

Notes on the Book of Hebrews

1. Introduction and Hebrews 1

The Authorship of Hebrews

The author was a second generation Christian for in Hebrews 2:3-4 the writer states, "How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." The author was not an eyewitness to the Lord and his announcements, but received a salvation confirmed by those who were eyewitnesses. This excludes Paul and the other apostles as writers.

The author was most probably a Hellenistic Jew. The author relied heavily on the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Old Testament (written B.C. 100-80). An illustration of this use of the Septuagint occurs in Heb 1:6:

6 And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says,
"Let all God's angels worship him."

The footnote on this passage indicates that the reference comes from Deut 32:43, which reads in the Jewish version:

43 Rejoice, O nations, with his people,
for he will avenge the blood of his servants;
he will take vengeance on his enemies
and make atonement for his land and people.

Footnotes for Deut 32:43 offers this addition: "Masoretic Text; Dead Sea Scrolls (see also Septuagint) people, | and let all the angels worship him /"

Apollos fits the characteristic of a Hellenistic Jew extremely conversant with the scriptures as recorded in the Septuagint. Luke recorded in Acts 18:24, "24 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures."

The writer was also acquainted with Timothy and possibly Titus, which also indicates Apollos:

"10 If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. 11 No one, then, should refuse to accept him. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers. 12 Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity." 1 Corinthians 16:10-12.

Further Apollos knew Titus: "13 Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need." Titus 3:13. The author acknowledges Timothy as one of the acquaintances: "23 I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you." Hebrews 13:23

The author was well educated in the idioms and logic of Greek. The logic and idioms of the Hebrew letter are different from Paul's. Paul's logic is an if-not-then logic that is given to asides and that sometimes make them hard to understand. A good example from Paul is the 1 Corinthians 15 discourse on the resurrection of Christ. 1 Cor 15:12-19 reads:

12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

The author of Hebrews is more straight-line in his reasoning as in Hebrews 11 where he amasses examples and draws a conclusion in Hebrews 11:39-40: "39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. 40 God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

Hebrews 9:1-15 also illustrates this types of reasoning:

In the Aristotelian fashion, the author begins with a minor premise: *Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary.*

Related it to the present time: *This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. 10 They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings – external regulations applying until the time of the new order.*

Showed it to be inferior to Christ: *When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. 12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.*

Added a contrary premise: *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*

And drew its conclusion: *15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*

The Time of Writing

The latest date for the composition of Hebrews is clearly fixed as earlier than 96 AD, by reason of its use by Clement of Rome about that time. The earliest date cannot be so definitely fixed. The apparent dependence of Hebrews on Paul's Epistles, Galatians; 1 Corinthians and Romans, brings it beyond 50 AD

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The Theme of the Book

The theme of the book is the superiority of Christ and the gospel to the prophets and the Mosaic Law. This theme accomplished by illustrating that Christ is superior to the angels, a superior high priest, a builder of a superior house, an author of a superior law (covenant), a superior sacrifice, a superior way, a King of a superior kingdom, and a superior judge.

God's Final Word Spoken by His Son Who Is Superior to the Angels (Hebrews 1)

Hebrews establishes the superiority of Christ over all that has gone before—the angels, the Mosaic Law and the prophet—and all that is to follow the revelation of God in his son Jesus Christ. The first chapter of Hebrews begins with the emphatic statement that God has spoken to us by his son. An equally emphatic statement follows that declares the son superior to the angels.

God Has Spoken to Us by His Son (Hebrews 1:1-3)

1:1 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

To a Hebrew audience, it would be difficult to let go of the Old Testament delivered through the prophets as the standard of authority in religion. Indeed, Paul had written two major books refuting the Jewish teachers who insisted that the Old Testament be bound on the Christians—Romans and Galatians. Now the writer of Hebrews states that in these last days, “He has spoken to us by his son.”

The Last Days

When are these last days? They are certainly the days in which God's speaks through his son. The Old and New Testaments declare the beginning and end of the last days. By definition these last days, exclude all that preceded the covenant spoken by the son, and likewise they exclude any revelation that comes after the son has spoken. These parameters exclude the Old Testament and all so-called latter day revelations. In prophecy, Isaiah described the beginning of the last days in Isa 2:2-4:

2 In the last days

the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established
as chief among the mountains;
it will be raised above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.

3 Many peoples will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths."

The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

4 He will judge between the nations
and will settle disputes for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.

In Micah 4 beginning in the first verse, Micah described the very same set of events in almost the exact word: "In the last days," he began.

In Acts 2:16-21, Peter quoted the prophet Joel from Joel 2:28-32:

16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17 "In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

18 Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

19 I will show wonders in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

20 The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

21 And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Nothing could be more emphatic than Peter's, "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel." The last days began on the day of Pentecost in Act 2.

What will characterize the last days? First there will be those like those of Acts 2:41: "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. And, again, in Acts 2:47: "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

In the last days, there will also be the blatantly immoral ones as portrayed by Paul in 2 Tim 3:1-5:

3:1 But mark this: **There will be terrible times in the last days** . 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

James is even more graphic in his description of the greedy, murderous, and materialistic of the last days in James 5:1-6:

5:1 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. 2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. **You have hoarded wealth in the last days** . 4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. 5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have

fatted yourselves in the day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

Peter teaches that there will be scoffers and unbelievers in the last days in 2 Peter 3:3-7:

3 First of all, you must understand that **in the last days scoffers will come**, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

The Revelation declares the very end of the last days. Rev 10:6-7 teaches that in the days of the sounding of the seventh trumpet the mystery of God will be accomplished: "There will be no more delay! 7 But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets." The fulfillment of this passage is in Rev 11:15-18:

15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:
"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

16 And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying:

"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
the One who is and who was,
because you have taken your great power
and have begun to reign.

18 The nations were angry;
and your wrath has come.
The time has come for judging the dead,
and for rewarding your servants the prophets
and your saints and those who reverence your name,
both small and great –
and for destroying those who destroy the earth."

At the end of the out-pouring of God's wrath (Rev 15:1), God said in Rev 21:6, "It is done."

God Has Spoken

That God has spoken by his son is a truth established in the beginning of the gospel, confirmed by the apostles, and testified to in the Revelation. On the Mount of Transfiguration, God declared that we should hear the son. In Matt 17:5, Matthew recorded, "5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'" Jesus asserted his right and the right of the apostles to speak in Matt 28:18-20: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." This right of Jesus to speak for the Father continues to the very end of the age.

In places, too many to mention here the apostles testified to this right of the son to speak. 2 Peter 1:16-18 calls attention to the utterance of God on the Mount of Transfiguration, asserting that they did not follow cleverly invented stories:

16 We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." 18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

Revelation concludes with the assertion that we must hear his words. Rev 22:6-7 says,

6 The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

7 "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

The rest of Heb 1:2-3 declares the indisputable power and glory of the son of God, through whom God has spoken:

- God appointed the son heir of all things.
- God made the universe through him.
- The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.
- The Son sustains all things by his powerful word.
- He provided purification for sins.
- He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Compare the above truths to those of John 1:3 and Col 1:15.

The Son of God, Superior to the Angels Revelation 1:4-14)

4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

5 For to which of the angels did God ever say,

"You are my Son; today I have become your Father"?

Or again,

"I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"?

6 And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says,

"Let all God's angels worship him."

7 In speaking of the angels he says,

"He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire."

8 But about the Son he says,

"Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."

10 He also says,

"In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. 11 They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. 12 You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

13 To which of the angels did God ever say,

"Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" ?

14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

The logic and expression of the preeminence and superiority of Christ over the angels, testifies to the fact that we are to hear him. His word supersedes all that has gone before. In verse 8, the scripture calls the son of God, God, which attests to the divinity of Jesus the son. It also testifies to a kingdom that has come and a king on his throne.

In verse 10, the son receives the same power over the universe in a comparison to one rolling up a garment and changing to a new one.

According to verse 13, the son is now at the right hand of God. And the angels, where are they? They are sent to serve those of us who inherit salvation. Thus by the strongest implication, Christians, as Christ the son, are superior to the angels. According to Paul in Rom 8:16-17, we are joint heirs with Christ:

16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now, if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.