

Who wrote the book of *Hebrews*? I'll give you three clues, and then guess the answer using your knowledge of the Bible.

First clue: The author had an expansive knowledge of Jewish religious rites and history, but wrote in excellent Greek. Second: The author was a friend of Timothy at a time when Timothy had just been released from jail.<sup>1</sup> The third is more subtle: Even though *Hebrews* is one of the longest books in the New Testament, ninth longest to be exact, the author considered it to be quite brief.<sup>2</sup>

The answer: nobody knows who wrote *Hebrews*.

Although a casual reading of *Hebrews* might lead you to think Paul wrote it, many modern and ancient scholars had good reasons to think he didn't. It was not generally recognized as one of Paul's letters when the New Testament was compiled. If it had been, it would have been shown as the third longest of Paul's letters and placed after *Romans* or *First Corinthians*.

If the author is one of the other people shown in the New Testament, the author is most likely me, or Barnabas. Other less likely possibilities are Luke, Silas or Priscilla and Aquila. If none of them, Clement of Rome has been suggested as the author.

In sum, no one knows with certainty who wrote the book of *Hebrews*. Yet, it is still considered a valuable, and canonical, (an aside) sanctioned, part of the New Testament.

With all that information, maybe you can understand why I, was chosen to talk about the first half of *Hebrews*, and Barnabas was chosen to talk about the second half.

*Hebrews* was probably written in the decade of the 60's AD, in the time before the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Although the title was not part of the original text, the audience for the letter was very likely Greek-speaking Jewish Christians who used the Septuagint version of the Bible. The Septuagint was a Greek translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew language.

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 13:23

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 13:22

The reason for the writing of Hebrews may very well be found in Hebrews chapter 10: verse 38, where the author is concerned that these Jewish Christians will “shrink back.” The question is what would they shrink back from?

Possibly they would shrink back from being Christians because of persecution from the Romans or Jewish authorities. This is not highly likely because they were probably not located where the Jewish authorities ruled, and the Romans were not typically persecuting Christians yet.

From the warnings and information in *Hebrews*, it is more likely that the author was worried that the Jewish Christians would revert back to Judaism. Although the Bible never seems to directly address this situation, it must have been a big problem to the early Christians. The family, social and economic pressures, these were enormous for any Jew who became a Christian. The persecution from Jewish authorities was intense both religiously and physically. The leaders could prohibit anybody from worshiping in the Temple or synagogues, and this would have been devastating.

In a much more subtle way, just the worship style may have exerted huge force for Jewish Christians to revert. The Christians had teachers with little formal training, teaching in *house* churches. They were used to the synagogue. A few letters from church leaders were being circulated, but the New Testament had not been compiled. No pomp and circumstance, no sacred writings. In contrast, the Jews had the elaborate Temple, religious rites that had been followed for fifteen centuries, educated leaders, and the Scriptures. On the surface, it must have seemed that God favored the Jewish way over the Christian way.

Here is why the book of *Hebrews* is important for you to know. It is a book of choice. Should you choose Christianity or another way? Which is better? The choice you make has rewards and consequences. The ancient Jews had to choose whether to follow their ancient religion wholly, or be devoted to Christianity with Judaism taking a distant second place role. Perhaps you have to choose whether to follow another religion, no religion, or try to live without full commitment to anything. Whatever the choice you have to make, the book of *Hebrews* will help you understand how to make it.

Spoiler Alert: Jesus is better. As you are reading the book of Hebrews, you can keep this in mind...the answer is always, “Jesus is the better choice.”

One of the few exceptions to that rule is in the opening to the letter. The author makes the statement that the Son is the exact representation of God’s being. He is the radiance of God’s glory. God made the universe through his Son.

The introduction of the next subject seems a little odd to hearers today without some background. In the time of Jesus, some Jews exalted and revered angels because they were possibly involved in the giving of the Law. In the eyes of those Jews, angels were inferior only to God.

The author of Hebrews states that Jesus is superior to angels, and goes on to prove it with Old Testament Scriptures. He even says that angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.

Through suffering when he was tempted, Jesus is able to help those who are tempted. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus brings many to salvation. Yes, Jesus is superior to the angels.

The greatest of all the Jews was Moses. He was a faithful servant of God, and the law came to the Jews through Moses. Yet, Jesus is superior to Moses because Jesus is the Son, not just a servant.

The Jews wandered in the desert for forty years under the leadership of Moses. This predicament and punishment was because of their rebellion and hard hearts. The writer of Hebrews warns his hearers against having sinful and unbelieving hearts, to stop and turn to God. Why do people become hard-hearted? Because of the deceitfulness of sin.

The author of Hebrews gives a further warning against unbelief and disobedience. These have kept people from entering into rest with God. Nobody can trick God, either. For God's word is living and active, penetrating enough to divide soul and spirit, and it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing is hidden from God, but all is laid bare before him to whom each much give an account.

So, Moses was the greatest of the prophets, but Jesus is superior to Moses.

The author has demonstrated that Jesus is superior to the angels and to Moses, but how about the high priest? Jesus is the great high priest!

Every high priest, except Aaron, was selected among men and appointed to represent them in matters related to God. Since the high priest of the Jews was a sinful person, he had to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as those of the people.

However, Jesus was without sin, so he did not have to sacrifice for his own sins. Even so, he is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because he was tempted in every way, just as we are...he just didn't sin. So, we can approach the throne of grace with confidence that we will receive mercy and find grace. Because he learned obedience from what he suffered, he was made perfect and became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. He was designated by God to be the great high priest.

Barnabas will tell you more about Jesus being the great high priest, I want to tell you about some warnings from the author of *Hebrews*. These warnings are in the last half of Chapter Five, and in Chapter Six. As you read these warnings, you realize that the author knew his audience personally, or knew a lot about them. You also get the idea that these warnings were not meant just for the recipients of the letter, but for the broader Christian community.

He warns that they are slow learners and have forgotten the elementary truths of God's Word. They are so immature that they can't distinguish good from evil. He tells them to move on to maturity, and the foundations of repentance and faith in God.

He warns that it is impossible for those who have been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit and tasted the word of God to be brought back to repentance if they fall away.

With those warnings, he encourages them by telling them that God is not unjust and will not forget their work and the love they have shown by helping God's people. He encourages them to show diligence to the very end, in order to make their hope sure.

The author tells them that God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose clear, so he confirmed it with an oath. Since it is impossible for God to lie, we can hold onto his promises with confidence.

No matter who the actual author of *Hebrews* is, know this: Jesus is greater than the angels and greater than Moses. He is our great high priest. It is wise to choose Jesus, and dreadful to choose something else. What will you choose?