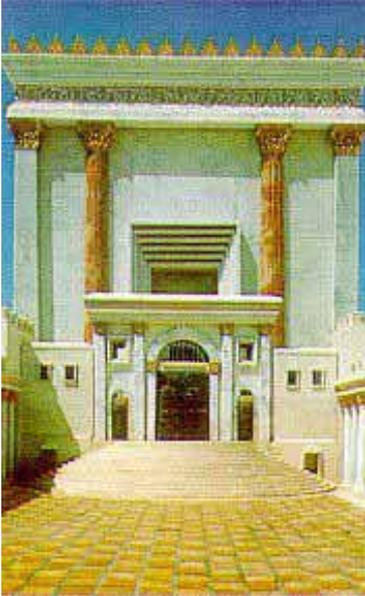


# The Book of Hebrews

## Introduction



On Pentecost A.D. 33 (Acts 2) the Holy Spirit descended in power on the house where the apostles met, a sound heard attracted a crowd. The crowd of men and women, from many nations, gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost. This crowd included Jews and converts to Judaism, from Asia, Africa and Europe. The Holy Spirit enabled those in the room to speak in the languages of all these nations. This typified God's plan, the Church was not to only include those in Israel, but believers throughout the world. This event came the 50<sup>th</sup> day following Passover, hence the name Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-21).

From here, Christianity grew throughout the world, by 64 A.D, they blamed Christians as the cause of Rome's fire. The Romans felt the gods were punishing them for those who abandoned them for Christianity. Christianity had spread throughout the world. However, Jews who accepted Jesus, as Messiah were struggling, emotionally, physically and economically. They had become outcasts, lost property and suffered persecution by those who rejected Jesus. Some, considering Jesus, were having second thoughts after weighing the costs. Others attempted compromise to appease Jewish

authorities, and still others did not understand Jesus in contrast to Mosaic law. The purpose of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* was to encourage these groups of Jewish believers and seekers, to continue in their walk and to persevere in their quest.

The *Epistle of Hebrews* answers questions Jewish believers struggled with in the first century. They needed to understand the relationship between the Old and the New Covenants. Why Jesus was superior to Moses?, Why Jesus' death eliminated the need for the Levitical system. What is the relationship between the Tabernacle and Jesus? Is there another way to attain salvation? Can you loose your salvation?

The issues this first century group of Jewish believers and seekers struggled with is not much different from what many in the church struggle with today. For this reason, the Holy Spirit through the writer of this book included it as part of the canon, to help the believer understand the connection between the Old and New Covenants.

### Authorship:

The author to this book has been the subject of debate, there is no name within the text so this has led much speculation. Paul, by many in the early church is viewed as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. There are arguments for and against his authorship.

### *Arguments for Paul's Authorship*<sup>1</sup>

1. The inscription "The *Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*" is found on nearly all existing Greek manuscripts, including the Peshito (Aramaic translation).

2. Church of Alexandria.

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 180) says Paul wrote to the Hebrews and this was the opinion of Pantaeus, who was the head of the celebrated school at Alexandria. Pantaeus lived near Palestine, and he would have been familiar with prevailing opinion.

Origen, (A.D. 185) of Alexandria also ascribed the epistle to Paul. Origen was one of the most learned of early church fathers.

<sup>1</sup> Barnes Notes on the New Testament, Albert Barnes, Kregel, 1994, pgs. 1215-1217

3. Authorship was ascribed to Paul in the Aramaic (Syriac) translation dating to the early second century.

4. The Eastern Church received this as a production of Paul.

Justin Martyr who was born at Samaria quotes it about A.D. 140.

Jacob, bishop of Nisibis, also (A.D. 325) quotes it as a production of Paul.

Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, Early Church historian (A.D. 325) ascribed authorship to Paul.

5. Western Churches

Well known church fathers such as Ambrose of Milan (A.D. 360). Jerome translator of the Latin Vulgate

(A.D.400) as well as Augustine argued from Paul authorship.

Council of Hippo A.D. 393, Carthage, 397, Carthage 419 declared Hebrews to be the Epistle of Paul.

6. Internal Evidence.

a. Timothy is mentioned 24 times in the scripture, 23 times in his relationship to Paul and the ministry.

Timothy was Paul representative to the Churches. He speaks about returning to the "Hebrews" with Timothy.

b. The writer is writing from Italy and is or was a prisoner who was maintained by the "Hebrews". (Hebrews 11:24, 10:34). Paul was a prisoner for 2 years and was helped by Church in Palestine. (Acts 24:27). The salutation "Those from Italy greet you" agrees with Paul situation of being in Rome as a prisoner.

7. Knowledge of the Old Covenant:

Paul was a Pharisee and would have been thoroughly familiar with the Levitical system and laws.

#### *Arguments Against Paul Authorship*

1. Hebrews 2:3 writes, "was confirmed to us by those who heard Him" would indicate the writer never heard the Lord himself but had contact with those who did. Paul would have mentioned his special revelation, where he personally heard from the Lord.

2. Tertullian (200 A.D.) quotes from Hebrews and calls it the "Epistle of Barnabas". Barnabas was a Levite (Acts 4:36)

3. The writer quotes from the Septuagint (LXX) rather than the Hebrew in Old Testament quotes.

4. The writing style and vocabulary differ from that of Paul.

#### **Time of Writing:**

The time of the writing of this book can be dated before 64 A.D., the beginning of persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire, where Christians die for their faith. Rome burned that year and Nero blamed the Christians, which began the persecution. This letter was written before the persecution of 64 A.D. with Christians dying for their faith, under Roman persecution.

4 You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.  
(Hebrews 12:4).

This was also an established group of believers, who should have grown more by the time this epistle was written to them.

12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. Hebrews 5:12.

Since the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, and there is no mention of this the date is probably close to A.D. 62-63 that Hebrews was written.

### **Audience:**

The audience is mainly a group of Jewish believers, and seekers who are located in Palestine. Gentiles are not mentioned in the book, understanding who is being addressed is key to understanding the book of Hebrews.

The audience can be broken down into groups.

1. Hebrew believers
2. Hebrew believers struggling with their walk
3. Hebrew non-believers who are intellectually convinced.
4. Hebrew non-believers who are not convinced.

### **1. Hebrew Christians**

This Jewish group had accepted Christ as Messiah and Savior, they however had suffered persecution because their faith.

32 But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings:  
33 partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated;  
*Hebrews 10:32-33*

This group is also having trouble distinguishing the promises of the New Covenant from the Old Covenant, the priesthood of Aaron and the Priesthood of Christ.

13 In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.  
*Hebrews 8:13*

### **2. Hebrew Non-Christians who are intellectually convinced**

This group of Jews were intellectually convinced Jesus was the Messiah, but they were unwilling to pay the cost of spiritual commitment. They understood the Messianic prophecies and had seen their fulfillment; but stopped short of committing to Christ. The Holy Spirit addresses this group several times in Hebrews.

1 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.  
2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward,  
3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him,  
*Hebrews 2:1-3*

26 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,  
*Hebrews 10:26*

### **3. Hebrew Non-Christians who are not convinced**

The third group addressed is the Jewish seeker who is not convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, and they refuse to accept him. The writer of Hebrews, explains Jesus to this group as fulfillment of the New Covenant with the warning of judgment for refusing Christ.

27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,  
28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.  
*Hebrews 9:27-28*

The believer has already been judged with Christ on the Cross. Those who reject Christ must bear their own judgment.