

HEBREWS

Study Guide

GENERAL EPISTLES

Having concluded Paul's epistles (letters), we now embark on the General Epistles – letters intended for more general audiences, rather than just an individual or specific congregation. Because the book of Hebrews doesn't exactly fit the above definition, some group Hebrews – Jude as “non-Pauline epistles,” or those letters not written by Paul.

AUTHOR

If you want to get into a hot debate, discuss who might be the author of Hebrews! There are so many options which exist, that it is just better to say: **No one knows for sure** who authored Hebrews and the Lord was fine with it not being known.

But, so you understand some of the discussion, the text does not specify its author. Clues within the text demonstrate that whoever wrote the book did so with finessed Greek, an extensive awareness of Jewish religious practices, and advanced education in persuasive writing. The original Greek phrase, “For time will fail me (NASB) / “I do not have time to tell” (NIV) in Heb. 11:32 uses a masculine form, which may indicate a male author. However, some argue that this is not enough proof to rule out a female author. The list of potential authors includes Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Priscilla & Aquilla, Jude, Clement of Rome, and others.

Knowing who the author is helps provide greater insight to historical and social background, clues as to why the author wrote the work, the ability to compare works of the same author, and determine proximity to Jesus and the apostles for strength and trustworthiness. HOWEVER, Hebrews is proven to be consistent with material of both the Old and New Testaments, applications of quoted Old Testament scriptures are backed by others in the New Testament, and the warnings within the book are also echoed by other New Testament writers. In other words, Hebrews is consistent with both Testaments and holds support from other biblical authors of the same general period. Ultimately, God is the Author and the human writer was under His inspiration, therefore while knowing the human author might be nice, it is not theologically necessary.

How ironic that within Hebrews is the “Faithful Hall of Fame,” yet the author himself is unnamed. This is an important lesson for us – faithful followers might not always be known by the world, but they are certainly known by God!! The book of Hebrews consistently raises the reader's eyes to God, the ultimate Author, and I don't think the human author would have had it any other way!

ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

What is important about the author of Hebrews is that the original audience knew who wrote to them. So, who was this audience? The phrase, “those from Italy greet you” (Heb. 13:24) hint that either the audience or the author was in Italy. If the audience was in Italy (most likely Rome), then the author had other Italians around them who sent their greetings back to their homeland. If the author was in Italy, then other Italians sent their greetings from Italy to wherever the audience dwelled.

The recipients of Hebrews most likely were **Greek-influenced Jewish Christians**. Several mentions within the text support this idea through references to Jewish practices (Heb. 2:2; 5:1; 9:13; 10:28; 12:17, etc.). The congregation, a house church established by someone other than the author (Heb. 2:3), had suffered persecution in the past (Heb. 10:32-34), was experiencing increased pressure (Heb. 12:3-4), and suffered from reduced attendance (Heb. 10:25) which indicated the more widespread apathy (Heb. 5:12-14) in their midst. It is this spiritual apathy which leads the author to write the congregation, encouraging them to persevere in faith and trust in Jesus, the Royal Son of God, and High Priest who eternally serves in the heavenly sanctuary guaranteeing them better promises (Heb. 8:1-6) than what their current world provides.

DATE

Once again, fuzziness surrounds when the book was written. One key indicator is that while the author goes to great lengths to demonstrate Christianity as fulfillment and replacement of Judaism, there is no mention of the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 A.D. In fact, references within the text speak of the high priest in present tense (Heb. 5:1-4; 9:25; 10:11), further indicating the Temple had not yet been destroyed at the time of writing. Had the Temple been destroyed, this would have strengthened the author’s argument that Judaism was replaced by Christianity and God no longer needed the Temple for proper worship. Additionally, if the congregation was indeed living in Rome, they would have endured Nero’s persecution following a great fire in the city in 64 A.D. Therefore, we can safely date the writing of Hebrews to between **64-70 A.D.**

LITERARY GENRE & STRUCTURE

Determined for many years to be a letter (epistle), the text lacks many of the typical features of a letter from that era, even though the book closes like an epistle (Heb. 13:20-25) with concluding remarks and greetings. The text shows greater evidence of being a **written sermon** based on repeated words connecting one thought to the next, repeated phrases for emphasis, and rhetorical questions the listeners would answer for themselves. So, what we hold in our hands today is a sermon from a concerned preacher who is from a distance trying to encourage a congregation with the truths about Christ and application of those truths to their own lives and present situation. Hear the heart of this preacher as you read!

Introduction:	Christ as the Superior Revelation (1:1-4)
Part One:	Christ the Son as the Superior Mediator (1:5-7:28)
Part Two:	Christ as the Superior High Priest (8:1-10:39)
Part Three:	The Christian's Response to Christ's Superiority (10:19-13:25)
Conclusion:	Prayer, Final Thoughts, Greetings (13:18-25)

OBSERVATION WORDS

- Jesus
- Holy Spirit
- God
- Spoke/Spoken/Testified (all synonyms)
- Hear/Listen
- Angels
- Better / Superior / Great / Greater
- Salvation
- Priest/Priesthood/High Priest
- Belief / Unbelief
- Sin
- Rest / Sabbath
- Promise / Oath
- Faith / Faithful / Faithfulness

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- What did you learn about Jesus through this book?

- What did you learn about the Holy Spirit through this book?

- What did you learn about God through this book?

- Jesus is described as superior in the following areas. Why & how is Jesus superior to:
 - Prophets (1:1-4)

 - Angels (1:5-2:18)

 - Moses (3:1-19)

 - Joshua's Rest (4:1-14)

- Levitical Priesthood (5:1-7:28)

- The High Priest (8:1-6)

- The Old Covenant (8:7-13; 9:15-22)

- Sanctuary (9:1-14)

- Sacrifices (9:23-10:18)

- Who is Melchizedek & what does he teach us about Jesus?
 - Gen. 14:18-20

 - Psalm 110:4

 - Heb. 5:4-10

 - Heb. 6:20

 - Heb. 7:1-17

- As a result of Christ's superiority, Christians are called to respond in the following ways. What do you learn about each?
 - Draw Near to God (10:19-25)

- Perseverance with Faith (11:1-12:29)

- Sacrificial Love & Obedience (13:1-17)

- There are 5 clear warnings given in Hebrews. What is the warning about? What are the end results for not heeding the warning? What happens for those who do heed the warning?
 - Heb. 2:1-4

 - Heb. 3:7-19

 - Heb. 5:11-6:12

 - Heb. 10:26-38

 - Heb. 12:25-29

- Look again through the “Faith Hall of Fame” (Heb. 11:4-40). What name(s) stood out to you as a surprise? Why? What can you learn by their name being included in this list?

- What lesson did the Spirit highlight to you out of this book? How will you go about applying what you’ve learned? In what way(s) will your life look different as a result?

KEY WORD:

KEY VERSE:

KEY CHAPTER:

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