

Hebrews “Christ the Champion”

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 - a. 1:4-14 Superior Son
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- II. Chp. 4:14 – 10:18 A Better Performance
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 - b. 5:11 – 6:20 *Third warning of rejecting spiritual maturity*
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 - e. 13:1-17 Faith that Functions
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I. Introduction

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We come now to the introduction of a new study in the book known simply as *To Hebrews*. It is never an easy task as far as a student to start a new study. There are specific steps that must be followed that enable the student to properly investigate the book. These steps include knowing:

- The type of literature
- The author
- The original readers
- The location and time of writing among many other things.

All of these play an important role in determining the context of the passage under investigation. Then there is the time consuming exercise of dividing the book into sections which will enable a further detailed study. In the case of Hebrews with it's 13 chapters, (*the 3rd longest letter in the New Testament behind Romans and 1 Corinthians*), no easy task. Further complicating our investigation into this amazing book is that though it is a letter the common elements of ancient letter writing were not followed. This letter has no introduction with which most letters started with. The introduction of the letter is where we normally learn of who the author is as well as who the original readers were. Second there is no clear “statement of purpose” where the student would discover the clear reason for writing. What we do have is only two aspects of a normal New Testament letter:

- 1:1 – 13:17 A body of teaching that starts immediately in chapter one verse one and continues all the way through chapter 13 verse 17

- 13:18-25 A closing where the writer asks for prayer from his readers mentions a common acquaintance (Timothy) and mentions a greeting from fellow believers in Italy.

What this means is that our examination lacks the normal elements which help give us the context.

Authorship

The first example of this is in determining the writer. Since the writer doesn't choose to introduce himself we are left with only historical and internal evidence which is vague at best. Further more because the author is uncertain, we are also left with uncertainty with regards to:

- Where it was written
- When it was written
- Whom it was written

This has led some to question the book of Hebrews placement in the New Testament but it must be noted that this book had the full support of early church fathers such as Clement of Rome. It wasn't accepted in the West until the 4th century when it received the full support of both Jerome and Augustine. But the Eastern Church had no such issues because it regarded the book as the 14th letter from Paul. The issue of it's acceptance again came up during the reformation where it over came its anonymity and passed the test of inspiration due to its quality and spiritual depth. An examination of this letter reveals that this letter was NOT anonymous to its original readers: The author asks prayer from the readers in 13:18, indicates that he is looking forward to being "restored" to them soon. They also shared a mutual friend in Timothy (13:23) as well as those in Italy. Yet with those clues the question as to authorship still remains, largely being divided between Paul, Luke or Barnabas. The internal evidence is less than conclusive, as some aspects of the style, language and theology are very similar to Paul as well as the author's

mention of Timothy who was Paul son in the faith. But there are significant differences as well: The lack of Paul's common salutation which included his name in the 13 letters he wrote church's and individuals. The Greek style in Hebrews is far more refined than found in Paul's known letters. In Paul's other letters he was far more insistent upon being an apostle of Jesus and hearing from the Lord directly. Where as in Hebrews the author states that Jesus was confirmed by those who heard Him. Paul in his other writings would quote the Old Testament scriptures using both the Hebrew text as well as the Greek translation of the Hebrew text but in Hebrews only the Greek translation is quoted which suggests that the author only knew the Greek translation. All of this suggests that the author was greatly influenced by Paul but most likely wasn't written by him. One of the possible answers to authorship is an ancient reference from Clement of Alexandria 150 – 215 AD where he says that the Letter to the Hebrews was written by Paul but that it was written for Hebrews in the Hebrew language and that Luke carefully translated it for the Greeks and that it purposefully didn't bare the name of Paul as the writer as the original in Hebrew was absent these normal markings due to the prejudice and suspicions held by the Jews against Paul.

Location, Time and Original Readers

Like the authorship many destinations have been suggested as the locality of the original readers. But none can be determined absolutely! Some suggest Jerusalem but this location has been all but eliminated by most scholars due to internal and external evidence. The other popular locations are Antioch, Alexandria and Rome, all of which had substantial Jewish populations that had come to recognize Jesus as their messiah. Rome is by far the most popular location by scholars as the salutation in 13:24 makes it

obvious that the writer was in company with certain Italian believers who were sending their greetings back to Rome. What we can determine in this letter about the original readers of this letter is that they were believers (3:1) who had come to Christ through those who were eyewitness of Jesus. According to chapter 5 verse 12 they were not “new believers” but were stunted in their maturity. According to chapter 10 verses 32-34 they had gone through great trials because of their faith as well as their association with the writer who was in chains. Yet with that said that had become dull of hearing 5:11 and in danger of drifting away 2:1 and departing from the Living God 3:12. The author feared that renewed persecution would further their decline 12:4-12 and were in need of exhortation 13:22. We can reasonably guess the date of the letter by examining the other evidence as Hebrews is quoted by Clement of Rome in A.D. 95, further more the fact that there is no mention of the ending of the sacrificial system which occurred in A.D. 70 when the temple was destroyed indicates that the letter was written prior to its destruction. Timothy was still alive, persecution was mounting and the Jewish system of sacrifice was seen as ending all point to a date around 64-68 A.D.

Reason For Writing

Among the many challenges that Jewish believers faced that Hebrews addresses is:

- A. How is Jesus to be understood in relation to the teachings of many Old Testament passages, especially the New Covenant spoken of by Jeremiah?
- B. How were these Jewish believers to interpret their religious and cultural expression practiced by their fathers in their new realization of Jesus as their Messiah?
- C. How were they to understand their persecution from their fellow Jewish brethren and avoid the temptation of abandoning their new faith in Jesus as Messiah?
- D. How are they to understand the old practices of sacrifices in light of the sacrifice of Christ?
- E. How were they to engage with gentile believers who didn't share their culture or former religious practice?

These are the questions that come up in this letter but behind it is the practical question

of: *What can the author do to encourage specifically Jewish believers to live like what they say they believe?* They had like so many professing believers today began to “*drift away*” from their faith. They had lost the sense of relevancy of their faith to everyday life and had begun to go back to the outward religious performance of their formal religious expression. They faced doubts both from alternative philosophies and increased persecution that made abandoning their profession and practice of their faith in Jesus easy to succumb too. The cost of faith in Christ was just too much and with their Jewish brethren advancing this agenda some had begun to doubt the message of eyewitness testimony and began to think that the truths about Jesus were an elaborate hoax in which they had been deliberately deceived.

To these pressures that they Jewish believers faced the writer without apology stressed Jesus Christ as the answer to their doubts and fears. There is no book in the New Testament that better presents the availability and adequacy of Jesus than the book of Hebrews. Jesus alone is our champion who is incomparable to any person or religion in setting men free as well as granting them unrestricted access to the Living God. The author achieves this by contrasting Jesus against what these Jewish believers were tempted to going back too. Thirteen times In Hebrews the author uses the word “better” to show the superiority of Jesus Christ to what they were tempted to returning too. Jesus is better than angels, He offers a better hope because He is a mediator of a better covenant established by better promises. Another word the author repeatedly uses to express Jesus superiority is the use of the word “perfect” which he uses 14 times. Here the contrast is between what could never be accomplished by their former religious observance but can be accomplish by Jesus “Perfect” work! The third word the author

uses us the word “eternal” where the author seeks to show the permanent of the work of Christ when compared to the temporary work that they were being tempted to return too. Yet with those three words emphasizing the superiority of Christ five times throughout this letter the author issues warnings about rejecting the truth once and forever delivered to the saints. In each of these warning these are admonished to heed God’s word!