

HEBREWS: A Great High Priest

The Superiority of Jesus Christ

AUTHORSHIP: The author of the book is anonymous. The King James Version has the title, "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews." However, the oldest Greek manuscripts read simply, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Paul's name did not appear in the original. Scholars have suggested Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Silas, Aquila, Priscilla, and Clement of Rome. Probably the author is not Paul because he appeals to his own apostolic authority in his writings, while the Hebrews author appeals to others who were eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry (2:3). The safest position is to say with Origen, "who wrote the *Letter to the Hebrews* only God knows for certain." We believe that the human author, whoever he was, was inspired of God to write the book. The important thing is that it is a fully inspired message from God.

RECIPIENTS: Evidence tends to show they were of Jewish background, who lived in Palestine or Italy, and who were still interested in the Levitical worship. A good indication would be Italy because they were not poor and they used the Greek Septuagint (*LXX*) for quotations from the Old Testament. The book contains at least thirty O. T. quotations, all taken from the *LXX*. On the other hand, Palestinian Jews would use Aramaic or Hebrew. The author sends greetings from those who were in Italy (13:24). Most of the readers were believers in Christ (3:1). Some were in danger of abandoning Christianity to return to Judaism (13:22).

PURPOSE: The epistle was written to prevent the apostasy of Jewish Christians, who were tempted to forsake their faith in Christ because of intense persecution and go back to the legalism of Judaism. *Hebrews* "is a stirring apologetic for the superiority of Christ and Christianity over Judaism in terms of priesthood and sacrifice." Cf. 2:1, 3; 3:12f; 5:12f; 10:32ff. It is a call to remember and rekindle the fire of Christ in their hearts (Cf. 4:14). If they went back to legalism, they would be abandoning Christ and would lose all that He came to bring them.

THEME: is the superiority of Christ and Christianity over the old Jewish economy. Christ is superior to the prophets, angels, Moses, Aaron's priesthood, etc. Faith, hope and love in Christ is superior to Judaism. The all sufficiency of Christ is the emphasis.

KEY WORDS: are "better," "perfect," and "heavenly."

KEY VERSES: 10:19-23

DATE: The book of *First Clement*, which quotes from *Hebrews*, was written in A. D. 95. Therefore, *Hebrews* has to be some time before that in order for it to have circulation and acceptance. Moreover, the author of *Hebrews* does not refer to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem as a proof that the old sacrificial system was finished argues strongly for a date before A. D. 70. If Timothy's recent release (13:23) was in connection with Paul's ministry in Rome then a date in the late 60's is a good guess. The date may have been sometime between A.D. 65 to 69.

STYLE: The author has outstanding literary and rhetorical skill which is a model of Hellenistic prose. He is very familiar with the Old Testament in the Greek translation (*LXX*, Septuagint). He quotes directly from the O. T. *LXX* 29 times, and has 53 clear allusions to other O. T. passages. It is like a great sermon with scholarship that makes you think, and it is full of Jewish tradition.

DOES HEBREWS TEACH YOU CAN FALL FROM GRACE?

The critical question in Hebrews 6:4-8 is can one be eternally lost after having been *truly* saved? Can you lose your salvation? Those who answer affirmatively fail to appreciate the Scriptural teaching that eternal salvation is not determined only by an initial act of repentance toward God and faith in Lord Jesus Christ, but by an initial experience of repentance and faith that becomes permanent and controlling during the earthly life. The enlightenment we receive must become abiding illumination, that tasting must lead to joyful assimilation, that participation in the Holy Spirit must become domination by the Holy Spirit, the good word of God and the powers of the world to come must become the indispensable realities. Keep in mind the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:20-21). If the seed does not take root it is

superficial. Jesus said, "He that endures to the end shall be saved" (Matt. 10:22). Saving faith will have an enduring quality. The writer of Hebrews is taking it for granted that those who turn back, thus manifesting a so-called superficial faith, prove thereby that they never had been truly saved. The fine profession fell short of true possession.

They also fail to understand that the author is using a hypothetical argument, i.e., an argument based on a groundless assumption. He is not saying that apostasy from Christ, once a person is united by faith to Him, is a possibility. That would be contrary to the teaching of the rest of the New testament. The writer is saying something like this: "Let's suppose, for the sake of argument, that you would turn away from Christ, don't you see that it would be impossible for you ever to be saved? Your action would hold the substitutionary death of Christ on the Cross as contempt. It would be like spitting into His face. There is salvation in no other person. The thought of crucifying Him again in order to get you to repent again is preposterous, so in all the universe there would be no possible way you could ever escape eternal damnation and punishment. It would be absolutely impossible for the renewal of your spiritual life. Cease with the thought of turning back from Christ. You must go on to perfection. Your faith must not be fickle or superficial. You must prove your professed salvation to be genuine."

It would be false to suppose that we could fall, because that would invalidate the crucifixion of Christ on which our repentance was based if we were to be saved to the end. In order to have a lasting salvation it would be necessary for Christ to be recrucified which is an impossibility, for he died only once and for all. It would also make His crucifixion be declared as ineffective. The difficulty is that we interpret our own "decision to follow Christ" as salvation per se. It is the second step toward salvation. The first step is the offer of that salvation by God through faith in Jesus Christ in the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. Our acceptance of God's offer of grace is not salvation. We are truly saved the moment God sees that our repentance of our sin and unbelief is genuine and He accepts us and makes us part of His body. We should not speak of our salvation as a decision of ours only, but rather of God's acceptance of a truly repentant sinner. He does the saving; we receive the free gift by faith. If God accepts someone who He is not able to keep to the very end, then Christ is insufficient to save and He has failed. Only that decision that is man-initiated and constitutes merely man's emotion can be ineffective.

Series of studies on [Christ in the Old Testament](#)

Title: Introduction to Hebrews
Series: A Look at the Book

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