

CHAPTER 10

HEBREWS

When Peter and Paul were executed by Nero and the Gentile churches were coming under increased threats of persecution, the Jewish church in Jerusalem also faced new trials. Increasing pressure from the Jewish Zealots was steering the Jewish nation into revolt against Rome. In A.D. 67 the Romans began their campaign to re-conquer the Jews. During those years the Jewish Christians throughout the Roman Empire would have been pressured to support the Jewish nation and religion. The Jews' beloved temple was still in operation (Heb 10:1; 13:10-11), and provided a magnificent worship, quite different from the simple worship of the NT churches.

The Jewish Christian community in Rome likewise would have been under double pressure, from both their Jewish families and friends and from the Roman government. Since the Romans recognized Judaism as a permitted religion, and now denied that status to Christianity, it would have been doubly tempting to return to Judaism.

The book of Hebrews was written to encourage the Jewish Christians, probably in Rome (Heb 13:24), to remain faithful to Christ in spite of the coming persecutions. It apparently was written by a second-generation Jewish Christian (Heb 2:3-4) who had a detailed knowledge of the Jewish religion and history and a thorough knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures.

Author of Hebrews

The book is anonymous; ascriptions to Paul come only in later MSS. The early church fathers state that its authorship was unknown, although the teachings are clearly Pauline.

Suggested authors:

- Paul (traditional author, 4th century and later)
- Barnabas (Tertullian)
- Apollos (Luther)
- Luke (Clement of Alexandria, Calvin)

- Clement of Rome (Eusebius, Erasmus)
- Priscilla (and Aquila) (some modern scholars)

In spite of the many suggested authors, the place of Hebrews in the NT canon is unquestioned. Its theology is clearly Pauline; if Paul did not write the epistle, it appears to have been written by one of his circle.

Theme and content of Hebrews

The key concept in Hebrews is “better”; Jesus was better than all other people in Jewish theology, and his ministry was better than that of the Levitical priesthood and its institutions.

1. Personal superiority of Christ (Heb 1-4)
 - Superiority of Christ over the prophets, the angels, and Moses
2. Christ’s priesthood superior to Aaron’s priesthood (Heb 5-10)
3. Faith and the Christian life (Heb 10-13)

Scattered through the book are five important and strong “warning passages” (Heb 2:1-4; 3:7 - 4:13; 5:11 - 6:20; 10:26-31; 12:18-29).

Points of interest in Hebrews

- Controversial warning passage (Heb 6:4-6)
- Order of Melchizedek (Heb 7)
- The new covenant (Heb 8)
- Ceremonial sprinkling (Heb 9:10)
- Not forsaking the church (Heb 10:25)
- Heroes of faith (Heb 11)
- Chastening (Heb 12)
- Jesus the same forever (Heb 13:8)
- Christian separation (Heb 13:10-14)

- Timothy released from prison (Heb 13:23)