

HEBREWS

ORDER IN NEW TESTAMENT

19

NUMBER OF CHAPTERS

13

TYPE

EPISTLE, GENERAL



OVERVIEW

This epistle is the only one with an unknown author. Although traditionally attributed to Paul, the authorship has been questioned in recent times due to the different writing style. As such, the book's meaning is dependent completely on the text. The audience of the epistle was Jewish Christians in effort to persuade them that the Law of Moses had been fulfilled through Jesus Christ, and that certain ordinances were no longer necessary for Gentile Christians. The book paints an image of Jesus as divine, a priest who intercedes for us before the Father. Written at the time Nero was heavily persecuting Christians, it encouraged the Saints to persevere and hope for a brighter future.



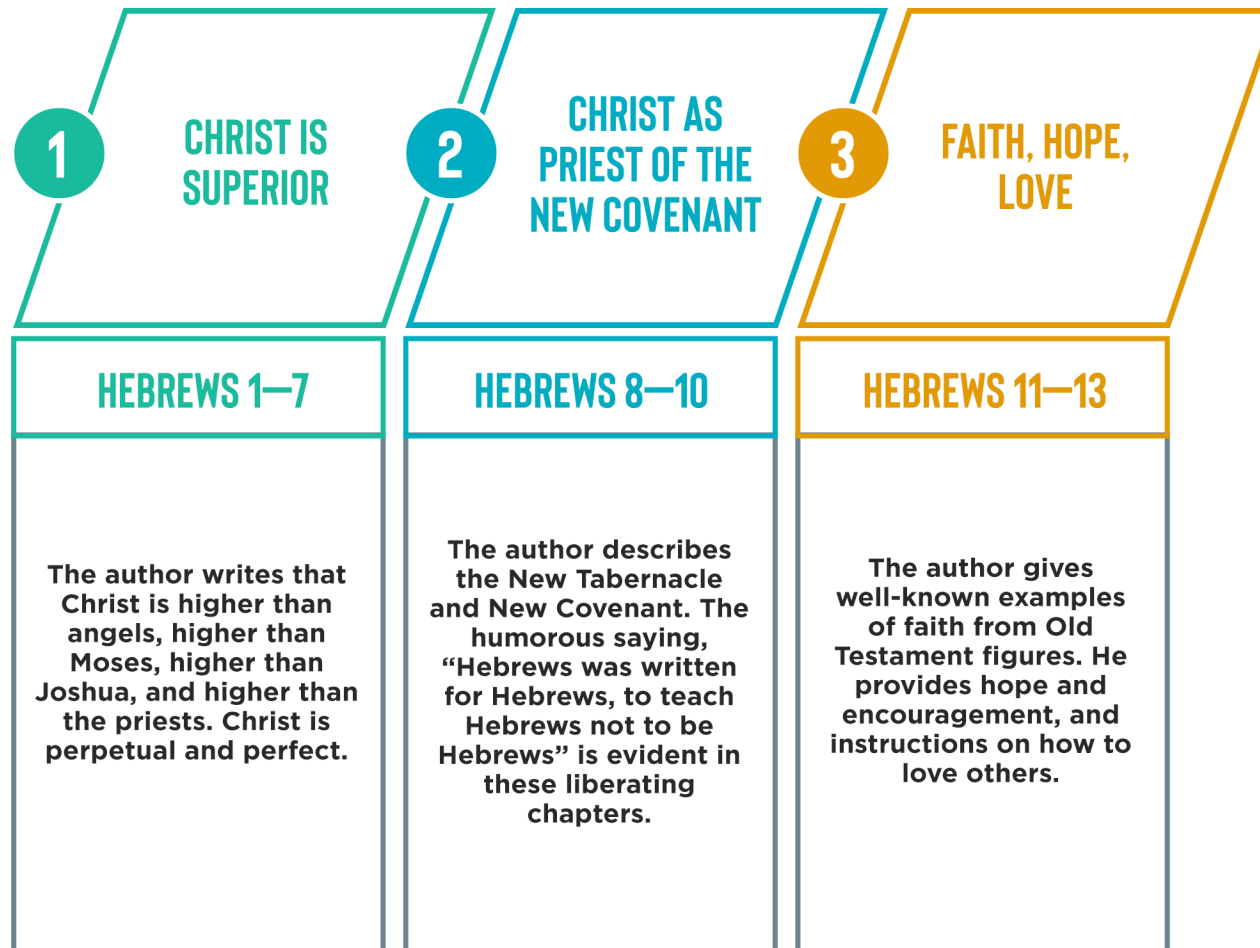
WRITTEN
67-69 AD



TIME PERIOD COVERED
All Eras in the Age of
Grace



AUTHOR
Unknown



WHO WROTE HEBREWS?

Brett Kays

Hebrews is the only New Testament book for which we don't know who the author is or when it was written. Traditionally, from at least the 5th to the 16th centuries, it was thought to have been written by Paul, which is why it's often been lumped in with the Pauline Letters. But we're not sure, so it's positioned between the Pauline and the General Letters written by others (James, Peter, Jude, John).

Who would want to write a letter like this? Maybe the most obvious candidate would be Paul because he wrote about the importance of the New Covenant, and against the Judaizers who claimed that before becoming a Christian, a person first had to become Jewish and obey the Mosaic Laws. Some early traditions attribute it to Paul, like a Christian teacher named Pantaenus of Alexandria, [c. A.D. 180-190]. Many handwritten Greek manuscripts added Paul's name to the title, as did many translations.

But I don't include Hebrews in the Pauline letters for a few reasons. It's not like his other letters, written to either churches or individuals. There are no personal remarks like he'd always include. It's also written in a different tone & style of Greek. It's excellent, polished Greek with complex sentence structure, a large vocabulary, and unique words not found in his other letters. The style is closer to Dr. Luke in his Gospel than Paul's. Paul was a brilliant scholar, but his letters are usually less formal & more conversational. That doesn't mean Paul couldn't have written it, because writing style can differ based on the subject & circumstances.

But in Hebrews 2:3, the author implies he received the gospel secondhand from those who heard Jesus, suggesting he wasn't a direct witness. But Paul emphasizes he WAS an eyewitness and received direct revelation from Christ (Gal. 1:11-12). So if Paul didn't write, the book is still anchored in the teaching of the apostles.

If it was written by Paul, it seems that it would have been universally accepted from the get-go, a slam dunk. But it wasn't...at first. It was debated and disputed in the Western Church whether it should be included in the inspired list of New Testament books along with the Gospels, Acts & Paul's letters. The same was true for the other General Letters.

Other early church figures like a man named Origen (c. A.D. 210) expressed doubts that it was from Paul based on the style & content. He said: "Who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows." He says it's Pauline in thought, but maybe an amanuensis actually wrote it—that is, a scribe who writes what someone dictates. He mentions that a companion of Paul's, like Luke, could have transcribed or translated Paul's ideas—or maybe Clement of Rome, an early church leader, polished or transmitted the text from one of Paul's companions. The first quote we have of Hebrews outside of the New Testament is in Clement's writings (c. A.D. 96).

Maybe someone wrote down Paul's sermons that he gave in the synagogues wherever he went--someone like Silas or Barnabas. In the year A.D. 200, another early church leader named Tertullian said Barnabas wrote it -- a Levite with knowledge of Jewish traditions. Maybe.

But I like the theory that it was Apollos. Martin Luther in the 16th century thought this. He's described this way in: "Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures" (Acts 18:24). He checks all the boxes: Jewish, so he knows the Old Testament, which is quoted from heavily. He's from Alexandria in Egypt, which was known for its education, and this may account for the different style of writing. Apollos was eloquent and competent in the Scriptures, which is reflected in Hebrews. He'd also been with Paul. In 1 Corinthians, Paul speaks of him as one of the teachers whom people were following besides himself and Peter. So he was a well-known key teacher.

A theory I have is that it could have been written soon after Paul's martyrdom in Rome (A.D. 67), as perhaps a collection of Paul's topical messages on the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. God could have providentially had it written just prior to the catastrophic & violent destruction of the Temple & Jerusalem in order to get people prepared for the disaster that Jesus had foretold as the consequences of their rejecting Him. By showing how it had all been fulfilled & none of it was no longer needed, Jewish Christians wouldn't need to mourn it.

Hebrews was used by early Church leaders like Irenaeus (A.D. 180), Clement of Alexandria (190), and Tertullian (200). Its early use in the Eastern church and endorsement by key figures (like Jerome and Augustine) led to its eventual inclusion in the New Testament. The Council of Carthage (A.D. 396-397) lists Hebrews with reluctance as Pauline. Although knowing the author would be interesting, it would add little to our understanding of the book's message.