

# INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

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### Part LVIII: Hebrews

Who wrote Hebrews? Sadly, that question seems to be nearly as studied as the book itself. It may be an interesting question, but ultimately it is a question which will continue to be debated and which is of relative insignificance--if it were that important, God would have had the writer identify himself. That said, to this writer, it seems probable that Paul wrote Hebrews due to, among other reasons, these: first, the early credit given him as the author; second, the situation of the book's being written by someone who was in Italy (Heb. 13:24) and who had been and may still have been in prison (Heb. 10:34; 13:3,19) and who was a close associate of Timothy (Heb. 13:23); third, the writer's great concern for his national brethren; and, fourth, the fact that Peter said Paul had written to this audience (2 Pet. 3:15).

It is not out of the realm of possibility that another penned the epistle (for example, Barnabas, Silas, Luke, Apollos, Aquila, Mark, et al; though not Clement of Rome for he would have been too late, and not Timothy—as the uninspired postscript supposed—for he was mentioned in the third person in Hebrews 13:23). This writer's thought is that the best argument against Pauline authorship has been the lack of his claiming authorship (which could have been motivated by humility or the fear that some might never open the book knowing it was penned by him), which would have included his penning the salutation in his own hand (2 Thes. 3:17)—though who would know whether he did or not, for he did not claim in every book he wrote to have penned its salutation. The similarity or dissimilarity of language to Paul's writing is an argument used by both schools of thought; this very fact reveals the difficulty of using that argument at all either way (though were this writer given no alternative but to answer, it would seem to him that the style favored Paul in theme, structure, language, and form of benediction). Regardless, as has been mentioned, who penned the book is not really important, for God wrote it (2 Tim. 3:16)!

There are some things which are certain regardless of authorship: first, the book was written from a prison (Heb. 10:34; 13:3,19); second, it was written to Jewish Christians (Heb. 1:1-2 [who had been converted a good while earlier (Heb. 5:12-14)])—one might compare Acts 13:32 which was spoken by Paul to “Men of Israel” (Acts 13:16) in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:14); third, it was written to show the superiority of Jesus over angels, the old law, priests, sacrifices, and other things associated with the Mosaic age. If it were written by Paul, then the likely date would be around A.D. 57-59, for Paul was apparently serving his first prison sentence in Rome (Acts 28:30,31; Col. 4:3,18).

The key words of the book are "faith" (found thirty-two times; twenty-four in Hebrews 11 alone), "better" (used thirteen times, primarily demonstrating the superiority of Jesus), "perfect" (nine uses), "promise" (found nine times referring to both Old and New Testament promises). The key phrases are "by faith" (seventeen uses; sixteen of which are in chapter 11) and "let us" (found thirteen times respecting Christian responsibility under the new covenant). The numerous key verses include Hebrews 8:1, which was effectively the conclusion of the

arguments from Hebrews 1-7; Hebrews 9:16 which spoke of the necessity of the death of a testator for a covenant to take effect); Hebrews 9:22, showing that blood must have been shed for sin to be remitted; Hebrews 10:9, showing God's will was Jesus' mission; and Hebrews 10:14, showing that Jesus' one offering was sufficient. The key passages are Hebrews 5:8,9, referring to the obedience of Jesus, and Hebrews 12:1-3, showing the race, the spectators, and the goal. The key chapter is Hebrews 11, the wonderful chapter on faith ... and works and grace.

There are many great lessons in Hebrews; here are a number of them: first, Jesus is better than the angels (Heb. 1:4); second, man has value (Heb. 2:6-8); third, the Father and Son suit man's needs (Heb. 2:10; 7:26); fourth, Jesus knows what man has faced and so can comfort man (Heb. 2:18; 4:15); fifth, anything built must have a builder (Heb. 3:4); sixth, the Bible is active (Heb. 4:12); seventh, no one can hide and nothing can be hid from God (Heb. 4:13); eighth, Christians can approach God confidently (Heb. 4:16; cf. 1 John 5:14-15); ninth, there is not one greater than God (Heb. 6:13); tenth, God is true to His Word and the hope in Him is sure (Heb. 6:18-19); eleventh, Jesus provides a better hope (Heb. 7:19); twelfth, Jesus made a better testament (Heb. 7:22); thirteenth, Jesus makes better promises (Heb. 8:6); fourteenth, Jesus offers a better sacrifice (Heb. 9:23-28); fifteenth, Jesus cannot die more than once (Heb. 9:27-28; cf. 10:26); sixteenth, one should be faithful for himself and his brethren (Heb. 10:22-26); seventeenth, sin is a serious thing (Heb. 10:28-31); eighteenth, faith is the victory (Heb. 11; 1 John 5:4-5); nineteenth, chastening can be good (Heb. 12:5-11); twentieth, one should help others physically, emotionally, and spiritually (Heb. 12:12-17; 13:1-3); twenty-first, marriage is an honorable institution which must not be forsaken (Heb. 13:4); and, twenty-second, the righteous should remember and obey those over them (Heb. 13:7,17).