

HEBREWS

Hebrews is, without a doubt, one of the most intriguing books in the New Testament. Many Christians find it to be a huge challenge to understand, but one thing is for sure—studying Hebrews can be a rich, exciting adventure. I discovered that personally many years ago when I studied it in graduate school under Dr. William Woodson. Of all the college and seminary courses I took over many years, I’ll never forget how unexpectedly thrilled I was during and after that course. Sure, there are many deep truths in this book that are tough to grasp and that require diligent, focused study, but keep in mind that God intended for you to _____ [a] it, _____ [b] it, and be _____ [c] by it.

WHO WROTE IT?

Who the book of Hebrews? I believe one of the most famous early church scholars and writers—a man by the name of Origen (c. 185—c. 253)—said it best: “No one knows.” With that said, in the past many believed that _____ [d] wrote it. Today, however, very few scholars believe Paul was the author because there is simply no evidence to support that view. As a matter of fact, it is universally acknowledged by Greek scholars and theologians that the grammar, syntax, style, vocabulary, and phraseology are not characteristic of Paul’s writing. What is characteristic of Paul’s thirteen New Testament letters is a salutation in which he makes it clear that he’s the author. And not only that, in Paul’s letters he often asserts his apostolic authority. The author of Hebrews, however, never claims to be an apostle, but instead said that the “salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him” (Heb 2:3). The author of Hebrews, then, seems to be saying that he didn’t receive the message of salvation directly from God, but rather from “those who heard” Jesus personally. It’s unlikely Paul would have said that since elsewhere he said this about his teaching: “I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:11-12).

The fact that the author of Hebrews doesn’t identify himself hasn’t stopped the speculation. Other suggestions include Apollos, Barnabas, and Luke. The reason these names are tossed out is because the author of Hebrews seems to have been a close friend of _____ [e] (Heb 13:23), which would link the author with the apostolic circle. Needless to say, there are plenty of problems with all of these proposed authors. _____ [f], for instance, comes from a _____ [g] background. But Hebrews seems far more likely to have been written by someone

immersed in _____ [h] and _____ [i] culture. Barnabas would be a better candidate since he was Jewish and a _____ [j]. His status as a Levite (Acts 4:36) would certainly explain the book's attention to all the _____ [k] issues and _____ [k] ritual. But the fact still remains that there is not a shred of evidence to connect Barnabas directly to the letter. And then there's the suggestion that Apollos may have written it. The main reason his name crops up as a possible author is because of the _____ [l] of the letter and its emphasis on the _____ [m] of Jesus over everyone and everything. Why would some believe these things would point to Apollos? Because he was a "learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures" who "vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18:24-28). But, just like every other proposed author, there is insufficient evidence to ascribe Hebrews to Apollos. To sum it up, proposed authors for Hebrews are nothing more than appealing _____ [n]. Ultimately, we just need to accept that God in His providence chose not to reveal either the human author or the original recipients. What is clear is that _____ [o] Himself is the ultimate author of it, and that all _____ [p] in every place and in every generation are the ultimate recipients.

WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN AND TO WHOM?

As I just said, God doesn't specifically reveal the original _____ [q] of Hebrews. In ancient manuscripts it's simply addressed "to the Hebrews." The content of the book assumes the original recipients were _____ [r], and the title suggests they were _____ [s]. Not only does the title suggest they were Jewish, but so does the fact that it was obviously written to people who had a significant amount of knowledge of the _____ [t] Testament. At the same time, the author frequently quotes from the _____ [u] translation of the Old Testament (called "the Septuagint"). If the original recipients depended on a Greek translation of the Old Testament, it likely means they were Greek-speaking Jews who lived somewhere in the Roman Empire outside of Palestine.

The letter also indicates that its recipients were enduring _____ [v] (Heb 10:33-34; 12:4; 13:3, 23). They had left Judaism to follow Jesus. The result was tremendous _____ [w] from the Jewish community. These Jewish Christians were ostracized from their families, persecuted, and suffered many hardships, though they had not yet suffered martyrdom (Heb 10:32-34; 12:4). With all that pressure, their faith was weakening, and they were beginning to wonder if the high cost of following Jesus was worth it. In other words, they were beginning to flounder and were teetering on the verge of leaving _____ [x] and going back to _____ [y].

Now let me briefly say something about when Hebrews was written. It was probably written prior to AD 70 (the year the Jewish _____[z] in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans). If the temple had already been destroyed, the author surely would have used that to support his argument that _____[aa] and the _____[bb] Covenant is their only hope. Also, the book mentions the _____[cc] system as if it were still in practice (Heb 7:27-28; 8:3-5; 10:1-3). These clues point to the fact that Hebrews must have been written sometime before the Romans _____[dd] the temple. I believe it was probably written close to AD 70, perhaps around AD 65.

CONTENT OF HEBREWS

As I mentioned a moment ago, _____[ee] was a reality for the Jewish Christians who were the original recipients of Hebrews. As they tried to live out their faith in Christ, opposition from the Jewish community was the order of the day. Consequently, it seems that many of these Jewish Christians were in danger of slipping back into Judaism to alleviate the _____[ff] they faced for leaving Judaism. So, they desperately needed encouragement to press on in their Christian faith. They needed to _____[gg] and become _____[hh], relentless followers of Christ. The basic purpose of the letter, then, is to exhort these Jewish believers to stay _____[ii] to the gospel of Jesus Christ no matter what.

The author of Hebrews opens his letter with a declaration that Jesus is _____[jj] to the Old Testament _____[kk] who revealed God's revelation to His old covenant community, and that He [Jesus] is the final and ultimate revelation of God (Heb 1:1-2). The writer goes on to add that Jesus is also superior to the _____[ll] because He alone is God's Son (Heb 1:4-2:18). And not only is Jesus superior to the angels, He's also superior to the great lawgiver, _____[mm]. Moses was just a servant, but Jesus is a Son (Heb 3:1-19). And even though Joshua led the Israelites into their inheritance—that is, into the Promised Land—there still remains a better _____[nn] for God's people in the future; and _____[oo] will provide that rest (Heb 4:1-13).

The _____[pp] has always been important in Judaism, so the writer of Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus' priesthood is superior to even Aaron's priesthood (Heb 4:14-5:11; 7:1-8:6). That's because Christ's priesthood comes from the order of _____[qq], an Old Testament priest who blessed Abraham, the forefather of Levi and the Levitical priesthood (of which Aaron was the first priest). Christ's priesthood, then, is the perfect fulfillment of this order of Melchizedek because it was established by an oath from God. No priest can be this qualified, so Christ's priesthood is superior. Christ has become a _____[rr] and _____[ss] High Priest and the "mediator of a better covenant"

(Heb 8:6). This new _____ [tt] has made the old one _____ [uu]. Similarly, our High Priest ministers in a “greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands” (Heb 9:11). Also, Jesus offers Himself as a sinless and voluntary sacrifice once and for all, which is unlike the old priesthood which had to offer sacrifices continually (Heb 10:23-28).

After extoling the superiority of Jesus, the Hebrew writer sums up all he’s been saying about Jesus by _____ [vv] his readers of the danger of giving up the superior faith of Christianity (Heb 10:19-39). He tells his readers that they must _____ [ww] the kind of faith seen in the lives of so many Old Testament believers like Abraham, Moses, David, and others (Heb 11:1-39). He exhorts his readers to _____ [xx] their _____ [yy] on _____ [zz], “the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb 12:2), who endured great hostility and suffering on the cross. He reminds them that those who trust and follow Christ will sometimes have to _____ [aaa] difficulty for the sake of holiness (Heb 12:3-29).

Finally, the last chapter focuses on some of the essential _____ [bbb] ethics of Christian _____ [ccc]. These ethics are to be shaped and molded by our dedication to Jesus. The superior behavior that a superior savior demands will be manifested in love, in godly marriages, in a lack of covetousness, and in contentment and obedience. This kind of Christ-like behavior demonstrates the true gospel to the world, encouraging others to believe in Christ and thus bringing _____ [ddd] to God.

TO SUM IT UP

I think the commentator John McArthur, Jr. sums Hebrews up nicely when he says:

“In this epistle, contrast reigns. Everything presented is presented as _____ [eee]: a better hope, a better testament, a better promise, a better sacrifice, a better substance, a better country, a better resurrection, a better everything. Jesus Christ is presented here as the supreme Best. And we are presented as being In Him and as dwelling in a completely new dimension—the heavenlies. We read of the heavenly Christ, the heavenly calling, the heavenly gift, the heavenly country, the heavenly Jerusalem, and of our names being written in the heavenlies. Everything is new. Everything is _____ [fff]. We don’t need the old. *‘Now the point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. (8:1)’* Here is the whole summary of Hebrews in one sentence. Our is the High Priest of high priests, and He is _____ [ggg]. His work is _____ [hhh], completely finished for all time and for us.”

LESSONS FROM HEBREWS

- The superiority of _____ [iii] is based on the superiority of _____ [jjj].
- Focus on our promised _____ [kkk] to get through the tribulations of the _____ [lll] (Heb 10:32-39; 11:10, 24-26).
- True faith/trust is manifested in _____ [mmm] (Heb 11:8, 17, 30).
- We need the _____ [nnn] to remain faithful (Heb 10:25)
- _____ [ooo] is essential in the process of God cleansing our hearts from sin (Heb 10:22).
- Every saved person in history has been saved by the _____ [ppp] of _____ [qqq] (Heb 9:11-15).
- Be aware: It is possible to “_____ [rrr] our salvation” (Heb 3:12-14; 6:1-6).
- We must _____ [sss] and _____ [ttt] in our faith so we can stand firm (Heb 5:11-6:3).

KEY PASSAGES FROM HEBREWS

- Hebrews 1:1-2
- Hebrews 2:9, 14-18
- Hebrews 3:12-14
- Hebrews 5:8-9
- Hebrews 6:1-6
- Hebrews 9:11-15
- Hebrews 10:19-25
- Hebrews 11:1
- Hebrews 12:1-3
- Hebrews 13:15-16

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK ANSWER KEY

[a] read	[ss] perfect
[b] understand	[tt] covenant
[c] shaped	[uu] obsolete
[d] Paul	[vv] warning
[e] Timothy	[ww] maintain
[f] Luke	[xx] fix
[g] Gentile	[yy] eyes
[h] Judaism	[zz] Jesus
[i] Jewish	[aaa] endure
[j] priestly	[bbb] practical
[k] sacrificial	[ccc] living
[l] eloquence	[ddd] glory
[m] superiority	[eee] better
[n] guesses	[fff] better
[o] God	[ggg] seated
[p] Christians	[hhh] done
[q] recipients	[iii] Christianity
[r] Christians	[jjj] Christ
[s] Jewish	[kkk] future
[t] Old	[lll] present
[u] Greek	[mmm] obedience
[v] persecution	[nnn] church
[w] hostility	[ooo] Baptism
[x] Jesus	[ppp] blood
[y] Judaism	[qqq] Christ
[z] temple	[rrr] lose
[aa] Jesus	[sss] mature
[bb] New	[ttt] grow
[cc] sacrificial	
[dd] destroyed	
[ee] persecution	
[ff] suffering	
[gg] mature	
[hh] stable	
[ii] true	
[jj] superior	
[kk] prophets	
[ll] angels	
[mm] Moses	
[nn] rest	
[oo] Christ	
[pp] priesthood	
[qq] Melchizedek	
[rr] permanent	