

# **HEBREWS: GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE WILDERNESS**

# GENERAL EPISTLES

## DESIGNATION

- Title comes primarily from author, not audience (except Hebrews; unlike Pauline letters)
- General in terms of audience
  - No specific church or individual as Paul's epistles (except 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> John)
  - To Christians 'at large' (see book introductions)
  - Universal; Catholic; General; Non-Pauline
- Five authors – James, Peter, John, Jude, and the author of Hebrews

# GENERAL EPISTLES

## DESIGNATION

- Focus of general epistles on *external persecutions* from Rome and *internal attacks* from false teachers
- Placed after Paul's epistles because latter date (except James) and view as supplemental content to the latter
  - Though early Grk. manuscripts place them before
  - All but 1 Peter and 1 John were disputed before being officially recognized in NT canon (AD 300s)

# GENERAL EPISTLES

## STYLE

- Paul – *faith*
- Peter – *hope*
- John – *love*
- James – *work*
- Jude – *zeal*
- ‘Author of Hebrews’ - *steadfastness*

# GENERAL EPISTLES

## STYLE

- Paul – theological (*Gentile Christianity*)
- Peter – experimental (*Pauline/Judaistic mediating position*)
- John – expository (*World Christianity*)
- James – ethical (*Judaic Christianity*)
- Jude – polemical (*Judaic Christianity*)
- ‘Author of Hebrews’ – interpretive (*Alexandrian Christianity*)

# HEBREWS

## AUTHOR

- Possibilities: Paul, Silas, Titus, John Mark, Clement of Rome, Luke, Aquilla, Barnabas, and Apollos.
  - Of these, Paul, Luke, Barnabas and Apollos have been strongly argued.

# HEBREWS

## AUTHOR

- Why Not Paul???
  - **Some similarities**
    - Imagery: Word of God is a sword (4:12); hope is an anchor (6:19); heaven is an amphitheatre (12:1)
    - Joy amidst suffering (Heb. 10) – sounds like Paul
    - association w/ Timothy (13:23)
    - inclusion in canon meant Pauline connection likely
    - Early church recognition by most though widely accepted between 400-1600 AD as ‘The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews’
    - Binding of Paul’s epistles and Hebrews together by 100s
    - 2 Peter 3:15-16

# HEBREWS

## AUTHOR

- Why Not Paul???
  - **Noticeable differences**
    - Paul does not identify himself (maybe cause of Jewish hostility)
    - Structure difference (doctrine/duty vs. interspersed exhortations)
    - Revelatory nature (eyewitness – Heb. 2:3 vs. direct from the Lord – Gal. 1:12)
    - Classical use of Greek language and rhetoric
    - This author cites (use of LXX), writes, argues, thinks differently



# HEBREWS

## AUTHOR

- What About Barnabas & Apollos?
  - **Barnabas:** ‘son of exhortation’
    - Heb. 13:22 – this letter as a ‘word of exhortation’ – like a modified version of a series of sermons compiled together
    - Close associate of Paul
    - Of the Levitical order
  - **Apollos**
    - Suggested by Martin Luther
    - Acts 18:24; 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:22 – ‘an eloquent man...mighty in the Scriptures’
    - From Alexandria, Egypt where writing style and theological themes can be matched (e.g. Hebrews as a model of Alexandrian Hellenistic prose) – long, finely styled literary sentences

# HEBREWS

## AUTHOR

- Unknown: unlike other epistles, this letter does not bear the name of its writer. (e.g. anonymous) – does not name himself among the apostles!
- Known: the author of this book was evidently known well by the book's original recipients (13:18-24) as well as early church to be admitted into NT canon.
- Conclusion: As the early church father, Origen, put it: "Who wrote the epistle is known to God alone!"
  - Though the authorship is uncertain, the inspiration is certain!

# HEBREWS

## DATE

- Pre-95 AD
  - *Hebrews* is quoted extensively by Clement of Rome in *1<sup>st</sup> Clement* (AD 95)
- Pre-70 AD
  - Lack of referent to temple destruction
- Post-64 AD
  - Mention of Timothy's release (13:23) connects him in Rome around time of Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> imprisonment and dates book likely between 67-68 AD

# HEBREWS

## LOCATION

- Palestine or Rome
  - Christian persecution by Jews (Palestine and beyond)
  - Detailed reference to temple ritual (pro-Palestine, but remember diaspora)
  - Use of LXX citations (Septuagint not used in Palestine)
  - 13:24 – “those from Italy greet you”
  - Jerusalem – Antioch – Ephesus – Rome – etc...
- Paul’s letter to the Romans indicates there was a large group of Jews in Rome
  - Early beginnings in Rome (33 AD) Pentecost connection (*diaspora* – Jews that returned back to Rome)

# HEBREWS

## AUDIENCE

- All internal evidence points to a Jewish (Hebrew) audience though the inscription 'to the Hebrews' is not in the original manuscripts
  - References to Moses, prophets, angels ministering to Israel, citizens from the Levitical system
  - The readers were well acquainted with the OT (1:1, 5, 7; 2:6, 12)
  - They were Jewish Christians who had received the gospel from the apostles themselves and witnessed miracles and gifts of the Spirit (2:1-4)

# HEBREWS

## AUDIENCE

- They had been Christians long enough that many should be teachers by now (5:12), called to remember former days (10:32), and their original instructors were now dead (13:7)
- They had passed through great suffering (10:32-34) but not martyrdom (12:4)
- They were members of a church at some definite place with clear leaders (13:17, 24)
- They were in danger of drifting away from the Christian faith they had received and back into Judaism because of persecution (2:1; 3:6, 14; 4:1, 11; 5:11-14; 6:1-8, 11-12; 9:9-10; 10:23, 36-39; 13:9-12)

# HEBREWS

## PURPOSE & THEME

- The readers, Jewish Christians on the fringe of Rome, are evidently in danger of slipping back into Judaism because of growing opposition and persecution.
- They are in need of spiritual maturity and stabilization in their Christian faith
- Thus, Hebrews sets forth the superiority of Christ to the OT shadows and the superiority of the Christian faith to that of Judaism

# HEBREWS

## PURPOSE & THEME

- THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST

- The words 'better', 'perfectly', and 'heavenly' appear repeatedly throughout the book, expressing the superiority of Christ over all that came before Him.
- In His Person, He is better than the prophets, angels, Moses, and Aaron.
- In His work, He provides a better priesthood, covenant, sanctuary, and sacrifice than the OT economy and Mosaic covenant
- Christ is presented as BETTER in every respect



# HEBREWS

## STYLE

- Use of profound, striking contrasts in his writing style to best emphasize the superiority of Christ:
  - Christ and Angels, Moses, Joshua, Aaron, Melchizedek
  - Infancy and Maturity
  - Apostasy and Faithfulness
  - Old and New Covenants
  - Faith and Sight
  - Law and Christ
  - Earthly and Heavenly

# HEBREWS

## STYLE

- Use of parenthetical warnings about the peril of turning away from Christ, each building in intensity:
  - Drifting from the Word through neglect (2:1-4)
  - Doubting the Word through hardness of heart (3:7-4:13)
  - Dullness toward the Word through sluggishness (5:11-6:20)
  - Despising the Word through willfulness (10:26-39)
  - Disobeying the Word by refusing to hear (12:14-29)
    - Who are these addressing? Notice pronoun usage and interchange(we/they). Not addressing loss of salvation

# HEBREWS

## OLD VERSUS NEW

- Old Covenant = Mosaic Law; (not OT vs. NT)
  - Covenant of Works:
    - 2 Cor. 3:14; cf. Heb. 8:6, 13
- New Covenant = Gospel of Christ
  - Covenant of Grace:
    - Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24
- Why the need for a New Covenant?
  - The Covenant of Works remains in effect:
    - Rom. 5:18-19; 6:23; 7:10; 10:5; Gal. 3:12; 1 Pet. 2:22

# HEBREWS

## OUTLINE

### THE DOCTRINAL INSTRUCTION (1-10)

- A SUPERIOR PERSON IN CHRIST (1-6)
  - Better than the Prophets (1:1-3)
  - Better than the Angels (1:4-2:18)
    - Parenthetical Warning #1: Drifting from the Word (2:1-4)
  - Better than Moses (3:1-4:13)
    - Parenthetical Warning #2: Doubting the Word (3:7-4:13)
  - Better than Aaron (4:14-6:20)
    - Parenthetical Warning #3: Dullness Toward the Word (5:11-6:20)

# HEBREWS

## OUTLINE

### THE DOCTRINAL INSTRUCTION (1-10)

- A SUPERIOR PRIESTHOOD IN CHRIST (7-10)
  - A Better Order – Melchizedek, not Aaron (7)
  - A Better Covenant – new, not old (8)
    - Did the Old Covenant save anyone?
    - If not, what did?
  - A Better Sanctuary – heavenly, not earthly (9)
  - A Better Sacrifice – God’s Son, not animals (10)
    - Parenthetical Warning #4: Despising the Word (10:26-39)

# HEBREWS

## OUTLINE

### THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION (11-13)

- A SUPERIOR PRINCIPLE: FAITH IN CHRIST
  - The Examples of Faith (11)
  - The Endurance of Faith (12)
    - Parenthetical Warning #5: Disobeying the Word (12:14-19)
  - The Evidence of Faith (13)

# HEBREWS

## OUTLINE



'What have you?'

**Hebrews 1-7**

We have  
such a great,  
High Priest

**Hebrews 8-10:18**



'Having, therefore...let us'

**Hebrews 10:19-13:25**

