

Introduction to the Book of Hebrews – Part 1

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The Book of Hebrews is not a popular book to read or study. Here is a sampling of common thoughts on the book of Hebrews.

What do Bible scholars say about Hebrews?

1. "...The most difficult book in the whole New Testament." (William Barclay)¹
2. "...Is a delight for the person who enjoys puzzles." (William Lane)²
3. "...Is not light or easy reading... ...must apply himself vigorously...." (E. Schuyler English)³
4. "...Presents more unsettled problems than does the Epistle to the Hebrews." (A. T. Robertson)⁴
5. "...A number of passages which are extremely difficult to elucidate, [explain]..." (Thomas Hewitt)⁵

Now let me ask you, based on these quotes, would you want to study or even read the book of Hebrews? But let me share with you some quotes that show the value to reading and studying this book.

What do Bible scholars say about the value of the book of Hebrews?

1. "...High rank for its... ...portrayal of Christ as High Priest." (A. T. Robertson)⁶
2. "Cut from our Bibles, it [Hebrews] would leave a great gap that nothing else could fill." (H. A. Ironside)⁷
3. "...It contains some of the chief doctrines of the Christian faith...." (E. Schuyler English)⁸
4. "...The most theological book in the New Testament." (Thomas Hewitt)⁹
5. "...Presents the only full discussion... ...of Christ as the believer's High Priest." (H. L. Willmington)¹⁰
6. "...In a unique fashion it exalts the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ." (Zane Hodges)¹¹

I think the deeper doctrines both of the Christian faith and of Christ, make this book very vital for us today. In fact, the book of Hebrews is very practical for us today.

What do Bible scholars say about the practicality of the book of Hebrews?

1. Hebrews was used in the Reformation, Luther, Calvin and Zwingli all stated the following based on Hebrews: (1.) No sacrifice but Calvary; (2.) No priest but Christ; (3.) No confessional but the throne of Grace. (H. L. Willmington)¹²
2. "To speak of drawing nearer to God, marching to Zion, entering the promised land, finding a place of rest, and approaching the divine mercy seat, is to enter into the world of Hebrews." (James Thompson)¹³
3. "The temptation to withdraw from civilized life into a kind of wilderness experience is precisely the kind of temptation the Epistle to the Hebrews would counter so well." (Zane Hodges)¹⁴
4. "Every student of ...Hebrews must feel that it deals...with the thoughts and trials of our own time." (B. F. Westcott)¹⁵
5. "In like manner many Christians are happy that they have been saved from the judgments of hell, but they refuse to trust God for the abundant life in their daily experience. They simply survive in their immaturity...." (Robert Gromacki)¹⁶

Wanting rest in Christ, wanting to get out from under persecution and trials, wanting to just coast along without any pressure to grow, sounds a lot like me and others like yourself.

There are several difficulties when studying the over-all book of Hebrews.

You will notice six general difficulties about the book of Hebrews right away:

1. the title;
2. the author;
3. the audience;
4. the destination;

5. the date; and
6. the content.

We will look at these in survey fashion, but want you to know these are real issues with some people who know about the book of Hebrews, but have never studied the book.

Title “Hebrews”

1. The oldest manuscript of the book has “to Hebrews” as a title, but it was not in the original text.¹⁷
2. Tertullian (155-220) listed the “Epistle to Barnabas” on an Epistle in North Africa.¹⁸
3. The oldest complete collection of manuscripts places Hebrews right after the book of Romans and titles it “the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews.”¹⁹

The title is very fitting since the book addresses things near and dear to the Hebrews.

The writer of “Hebrews”

1. Suggestions: Paul, Barnabas, Silas or Silvanus, Apollos, Luke, Priscilla, Jude, Clement of Rome, and Philip.²⁰
2. The writer knew the recipients and was going to see them, (Heb. 13:19,23) and both the writer and recipients knew Timothy, (Heb. 13:23).²¹
3. The writer: knew Greek, knew Hebrew, was a deep theological thinker, knew NT theology, knew OT theology, was a great rhetorical craftsman, was highly educated, was a dynamic preacher, and was a great homiletician.²²
4. Concerning the author of the Book of Hebrews, “no human authorship, should not be considered, as no biblical authority.”
5. “Our ignorance on such points does not, however, prevent right understanding or minimize the spiritual and theological value of a document which has from the first commended itself as authoritative by its own intrinsic worth.”²³
6. “A library has been written on who wrote it...no answer can be given to any of these inquiries.”²⁴
7. “What conclusions can be drawn from this debate? ...only God knows for sure who the author is.”²⁵

In my own personal viewpoint for what its worth, I believe Paul composed the book and had someone with him help write the book. When Paul was at the end of his life, tradition has it that his eye sight was very bad. I think Paul and one of his assistants, Barnabas, or possibly Silas or Luke, co-authored the book. Paul was the key person who understood Old Testament and New Testament doctrinal truth, especially about Christ.

The recipients of the book

1. Hebrews is written to Jews or Hebrews. “Hebrews is addressed exclusively to Jewish Christians.”²⁶
2. There is the possibility that Hebrews was written to three different groups of Jews: (1.) believing Jews; (2.) unbelieving Jews who were intellectually convinced of the Gospel; (3.) unbelieving Jews who were attracted by the gospel and the person of Christ, but who had reached no final conviction about him.²⁷
3. The readers: (1.) were brethren, (2:11-13; 3:12; 10:19; 13:12); (2.) were holy, (2:11; 6:10; 13:24); (3.) were partakers of the heavenly calling, (2:14; 3:14; 9:15); (4.) were professors of the faith, (4:14; 10:23); (5.) were saved for a long time, (2:3-4; 5:11-14); and (6.) were persecuted and lost personal belongings, but didn’t shed blood, (12:3-4).

I will probably say this again under a few of the next points, but in my personal viewpoint, I think the Jews in Jerusalem were the recipients of the book. I do not think Rome had a temple where they were practicing Jewish things, making it easy to drop from Christ and go back to Judaism. It is possible Jews came from Jerusalem to Rome, and wanted to go back, but we can’t be dogmatic about it.

The destination of the book

1. Jerusalem, Samaria, Caesarea, Colosse, Cyprus, Alexandria, and Spain have been suggested.²⁸
2. The believers addressed...probably constituted a house church...near the city of Rome, (Heb.13:24).²⁹
3. Greek reading Hebrews (Hellenistic Jews) would suggest Rome, (Hebrews 13:24).³⁰

Again my personal viewpoint, I think the Jews in Jerusalem were the destination of the book. I do not think Rome had a temple where they were practicing Jewish things, making it easy to drop from Christ and go back to Judaism. It is possible Jews came from Jerusalem to Rome, and were wanting to go back, but we can't be dogmatic about it.

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