

**Jesus: The Son of God, Our Glorious High Priest**  
**Hebrews 1–13: An Introduction and Overview**

**What Do You Know About Hebrews?**

**What Do You Want to Know About Hebrews?**

## Who Wrote Hebrews?<sup>1</sup>

### Paul?

- Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) – Paul wrote in Hebrew; Luke translated into Greek
- Origen (ca. 185–253) – someone associated with Paul; probably Luke or Clement of Rome
- Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.3.5 and 3.38.2–3) – Paul wrote Hebrews and Clement translated
- By the third century, the church in the East believed Paul wrote Hebrews. Jerome and Augustine convinced churches in the West that Paul was the author.

### What are reasons for Paul?

1. The author knows Timothy (Heb. 13:23)
2. The themes could come from Paul

### Why not Paul?<sup>2</sup>

1. Paul always identifies himself in his letters
2. Hebrews 2:3 – Author is a second generation Christian who places himself under the original apostles. Paul would not have done that, as he regularly asserted his apostleship (see Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor 15:8; Gal 1:11–16).<sup>3</sup> For this reason, Luther and Calvin argue against Paul.
3. Many of the images are not Paul's (nautical pictures of a ship, 2:1; or an anchor, 6:19)
4. High priesthood is not Pauline; no other NT explicates Christ as priest
5. Vocabulary is unique to Hebrews – 169 terms are not found in the rest of the NT

### Barnabas?

- Tertullian (ca. 155–22) – Barnabas authored Hebrews
- He was a Levite (Acts 4:36–37) whose name means “encouragement.” He was also a preacher (Acts 11:23) who helped Paul in his ministry. Could he have sought to encourage fellow priests (Acts 6:7) with a sermon on the supremacy of Christ's priesthood? It's intriguing.

### Apollos?

- Luther believed it was Apollos; George Guthrie makes a compelling argument for Apollos.
- His eloquence Acts 18:24–28 and Alexandria background make this plausible.

### Luke?

- David Allen has written a massive tome arguing this point.<sup>4</sup>
- There is good evidence for this, but . . . (see below)

### What We Know of the Author<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Notes on authorship derived from Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (BTC; Nashville: Holman

<sup>2</sup> George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 23.

<sup>3</sup> Schreiner, *Hebrews*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> David L. Allen, *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010).

## 1. A Gifted Preacher

Hebrews 13:22 – “I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.”

### Seven Evidences That Hebrews is a Sermon<sup>6</sup>

1. The book closes with the words, “my word of exhortation,” which in other contexts including Acts 13 indicate a sermon;
2. Hebrews regularly exalts in God’s spoken word (1:1–2; 2:1–4; 12:25–29);
3. The Scripture citations are introduced as words spoken, not just written (3:7, 15; 5:6; 10:15);
4. (4) The author of Hebrews twice abbreviates his comments in order shorten his sermon (9:5; 11:32);
5. unlike other letters that begin with doctrine and transition to application, Hebrews unites exposition and application, such that in each section of the sermon there is biblical quotation, explanation, and exhortation;
6. there is a discernible outline to the sermon—Jesus is better than angels (1:4– 2:28); better than Moses (3:1–4:13); better than Aaron (4:14–7:28); better than old covenant sacrifices (8:1–10:31); better than the patriarchs (10:32–12:17); better than Moses as the mediator of worship (12:18–29);
7. The length of Hebrews read aloud totals about 55 minutes, which is in the ballpark for a sermon.

## 2. Knowledgeable of the Old Testament

35 quotations from the LXX; 34+ allusions to Old Testament concepts (Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 19)

## 3. Highly-Educated

What he learned—the sign, in his culture, of an educated man—was a formal and highly stylized means of self-expression and argumentation. What his peers would look for as the mark of his attainment was his ability to handle extremely traditional forms of speech and thought in a manner that formally adhered to the rules [of rhetoric] but, within these boundaries, found something interesting to say. These are indeed the traits of an “Alexandrian” art; our own age, in the grip of a very different set of artistic canons, finds them almost impossible to appreciate.<sup>7</sup>

## 4. Pastoral-Hearted

“He seems to have detailed knowledge of the congregation’s past and present situations (e.g., 10:32–34; 13:7–24” and his use of warnings and exhortations reveals his desire to see his audience finish the race.<sup>8</sup>

**So who does this sound like?**

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<sup>5</sup> These four points come from Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 25–27.

<sup>6</sup> Dennis Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 167–78.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Grant and Rachel Kitzinger, eds., *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean Greece and Rome* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1988), 2:1099–1100.

<sup>8</sup> George Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 26.

George Guthrie suggests Apollos. He writes,

The discussion above offers a basic portrait of the preacher-minister-rhetor who wrote the book of Hebrews. The question of his exact identity is unanswerable; any suggestion remains a “best guess.” However, a reasonable suggestion is found in the New Testament figure Apollos, so believed by Martin Luther to be the author of Hebrews. In Acts 18:24-28 Luke describes Apollos as a Jew from Alexandria, who was “eloquent” (a term used of those with rhetorical training) and thoroughly versed in the Scriptures. Furthermore, he was a pastor who had received the gospel from eyewitnesses of Jesus’ ministry (Heb. 2:3), was at home in the Greek-speaking synagogues of the Mediterranean, and had close acquaintances from Italy (see Heb. 13:24).<sup>9</sup>

Despite this postulation, Guthrie strikes the right closing note:

With Origen we confess our ignorance: “Who wrote the epistle, God knows the truth.” Whoever he was, we owe him respect for his rhetorical craftsmanship, admiration for the depth of his theological reflection, and gratitude for this enduring word of exhortation.<sup>10</sup>

Taking the same stance, I might suggest that Luke is the “best guess.”

1. He is Timothy’s friend (13:23), as Luke would have been.
2. He is writing to Rome (13:24), a place he’s been and a people he knows (Acts 28:16)
3. He doesn’t name himself (13:19), just like in Luke and Acts.
  - a. The other Gospel writers insert themselves (see Matthew 9:9–13; Mark 14:51; John 21:24), only Luke keeps himself entirely out of the light.
  - b. In Luke 1:1–4 and Acts, he never introduces himself. If he asserts his presence in the story, it is in the “we” statements (beginning in Acts 16:10).
  - c. All the Epistles except this one have a name – the anonymity points to the Luke’s trademark approach.
4. If [Luke is a priest](#), and if he is writing to Theophilus ([a priest?](#)), then Luke would be more than qualified to write Hebrews.
5. Priesthood is a compelling theme in his Gospel, one we often miss. (See forthcoming book).
6. If Luke has arranged Luke-Acts according to a “reverse exodus,” as David Pao suggests, then he is well-versed in Old Testament exposition and application, the very content we find in Hebrews.

**For all these reasons, I believe Lukan authorship is plausible, but not definitively provable. Hence, Origen’s words are best: “Who wrote the epistle, God knows the truth.” We don’t!**

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<sup>9</sup> Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 26–27. Cf. Ibid., “The Case for Apollos as the Author of Hebrews,” *Faith and Mission* 18 (2001): 41–56.

<sup>10</sup> Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 27.

## Who Received Hebrews?

### Jews in Jerusalem? Plausible, but not the best answer.

The temptation for Jews to return to the old system of sacrifice

The persecution associated with Christianity

### Jews in Rome? A much better possibility.<sup>11</sup>

1. Hebrews 13:24 – Could be audience (to Rome) or people around author (from Rome). Acts 18:2 – Aquila and Priscilla were “from Italy,” that is they were expatriate Italians, like the ones sending greetings in this letter
2. “Leaders” (Heb 13:7, 17) is a term used of overseers in Rome (cp. *1 Clement* and *The Shepherd of Hermas*, two letters associated with Rome).
3. *First Clement* “shows direct literary dependence on Hebrews,” which indicates Clement’s knowledge of Hebrews. And where was Clement? Rome.

## What Does the Book itself Contain?<sup>12</sup>

1. The audience has extensive knowledge of the Old Testament
  - 35 quotations from the LXX; 34+ allusions to Old Testament concepts
2. The author uses popular conceptions in Greek-speaking synagogues
  - Wisdom’s role in creation (1:1–4)
  - Angels as mediators (2:1–4)
  - Moses having special access to God (3:1–6)

3. Communities temptation to return to Judaism

This may indicate a Jewish background for the letter, but not necessarily. If the letter is written to the church in Rome, it would be Jew and Gentile.

The temptation to turn back reflects the pressures on the church in the 60s. At this point, the extreme persecution had not arrived in Rome, but it was coming, maybe even mounting, hence the reason for the letter.

**\*\* If the church is made up of Jews and Gentiles, what does this tell us about Christians’ relationship to the OT?**

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<sup>11</sup> Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 20–21.

<sup>12</sup> Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 19ff; cf. Guthrie, “The OT in Hebrews,” *DLNT*, 841–50.

## How is the book arranged?

In our attempt to understand the book, this is one of the most important parts. And there are differences of opinion on how to structure the book.

### Three Outlines

#### 1. Jesus is Better

- a. Jesus is better than angels (1:4– 2:28)
- b. Jesus is better than Moses (3:1–4:13)
- c. Jesus is better than Aaron (4:14–7:28)
- d. Jesus is better than old covenant sacrifices (8:1–10:31)
- e. Jesus is better than the patriarchs (10:32–12:17)
- f. Jesus is better than Moses as the mediator of worship (12:18–29)

#### 2. A Warning Not to Give Up

- a. Don't Drift from God's Word (Hebrews 2:1–4)
- b. Don't Harden Your Hearts (Hebrews 3:12–4:13)
- c. Don't Fall from the True Priest (Hebrews 5:11–6:12)
- d. Don't Miss the Grace of God (Hebrews 10:26–39)
- e. Don't Refuse the One Speaking (Hebrews 12:25–29)

#### 3. Indicative and Imperative

- a. Introduction (1:1–4)
- b. Jesus is
  - i. The Son of God (1:5–2:18)
  - ii. The Greater Rest (3:1–4:16)
  - iii. The Great High Priest (5:1–7:28)
  - iv. The Mediator of a New Covenant (8:1–13)
  - v. The Final Sacrifice (9:1–28)
  - vi. The Substance of Every Shadow (10:1–18)
- c. Therefore, Draw Near . . .
  - i. The Turning Point (10:19–25)
  - ii. Do Not Turn Back (10:26–39) –
  - iii. Walk by Faith (11:1–40)
  - iv. Suffer as True Sons (12:1–18)
  - v. Worship in the Kingdom (12:19–29)
  - vi. Live in Community (13:1–19)
- d. Conclusion and Benediction (13:20–25)

## Is There Any Way to Get a Handle on the book?

### Hebrews is . . .

1. a **sermon** . . .

Hebrews 13:22

2. with multiple **expositions** of the Old Testament . . .

Hebrews 1:5–1:14

3. centered on **Christ**

Hebrews 3:1

Hebrews 12:1

4. as God's Son, **our Glorious High Priest**

Hebrews 1:1–3

Hebrews 5:5–6

Hebrews 7:28

5. expounding how he **fulfills and exceeds** all the old covenant shadows . . .

Hebrews 10:1

6. so that people would **trust in Christ** and not turn back to the protections of Judaism.

Hebrews 2:1–4

Hebrews 3:12–14

Hebrews 4:14–16

Hebrews 10:19–25

Hebrews 10:26–39

Hebrews 13:20–21

Hebrews 13:22–24