

HEBREWS – INTRODUCTION

Unlike most Epistles, HEBREWS does not give the name of the author, nor the location of the people to whom the letter was written. Therefore, much conjecture has occurred concerning these two points of the inspired Letter.

The early manuscripts were entitled: “To the Hebrews.”

1. The word first occurs in Genesis 14:13 when Abraham is described as “the Hebrew” (“one who passes over”- he had come from the region beyond). Some say the word came from an earlier descendant, Eber – “one who passes over” (Gen. 11:14).
2. In the New Testament, the word is used to distinguish the Jews in Palestine from those who had been influenced by Greek customs in Greek lands, especially in regard to language (Acts 6:1); emphasizing the purest of Jew (2 Corinthians 11:22; Philippians 3:5).
3. Some suggest the readers were Jews in Rome. This is based upon the first known quotation from Hebrews was in I Clement, a letter written from Rome (A.D. 96). The preposition “apo” means “from” in 13:24. Brethren with Paul were sending greetings back to their homeland in Rome instead of being in Rome – “of.”
4. Events and local knowledge seem to indicate that the Jews who had become Christians in Palestine were the recipients of this letter (Hebrews 10:32-34, Acts 8:1, 18:12-17, 19:35-41; Hebrews 13:12-14 – “the gate”).
5. We do know that these Jews had been Christians for some time and were in immediate danger of apostasy (2:3-4, 10:32-34).

Early Christians ascribed the work to the apostle Paul.

1. There were those who felt that Clement of Rome, Barnabas, or Luke wrote the Epistle of Hebrews.
2. But men who lived in Alexandria, Egypt such as Pataenus (A.D. 180), Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 187), and Origen (A.D. 185) all believed that the apostle Paul wrote the Book.
“If then, any church considers this epistle as coming from Paul, let it be commended for this, for neither did those ancient men deliver it as such without cause. But who it was that really wrote the epistle, God only knows.” (Origen, Ecclesiastical History, Eusebius, Book VI. Chapter 25; p. 246-247).
3. Others have felt that the author excluded himself from the rank of the apostles in 2:3 – “confirmed unto us by them that heard,” therefore excluding Paul.

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4. We do know that the author was acquainted with Timothy (13:23).

DATE OF THE BOOK:

1. Between A.D. 63- A.D. 70 (when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman army).
 - a. A considerable time had elapsed since the readers' conversion (cf. 5:12)
 - b. Timothy had been imprisoned, but now was liberated and alive (13:23).
 - c. Implication that the Temple with all its religious ordinances was still standing, but its removal imminent (12:27, 8:13, 10:14-25, 37).

THEME AND PURPOSE OF THE BOOK:

1. Theme: Better things in Christ, the new and living way (10:20).
2. Purpose: To prevent the Jewish Christians from leaving the faith established by Jesus Christ.
 - a. Establishing the supremacy of Christ (1:1-10:18)
 - b. Showing how the new covenant is superior to the old covenant (8:6)
 - c. Faith is the divine principle to live by, it is better (10:38).
 - d. Thirteen times the word "better" occurs setting forth the supremacy of Christ and His covenant:
 - (1). Jesus is "better than the angels" (1:4)
 - (2). Expecting "better things of you" (6:9)
 - (3). "Less is blessed of the better" (7:7)
 - (4). "better hope" (7:19)
 - (5). Jesus is surely of "better covenant" (7:22, 8:6, 11:40)
 - (6). Covenant based on "better promises" (8:6)
 - (7). "better sacrifices" (9:23, 12:24)
 - (8). "better possession" (10:34)
 - (9). "better country (11:16)
 - (10). "better resurrection" (11:35)
 - e. Encouraging "let us" exhortations:
 - (1). "Let us fear" (4:1).
 - (2). "Let us therefore give diligence to enter" (4:11).
 - (3). "Let us hold fast our confession" (4:14).
 - (4). "Let us draw near...to the throne of grace" (4:16).
 - (5). "Let us press on unto perfection" (6:1).
 - (6). "Let us draw near" (10:22).
 - (7). "Let us hold fast the confession of our faith" (10:23).
 - (8). "Let us consider one another" (10:24).
 - (9). "Let us lay aside every weight" (12:1).
 - (10). "Let us run the race" (12:1)
 - (11). "Let us have grace" (12:28).
 - (12). "Let us therefore go forth unto Him" (13:13)

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(13). “Let us offer up a sacrifice of praise” (13:15).

Jesus is presented as the antitype of the Old Testament Covenant with its practices. He is the original from which all other forms were made.

1. Prophet, Mediator, Priest, King (1:1-4; 3:2-3; 4:14-16; 5:4-5; 7:1; etc.)