Heb 13:13) "**Let us** go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach."

(Heb 13:15) "By him therefore **let us** offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name."

Another Key Word: "better/superior"

--used 13 times

See: 1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40)

Discuss: What does this show? The superiority of the believer's position in Christ. Why would you want to leave what is "better"?! Hebrews could be called the book of "better things."

- **What is the outline of the book?**

(adapted from *NIV Study Bible*)

I. Prologue: The Superiority of God's New Revelation (1:1-4)

II. The Superiority of Christ to Leaders of the Old Covenant (chs. 1-7)

A. Christ is superior to Angels (chs. 1-2)

B. Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-4:13)

C. Christ is superior to the Aaronic Priests (4:14-7:28)

III. The Superior Sacrificial Work of Our High Priest (chs. 8-10)

A. A Better Covenant (ch. 8)

B. A Better Sanctuary (ch. 9)

C. A Better Sacrifice (chs. 9-10)

D. Exhortations (ch. 10)

IV. Final Plea for Persevering Faith (chs. 11-12)

V. Conclusion (ch. 13)

- **What is the message of the book in one sentence?**

--Hebrews is a letter that calls us to believe that Christ is superior and sufficient.

- **What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?**

1. *Hebrews develops the doctrine of Christ in great detail.*

Discuss: Let's summarize. What do we learn about Christ from Hebrews?

2. *Hebrews helps us understand the role of the OT sacrificial system in God's plan.*

Discuss: What was it? See: 10:1-4

3. *Hebrews deals with the issue of perseverance and security.*

It shows that profession of Christ does not guarantee of possession of Christ.

Discuss: What does that mean? See: 6:4-6

4. *Hebrews illustrates the importance of faith.*

See: Ch. 11