

Epistle of Hebrews

(verse by verse online teaching from 2021 and 2007-08 here →

https://www.generationword.com/audio_series/hebrews.html)

HEBREWS	68 AD
<i>"Fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess." 3:1</i>	
Author: Unknown, maybe Barnabas	
Written From: Unknown, maybe Corinth or Asia sent to Rome, or in Rome and sent elsewhere	
Sent To: Jewish Christian leaders probably in a Messianic synagogue in an unknown city, maybe Rome or Corinth.	
Purpose: A "word of exhortation" to encourage believers to continue to grow and mature and avoid returning to Jewish ceremonies, regulations, rituals and sacrifices	
Theme: Jesus is supreme.	
Basic Outline: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1:1 - 4:13 – Superiority of Jesus to prophets, angels, Moses, Joshua• 4:14-7:28 – Superiority of Jesus' Priesthood• 8:1-10:39 – Superiority of Jesus' Covenant, Temple and Sacrifice• 11:1-12:29 – Examples of Persevering Faith• 13:1-21 – Christian Ethics and Behavior	

Divisions and outline

1. Superiority of Christ
 - a. Superior to the prophets - 1:1-3
 - b. Superior to the angels – 1:4-2:18
 - c. Superior to Moses – 3:1-4:14
 - i. Superior Messenger – 3:1-19
 - ii. Superior Sabbath Rest – 4:1-13
 - d. Superior to Aaron and the priesthood – 4:14-7:28
2. Superiority of the New Covenant
 - a. Superior promises – 8:1-13
 - b. Superior Sanctuary – 9:1-28
 - c. Superior Sacrifice – 10:1-18
3. Exhortations to Believers in the Superiority of Christ and the New Covenant
 - a. Come to God and continue in the faith – 10:19-39
 - b. Run the race with endurance – 11:1-12:29
 - c. Final words of exhortation and information – 13:1-25

Date of the Book

1. Clement of Rome who wrote around 85 AD quotes from this book in 1 Clement 36:1:
 - 36:1 This is the way, dearly beloved, wherein we found our salvation, even Jesus Christ the High priest of our offerings, the Guardian and Helper of our weakness.
 - 2 Through Him let us look steadfastly unto the heights of the heavens; through Him we behold as in a mirror His faultless and most excellent visage; through Him the eyes of our hearts were opened; through Him our foolish and darkened mind spring up unto the light; through Him the Master willed that we should taste of the immortal knowledge Who being the brightness of His majesty is so much greater than angels, as He hath inherited a more excellent name.
 - 3 For so it is written "Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers aflame of fire"
 - 4 but of His Son the Master said thus, "You are My Son, I this day have begotten you. Ask of Me, and I will give you the Gentiles for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession."
 - 5 And again He says unto Him, "Sit Thou on My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."
2. Clement's use of Hebrews shows two things:
 - a. Hebrews was in existence before 85 AD
 - b. Hebrews had already been accepted as an authoritarian book which meant it was viewed as having an apostolic connection.
3. Those who accepted the gospel had accepted it from those who heard Jesus speak and they had time to grow and fall away before this book was written. (2:3)
4. Timothy was still alive (13:23) but in prison. This is not recorded in Acts or any of Paul's letters. Timothy was free when Paul died in 68 AD (2 Tim.). The fact that Timothy is mentioned and not Paul suggests that Paul had already died.
5. There had been an early persecution but serious persecution (martyrdom) was still a thing of the future. The minor persecution would have come from the Jewish community rejecting the believing Jews but Nero's persecution that began in Rome in 65 AD may have been spreading their way.
6. The temple service is spoken of as having given way to Jesus but was still spoken of in the present tense as still occurring.
 - a. 5:1-4, "For every high priest who is chosen from among men is appointed. . . to offer. .he can deal gently. . he himself is beset with weakness. . . he is bound to offer. . . one does not take . . .but he is called."
 - b. 7:8 – "In one case, the tenth is collected by men who die. . ."
 - c. 7:21, "They have become priests. . ."
 - d. 7:23
 - e. 7:27, "He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily."
 - f. 7:28, "The law appoints as high priests men who are weak."
 - g. 8:13 – "By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear."
 - i. This indicates the old covenant was still functioning but would soon disappear.
 - ii. If the temple had already been destroyed (70 AD) then clearly the new covenant had come spiritually and the old covenant had ceased and disappeared physically.
 - h. h. 9:6-9 – The verbs are in the present tense (even though the NIV does not translate them this way)
 - i. 9:13
 - j. 9:25, "the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year."
 - k. 10:1-3 concerning sacrifices – "they would have ceased to be offered"
 - l. 10:11, "Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices."
 - m. 13:10 – "We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat."
 - n. 13:11 – ". . . the bodies are burnt outside the camp."
6. If the temple had been destroyed already then two questions need to be asked:
 - a. Why is it still a temptation to resort back to the sacrifices of animals and the temple rituals if they no longer exist
 - b. Why does the author not come right out and say, "Hey, look the temple is gone. What more proof do you need that God is done with the old system?"
7. The coming Roman armies may be near since 13:13 encourages them to come outside the city. These words echo Jesus warning to flee Jerusalem when you see it being surrounded.
8. The church must be in the early days yet because no titles such as bishop, deacon, etc. are mentioned. The church still appears to be assembling together for strengthening one another with out the hierarchy that was developing even in Paul's day.

In chapter one Jesus is introduced as the means by which God spoke to us in these last days. Jesus is superior to the angels and greater than creation.

In chapter two the readers are warned not to drift away from Jesus. The punishment for such a failure would be more severe than the punishment Israel received for disobeying the message of an angel, since this message was brought to us by the Lord himself. Jesus has become a man to fulfill all the righteousness that man needed to fulfill. Jesus lived as a man, suffered as a man and is able to serve as the high priest for men before God.

Chapter three begins by showing that Jesus is superior to Moses even though Moses was faithful. The readers are warned not to be like the exodus generation who did not have faith, but instead, lived in unbelief. The exodus generation did not enter the Promised Land because of disobedience that came from their unbelief.

In chapter four the readers are told that the promised rest still is available through faith in Jesus. More than that, Jesus is introduced as the great high priest for mankind before God. The eternal God who became a man is also our high priest who understands our condition as men and is there to help us.

In chapter five the author begins to show that the Old Testament, even the law itself, promised another priesthood besides Aaron's. The author has more to say about this, but realizes his readers' ability to understand and perceive the revelation of God (which includes the priesthood of Jesus) has faded away.

Chapter six continues the rebuke but informs the readers there is only one way to move – and that is forward. They cannot go back into their unregenerate state. They are believers and will either grow and produce or become a field that is overrun with weeds that produces nothing useful.

In chapter seven the author returns to the priesthood of Jesus and compares it to the priesthood of Melchizedek from the book of Genesis which is also a part of the law. Jesus' priesthood is a better priesthood with a better covenant and better promises. Jesus is a priest who is eternal and has access to God because he is perfect and is God himself. But even more, the fact that he was a man made it possible for him to be offered as the perfect sacrifice for man's sins.

Chapter eight continues to analyze Jesus' priesthood. Here the author explains that Jesus entered the real temple which is in heaven as a high priest and actually dealt with sin. The earthly temple was only a shadow or example of the reality of what Jesus did. The result of this is the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31, which includes three main points:

1. The Law of God written on believers' hearts – they will have a new nature.
2. All believers will know God – they will have a personal relationship with God.
3. God will remember their sins no more – the penalty for sin has been forever paid.

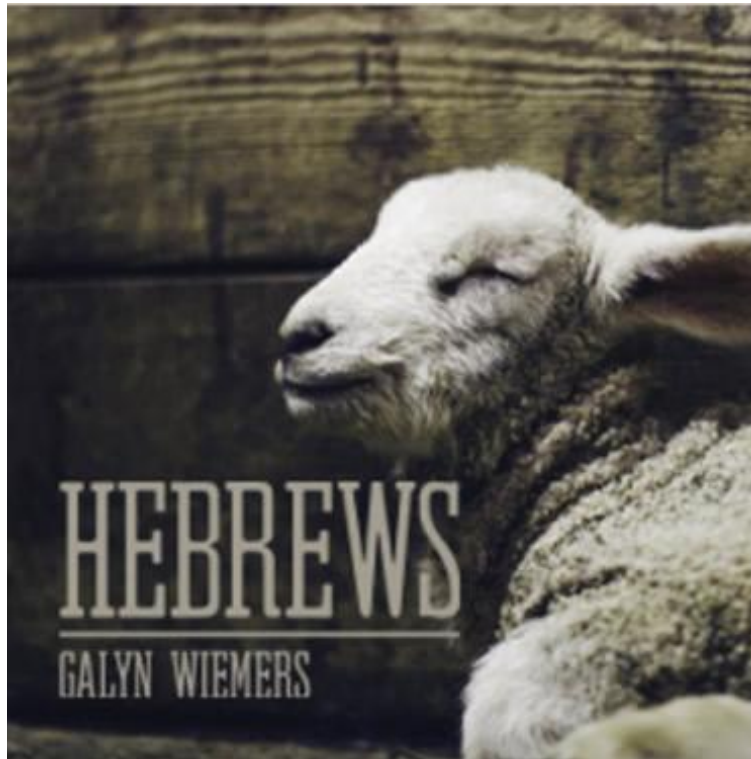
Chapters nine and ten compare the earthly temple (or, tabernacle) and its rituals and sacrifices with the heavenly temple and the work of Jesus Christ. Temple sacrifice in Jerusalem was a routine that had to be repeated because it was never effective. It simply taught of a great reality. This reality was fulfilled when Jesus actually died, paid for sin, and entered into the true temple in heaven. The work of Jesus need never be repeated because it was not a ritual but a real sacrifice that paid for the sins of men.

Chapter ten ends with the author encouraging his readers not to give up hoping in Jesus because his was the only effectual sacrifice and the only way of actual salvation. Many of the readers had been tempted to give up on the gospel of Jesus and return to their familiar Jewish rituals. The author says this would be a mistake since there is no other way. The choice is salvation through Jesus or destruction from God.

Chapter eleven gives a list of men and women of faith who believed the promises of God and continued to trust them even though they did not see them fulfilled in their lives. These people had faith. They trusted God's promises and proved it by how they lived. The list of people begins in Genesis and continues through the Old Testament, even including the time between the testaments, all the way up to the early church leaders (13:7).

Chapter twelve tells the readers it is their turn to live a life of faith and not give up. They are reminded that suffering does not mean the gospel is not true but instead means God is disciplining and training us for the day his kingdom does come. We are not looking for a natural mountain like the people of the exodus, but the heavenly mountain – the city of God which is heaven itself.

In chapter thirteen the author goes through a list of expectations for Christian morality, ethics and social behavior. He reminds them that even Jesus was rejected by the world. The Christian sacrifices are not burnt offerings but instead lips that confess Jesus, praises offered to God, and the doing of good deeds for the world and believers.



9. The forty years of the Exodus wandering mentioned in 3:7 may be hinting at the fulfillment of the forty years Jesus warned about in 30 AD.

Conclusion: I feel strongly that the book was written before 70 AD for a variety of reasons.

I would venture a guess at a more specific date after Paul's death which at the earliest was the fall of 67 AD and latest was the spring of 68 AD. The Jewish Wars with Rome began in 66 AD. Titus and the Roman legions arrived at the northern wall of Jerusalem on Passover 70 AD. Five months later the walls fell and the temple was burned. I place the date of the writing of this letter between 68-69 AD as Roman legions were approaching Jerusalem.

- The word "synagogue" (συναγωγή) is never used.
- "Jesus" is the name used, but never "Jesus Christ" or "Christ Jesus"
- Recipients may have been associated with the Jewish priesthood or Levites:
 - 5:12 – they should have become teachers in their Christian community already
 - 3:1 – Jesus is "the high priest whom we confess", not the ruling Jewish priest
 - 6:6 – "crucifying the Son of God all over again" could refer to the priests who rejected and crucified Jesus the first time
 - 13:10 – when the readers are compared to the unbelieving priests/Levites then, "We have an altar from which those who minister in the tabernacle have no right to eat."
- The writer read and quoted the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament.
- The author uses rabbinic teaching styles including arguments from the silence of Scripture, 7:3
- The writing and thought is not Paul, but it is supported by Paul's teaching
- Barnabas was a Hellenistic Jew from Cypress who was a Levite with higher Jewish training in Scripture. Trained for service in the temple. He was by his tribal ancestry a teacher. His name means "son of encouragement." He taught and traveled with Paul in many Gentile churches.

Who Wrote the Book of Hebrews?

1. It is interesting to begin by noting that Clement of Rome (in the west) showed his acceptance of it by quoting from it in 85 AD. Clement does not give the author's name but he does mention Paul when he quotes from First Corinthians. We then assume that it was not Paul and that Clement may not have known.
2. The Muratorian Canon, a list of the accepted books, is a fragment of parchment that has a list dated from around 170-190 AD leaves out of its accepted books: 1 and 2 Peter, James, Hebrews and 3 John. This list originated in the West.
3. In the east, Egypt for example, around 200 AD Clement of Alexandria writes that his teacher, Pantaenus, claimed that Paul wrote Hebrews. He says Paul left off his name because Jesus is the Apostle to the Hebrews and not Paul.
 - a. Clement of Alexandria wrote that Paul wrote the letter to the Hebrews in Hebrew and that Luke translated it into Greek.
4. Origen, who followed Pantaenus as Alexandria's teacher, rejected Paul's authorship of Hebrews but accepted the book as scripture.
 - a. Origen said the thoughts were Paul's but the style of writing was not. Origen said it lacked Paul's rudeness of expression which Paul himself claimed to have.
 - b. Origen said that he suggested that Luke or Clement of Rome wrote it, but concluded that "God alone knows who wrote it."
5. The Eastern Church continued to promote the book as Paul's and continued to accept it.
6. In the Chester Beatty Papyrus (200-250 AD) which were found in Egypt, includes the book of Hebrews and places it after Paul's letter to the Romans.
7. In the West around 200 AD Tertullian writes as though it is commonly known that Barnabas wrote the letter.
 - a. The phrase "word of encouragement" of Heb. 13:22 matches Acts 4:36 description of Barnabas as being the "son of encouragement"
 - b. The insight and understanding of the levitical service and the priesthood would fit that of a Levite, which Barnabas was:

"Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas
(which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and
brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet." Acts 4:36, 37
 - c. Heb. 2:4 says the gospel "was confirmed to us by those who heard him (Jesus)" would mean that Barnabas had not personally heard Jesus preach.
7. Cyprian (d. 258 AD), from Carthage in the west, was a bishop and wrote during the time of persecution. He was one of the first to claim that there was only one true church authority and used the OT priesthood to defend this position and the clergy. In all of his writings he never uses Hebrews since it would not support its position
8. Jerome and Augustine sided with the East in accepting the book and Paul's authorship around 400 AD. The rest followed.
9. The Synod of Hippo in 393 and the Third Synod of Carthage in 397 credited Paul with 13 epistles. By the Sixth Synod of Carthage in 419 Paul was given credit for 14 epistles which included Hebrews.
10. Thomas Aquinas said that Luke translated Paul's Hebrew letter into Greek.
11. Erasmus (1400's) said Paul could not have written Hebrews.
12. Luther suggested Apollos
13. Calvin thought it was written (not translated) by Luke or Clement of Rome
 - a. Clement could not have written it because it was written 30 years before he wrote First Clement to the Corinthians plus the two styles are different with the Hebrew author being superior to Clement.
14. Recently Priscilla and Aquila have been suggested. The fact that Priscilla was a woman explains why the name was dropped. This has support from the fact that
 - a. they were teachers who taught Apollos
 - b. they did know Timothy
 - c. they had lived in Italy so they had friends in Italy and from Italy living elsewhere.

Conclusion:

- The thought of the Epistle is not Paul but it is supported by Paul's teaching
- The language is not Paul
- The technical use of the Old Testament is not Paul
- The author:
 - Had heard the gospel from those who heard Jesus speak
 - Well versed in the Septuagint
 - Interpreted with creative exegetical principle
 - Had a brilliant vocabulary
 - Masterful rhetorical style
 - Powerful in the use of the scriptures
 - He was a Hellenist
- I think the writer was Barnabas because:
 - He was a Hellenistic Jew from Cyprus
 - He was a Levite which means he would have been exposed to higher Jewish training in scripture, trained for and possibly served in the temple, was by his tribal responsibility a teacher, son of encouragement, taught and traveled with Paul so would have been influenced by him, taught in many Gentile churches.

Destination

This answer hinges on the phrase "those from Italy send their greetings" (13:24)

- 1) Jerusalem or Jewish believers in Israel
 - a. Jewish character of the book.
 - b. Reference to the heavenly Zion in 12:22 would be a comparison to the earthly city of Jerusalem.
 - c. Problem is the readers were said to be generous (6:10; 13:16) but we know from Paul's letters the Jewish Christians were suffering from famine and poverty and were themselves receiving financial aid from the Gentiles.
- 2) Alexandria
 - a. The style of writing is similar to Alexandrian thought and Philo's style.
 - b. This destination is unlikely since they were the first to ascribe it to Paul which is clearly incorrect (in many people's opinions)
- 3) Corinth
 - a. The theory is that Apollos wrote Hebrews around 52-54 from Ephesus to Jewish believers in Corinth.
 - b. "those from Italy" were driven from Jerusalem under Claudius persecution of Jews in 49 AD.
- 4) Rome
 - a. "Those from Italy" could mean
 - i. "those in Italy send their greetings" indicating the letter was written from Italy.
 - ii. "those from Italy send their greetings" meaning those from Italy who are somewhere with the writer send their greetings back to Italy.
 1. This second (ii) one is more natural (John 1:44; Acts 6:9; 10:23 all use "apo" or "from"
 - b. The fact that Clement in Rome quotes Hebrews in 85 AD supports Rome as the destination.
 - c. Paul would have converted many of the Jewish leaders at the end of Acts. These leaders would have turned their synagogues into Messianic synagogues. When Nero's persecution of 64 AD broke out the Christians would have suffered but the Jews were protected by the law. (Or, the persecution could have been in 49 AD under Cladius.)
 - d. The destination of Rome would explain why they used the Septuagint and why they did not hear Jesus teach.
 - e. The reason it was so Jewish in flavor was because these were Messianic Jews still meeting in synagogues, which was something Paul tried throughout Acts

