

Hebrews Outline

The Supremacy of Jesus

Authorship: "God knows the truth" - Origen¹

- Pauline - Many have embraced this view to warrant its inclusion in the canon.²
 - Close association of the author with Timothy (13:23) & strong emphasis on the New Covenant.
- Non-Pauline – Unlike Paul, the author did not state his name or claim to be an Apostle. (2:3-4)
 - The vocabulary and style of the author varies greatly from the Apostle Paul's.³
 - At the end of their ministries, both Augustine and Jerome held to an anonymous author.
 - Some have suggested Clement of Rome or Luke,⁴ Barnabas,⁵ or Priscilla & Aquila.⁶
 - Apollos has been suggested because of his eloquence (Acts 18:24f) & ministry with Paul (1 Cor).⁷
- Conclusion: Ignorance is the most honest position. The epistle's inclusion in the canon should not be questioned however in light of its apostolic origins (2:3-4), its exaltation of Jesus, its congruence with the Old Testament, and its long-standing acceptance among the church.

Audience: A covenant community of predominantly Jewish believers who were suffering social persecution and the strong temptation to leave Christ and return to Judaism.

- Some have suggested the audience lived in Jerusalem, but that church had already shed blood for Jesus (Acts 7:54-60; Heb 12:4). According to 13:24, they may have resided in Rome.

Date: Due to ambiguity of author and audience, the dating of the book is not certain.

- The *external evidence* (quotation by Clement of Rome, 96AD) requires a 1st century date.
- Three pieces of *internal evidence* also lend to a date prior to the end of the first century. *First*, in 2:3 the author clearly states that the recipients of the letter heard the gospel directly from people who been with Jesus. *Second*, in 12:4 the community is said to not have suffered death for Christ yet. This would rule out the Roman church after 65 A.D. because of the Neronian persecution. *Third*, the overwhelming temptation to go back to the sacrifices and temple practices of Judaism would not be present if the temple were gone. The Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D.
- Conclusion: Probably prior to 65 A.D. and before 70 A.D. is nearly certain.

¹ Quoted by Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.25.11-14

² Clement of Alexandria proposed it was written in Hebrew by Paul and then translated to Greek. (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.14.3)

³ For an excellent comparison see Ellingsworth *The Epistle to the Hebrews* in the NIGTC, p. 7-12.w

⁴ John Calvin

⁵ Tertullian, *On Modesty*, 20

⁶ Harnack

⁷ Martin Luther, *Preface to Hebrews*, 1522, p. 344; *Commentary on Genesis*, 1545, p. 709

Theological Issues: Issues of soteriology are weighty and are made more difficult because of the lack of other writings by this author to help us understand his use of language.

- It is important to view Hebrews primarily as a pastoral book. The author is calling his congregation to persevere in faith in Jesus rather than providing a systematic theology.
- It is imperative we allow the text to instruct us and not limit it by our theological presuppositions. We must harmonize our conclusions with other Scriptures, but they may not fit as neatly as we would like. If there was ever a book that requires humility, it is this one.

Salvation: Salvation is seen primarily as a future promise of deliverance given to those who persevere in faith in the person & work of Jesus.⁸

- Salvation is only possible through faith in Jesus.
- Leaving Jesus to return to Judaism is seen as rejecting God, there is no plan B.
- Those who persevere in belief inherit salvation. Those who forsake Jesus (apostasy) do not inherit salvation, despite any initial experience of belief or profession of faith. Five warnings are given to encourage those who believe to persevere in faith.

Warnings: There are three primary views of the five warnings in the book of Hebrews.⁹

1. To the Unbelieving: Given to those who have joined the community of faith and have displayed signs of belief, but do not truly believe in Jesus & prove so by falling away.
 - Pros: Fits well with Scriptures such as Matthew 13:24-30 and 1 John 2:19.
 - Cons: The audience is never told to believe and is assumed to consist of believers (6:9). If these warnings are to false believers, they should be commanded to repent and believe.
2. To a Person who Believes: Given to someone who believes as a warning against committing the sin of apostasy (leaving Jesus) and 1) lose rewards or 2) receive eternal condemnation.
 - 1) *A person who believes loses rewards because they did not persevere.*
 - Pros: Straightforward reading of the text. (Warnings are real & the sin of apostasy is real)
 - Cons: The danger presented by the author appears to be more than losing rewards. (10:26-27)
 - 2) *A person who is born-again but will abandon Christ and end up being eternally condemned.*
 - Pros: Can be supported by the text. Promotes a healthy fear in the believer to persevere.
 - Believers must continue to believe in Jesus to inherit salvation. No belief, no salvation.
 - Cons: Seems to contradict biblical teachings about election and God's sovereignty.¹⁰

⁸ See especially 1:14; 2:3-5; 6:9-12; 9:27-28.

⁹ For a good resource on the warnings see: *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV

¹⁰ Cf. Acts. 13:48; Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:4-5, 11; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Pt. 1:1-2; Rev 13:8

3. Means of Grace: Warnings are a gift from God given to born again believers as a means of grace to guarantee their perseverance. True apostasy cannot really occur because God will complete His saving work, but the warnings are God's act of grace to ensure perseverance.
 - Pros: Poses no real theological problems regarding soteriology.
 - Cons: Appears to make the warnings hypothetical and appears to deny the real possibility of apostasy. If warnings are viewed as hypothetical, their purpose would most certainly be lost.
4. Covenant Community: The warnings are given to a community who is gathered together in the Name of Jesus. There are both believers and unbelievers in their midst. The warnings of leaving Christ are real for both. Those who believe receive the warnings as means of grace and the non-believers should hear them as a call to turn to Christ in a persevering belief.

GBC Conclusion: The warnings are given to a covenant community and serve as a means of grace to born again believers who are facing the temptation of apostasy in light of persecution. They are also a warning to those who do not yet believe to turn to Jesus in a persevering belief.

Lingering Questions

- *How can a person believe if they are not elect?* The Bible clearly teaches of cases where someone has believed, but do not continue to believe and therefore are condemned.¹¹
- *How could you not persevere in belief if you are predestined?* Ultimately, you will persevere. If God has marked you out as His, He will bring you home (Jn 6:37-39, 10:27-29). We however do not know who the elect are. Our job is not to determine the elect, our responsibility is to persevere in belief in Jesus and encourage others to do the same.

Perseverance of the Saints:

- To inherit salvation, we must continue to believe in and remain faithful to Jesus.¹²
- Perseverance is given to the believer by God. (Rom 15:5, 1 Thess 5:21-24)
- The community of believers is given by God as a means to help us persevere. (4:13; 10:24)

Old Testament Usage: The author builds his arguments on several key OT texts.

Psalm 2, 8, 95, 110	Genesis 14:17-24	Jeremiah 31:31-34
Psalm 40, 45, 97, 102, 104	2 Sam 7:14; Exodus 14-20	NT: 1 Cor. 10:1-13

¹¹ Luke 8:13 (they believe, then fall away and are not saved); Judas (walks with Jesus and then forsakes Him); Simon the magician (Acts 8:14-24); 1 Tim 4:1. A distinction between "true belief" and "false belief" is a common explanation of this experience, but the Scriptures do not provide this distinction. It may be more biblical to make the distinction between "a belief that perseveres to salvation" and a "belief that comes short and falls away." All systematic attempts break down at some point.

¹² Outside Hebrews, the NT is filled with commands to persevere in order to inherit salvation: Mt 5:13, 24:13; Jn 8:31, 15:6; Rom 11:22; 1 Cor 9:27, 10:12, 15:1; Col 1:22-23; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 2:12; 1 Jn 2:19; 2 Jn 1:9; Ju 20; Rev 2-3, 14:12, 21:7.

Outline of Hebrews

1:1-4:13 – Jesus: The Ultimate Revelation

1:1-3a – Jesus: Greater than the Prophets

1:3b-14 – Jesus: Greater than the Angels

2:1-4 – Warning #1 “Do not drift”

2:5-18 – Jesus: Greater than Fallen Man

3:1-6 – Jesus: Greater than Moses

3:7-4:13 – Warning # 2 “Do not harden your heart”

4:14-10:39 – Jesus: The Ultimate High Priest

4:14-5:10 – Jesus: Greater than Aaron

5:11-6:20 – Warning #3 “Do not fall away”

7:1-28 – Jesus: Greater Order of Priesthood (Melchizedekian)

8:1-13 – Jesus: Mediates a Greater Covenant (New Covenant)

9:1-10:18 – Jesus: Offers a Greater Sacrifice (Himself) in a Greater Tabernacle (Heaven)

10:19-39 – Warning #4 “Do not regard as unclean the blood of the Covenant”

11:1-13:25 – Jesus: The Ultimate Object of Faith

11:1-40 – Examples of Endurance through Faith

12:1-3 – Jesus: Our Ultimate Example of Faith

12:4-11 – Refining Our Faith Through Discipline

12:12-24 – Encouragement to Endure in Faith

12:25-29 – Warning #5 “Do not refuse Him”

13:1-6 – Call to Live Out A Pure Faith

13:7-17 – Learn the Faith from Your Leaders

13:18-25 – Closing comments