

## Introduction to Hebrews:

### *The Nature of the Book*

- A written sermon
- Alternation between Exposition and Exhortation

### *Authorship*

- Much discussion since not signed and internal evidence sparse
- The things that are clear:
  - ♦ Knew Timothy
  - ♦ Planned to visit recipients with Timothy
- My opinion: Luke, but other conservatives differ
- Safe answer: no one knows

### *Other Historical Circumstances*

#### *Recipients*

- The recipients were Jewish believers
- They were in one location (a local church or a part of a local church)
- They were not in Jerusalem

#### *Date of writing*

- Sometime before the destruction of the temple (AD 70)
- Likely after the death of Paul, so perhaps AD 67/68

Today, we want to take up the places of writing and reception, which will add to our understanding of the recipients; and we will begin to take up the theology of Hebrews.

#### *Place of writing*

Two suggestions for place of writing:

- Rome
- Somewhere outside of Rome

(The second point isn't brilliant! If the location isn't in Rome, it is outside of Rome — and it could be anywhere.)

Internal points of evidence

“Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released” (13.23)

“Those from Italy greet you” (13.24)

- The release of Timothy suggests Rome as the place of writing, since Timothy was likely imprisoned in Rome as an associate of Paul (recall Paul’s request in 2 Tim that Timothy come to him)
- But “Those from Italy” could mean Christians who were originally from Italy but were not there now, so the book would be written elsewhere.

This view of “those from Italy” bolsters the view of Rome as the destination.

They would also suggest that the date of writing (late in Nero’s principate) would fit with the fears of the recipients of Hebrews.

The many quotations in 1 Clement make it available in Rome very early (but Eastern church accepted it in the canon much earlier than the Western church)

This seems to be the view of most commentaries today.

However:

- The church in Rome included both Jews and Gentiles (see Rm 16.3-16)
- Recall that Jews in Rome were expelled under Claudius (Ac 18.2) — if Jewish Christians in Rome drew back into Judaism, would that grant some protection in Rome?

### *Destination*

“Was the Epistle addressed to the Hebrew Christians as such, or to those in a particular locality? Undoubtedly the latter; for the various things said about them could not be true of all Hebrew Christians in the same way (e. g., 2.3, 4; 10.32-34; 13.7, 19, 23). Those in Palestine, Alexandria, Syria (especially at Antioch), Asia Minor, Greece, North Africa, and Italy (especially at Rome) have all been suggested by someone.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1943), 302–3.

“At one time or another, almost every city in the Greco-Roman world where churches are known to have been established has been suggested.”<sup>2</sup>

Both Thiessen and Pentecost hold to Jerusalem as the destination.

- Jewish Christians in Jerusalem would also endure persecution, certainly from Jews, and potentially from Romans.
- They could easily think that slipping back into Judaism might eliminate some persecution.
- The resumption of Jewish practices could easily be accomplished in Jerusalem (or another Palestinian location).

On the other hand, the view that the recipients didn’t have first-hand knowledge of temple ritual would seem to exclude Jerusalem.

The Jewish War broke out in AD 66 and continued into AD 70. Would Christians in Jerusalem think there was safety in reverting to Judaism? (Remember the date of the epistle coincides with this troubling time.)

David Allen argues for Antioch in Syria:

- Notable Jewish component to the church (see Acts 11)
- According to tradition, the home of Luke, and Antioch had a noted medical school

But there was never any notable prior persecution of Christians in Antioch (see Heb 10.32-33).

The leading candidates seem to be Rome or Jerusalem, but there are strong objections against both.

- Sometimes commentators will interpret Hebrews based on the location they think the author was writing to.
- We will have to conclude that God never intended for us to base our interpretations of Hebrews on the location of the recipients since he chose not to give us that information.

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<sup>2</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Faith That Endures: A Practical Commentary on the Book of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000), 22.

## Theology of Hebrews

Christology: Jesus Christ is presented as the pinnacle of divine revelation.

### 1. The revelation through Jesus Christ supersedes all other revelations

“The writer of Hebrews held a high christology. A high christology is one that acknowledges that God’s self-disclosure found its ultimate expression in Jesus of Nazareth, who was the Son of God incarnate.”<sup>3</sup>

- a. The Law given to Moses by angels
- b. The typology revealed through Moses in the rituals
- c. The word given through prophets interpreting and applying the revelation given to Moses

“The key to that witness [to Jesus Christ] is the recognition that christology in Hebrews is pastoral response to crisis. The failure of nerve on the part of the community addressed, evidenced by the parenetic warning sections, occurred because of an inadequate christology, an inadequacy the writer is endeavoring to address in the expositional sections of the discourse.”<sup>4</sup>

- ### 2. The revelation through Jesus Christ fully meets every human need
- a. When God spoke through his Son, he bypassed human interpreters (prophets)
  - b. When God established the New Covenant in his Son, the need for any other mediator vanished (priests)

“Indeed, while in this Epistle the titles Priest and High Priest occur no less than 32 times, in accordance with their extreme prominence in the theological conceptions of the writer, it is remarkable that neither word occurs so much as once in all the 13 Epistles of St Paul.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2017), cxxxvii.

<sup>4</sup> Lane, cxxxvii (emphasis mine).

<sup>5</sup> F. W. Farrar, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, With Notes and Introduction.*, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), xl–xli.

- c. When God exalted His Son to his right hand, he established the only king his people will ever need
3. The revelation through Jesus Christ ensures spiritual victory for believers
  - a. Through the Son, the believer is perfected
  - b. Through the Son, social order with no disparities is achieved

**Soteriology:** man's relationship to God depends on faith

1. Hebrews defines faith as "volitional surrender and obedience to God, regardless of appearances."<sup>6</sup> (See Heb 11.1, 6)
2. Hebrews exhibits faith in action
  - a. Doing God's will
  - b. Suffering for Christ's name
  - c. Waiting on Christ's promises
3. Hebrews vindicates faith by giving examples of people acting in faith and receiving their rewards.

**Apostasy:** Hebrews warns against falling away from faith.

1. Hebrews warns against drifting away from truth (2.1-4, 16-19)
2. Hebrews warns against hardening one's heart (3.7-19)
3. Hebrews warns against spiritual immaturity (5.11-6.12)
4. Hebrews warns against willfully turning away from Christ (10.19-39)
5. Hebrews warns against failing to respond to God's word (12.14-29)

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<sup>6</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Heb 1.1 (Introduction: Message).