

Hebrews

chapter 1

God's Definitive Revelation

HPC Trinity Sunday School

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Jan. 4, 2026

LONG AGO, AT
MANY TIMES AND
IN MANY WAYS, GOD
SPOKE TO OUR FATHERS
BY THE PROPHETS, BUT IN
THESE LAST DAYS HE
HAS SPOKEN TO US
BY HIS SON.
HEBREWS 1:1,2

Intro to Hebrews

"It has been said that the Epistle to the Hebrews is the least known of all New Testament epistles."¹

But why does it deserve this label?

REASON #1—Paul was almost certainly not the author.

- Unlike the thirteen recognized Pauline letters, this book leaves us guessing as to its authorship. "The Greek style [of the book] and its characteristic themes are quite different from Paul's," which means "very few scholars accept it as Pauline today."²
 - Hebrews contains 124 words that Paul never used in his authenticated letters. Also, it contains 168 *hapax legomena* ("unique words")—words not used by Paul.
- Today's Greek scholars consider Hebrews to be more polished and eloquent than any other book of the NT.³

REASON #2—The title "Letter to the Hebrews"⁴ (or simply "To the Hebrews") was not found with the oldest scrolls. The current title was added sometime in the 2nd C. when the New Testament books were brought together to form the NT. Until the

¹ Wycliffe, p. 1401.

² Zondervan, "Introduction to Hebrews," p. 2489.

³ Duling, p. 281.

⁴ **Don't confuse our Book of Hebrews with the ancient *Gospel According to the Hebrews*. This was a Greek gospel which was really nothing more than a shortened version of the Book of Matthew, where the apostle James is the key player—not Peter—alongside Jesus. This 2nd C. writing, now lost, is mentioned by several ancient scholars, including Eusebius, Jerome, and Origen. (Interpreter's, vol. 2, p. 570f.)**

Reformation the author was assumed to have been Paul, "yet nothing can be derived from the title, which originally was outside the rolled papyrus letter and probably was never copied."⁵

- Even our unknown writer affirms that this is, in fact, an exhortation: a sermon in written form (13:22). Nothing resembling a Pauline epistle appears until 13:17-25.

Format of Pauline Letters:

I. Introduction

- a. Address & greeting
- b. Thanksgiving

II. Body of letter

- a. Doctrine—teaching about God/Christ
- b. Ethics—right & wrong behavior

III. Conclusion & well wishing

REASON #3—The style, rhythm, and logic used in this letter are more calm and reasoned (meaning “**more Hellenistic**”) than Paul’s. Thus, the writer was most likely a well-educated Hellenistic Jew. A similar style can be found in the writings of Philo of Alexandria and in the apocryphal Fourth Book of Maccabees.

REASON #4—We don’t know to **whom** he was writing or **where** they were.

However, these were not brand new converts to Christianity, as shown in 5:12: “by this time you ought to be teachers.”

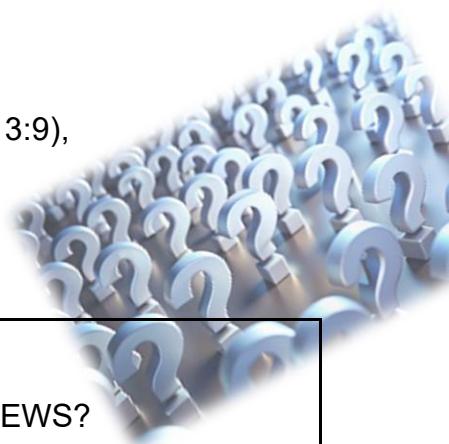
The date of the letter is also unknown, but probably mid-to-late 60’s. Hebrews never mentions any Jewish-Roman conflict nor the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.. Our oldest reference to this book comes from Clement, the bishop of Rome, in 95 A.D.

⁵ *Interpreter’s*, p. 572.

- What we **do** know about the author. He:
 - was well versed in the OT scriptures. He used about 30 citations and over 70 allusions to the OT⁶
 - was a theologian
 - knew the Greek Old Testament (LXX) thoroughly
 - was Jewish by nature but was well versed in Hellenistic culture.
- And we **do** know the reason for this letter:

Newly converted Christians--former Jews who were now Christian believers-- were being tempted into apostasy, i.e., lapsing back into Judaism. This was evident by their attitude of:

- neglecting public Christian worship (10:25),
- displaying a weakness in prayer (12:12),
- being lax in not holding firm to basic Christian doctrine (13:9),
- refusing to teach others about Christ (5:12), and
- neglecting the Scriptures (2:1).⁷



Q: KNOWING ALL OF THIS,

WHY DO WE STILL STUDY THE BOOK OF HEBREWS?

A: “The whole purpose of this letter was to inform the discouraged Christians and also to encourage them, and to support both approaches by innumerable examples both of Christ and of those who had successfully lived by faith.”⁸

This purpose remains true for us today.

⁶ Hagner, p. 15

⁷ Wycliffe, p. 1401.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1405.

Heb.1:1-4 is a prologue.

[READ HEBREWS. 1:1-2]

What is the author trying to tell us? ...

The continuous theme is that Christ is supreme. He is greater than any king (even David) or any institution (even the Old Testament and its rituals).

Because of Jesus Christ, God's only Son, it has been revealed to us that all of the promises of the prophets of old have been fulfilled. Here we find the writer strengthening the bond of **God/Jesus/us** by tying the past to the present. Christ brings salvation, as contrasted with the rule-bent old covenant.

All biblical commentators remark upon the magnificent and polished use of words found in Hebrew's opening line: *"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets."* (ESV).

But the author also has a method:

he uses an alliteration.



Hebrews' first two verses are an alliteration, which means a series of words, each beginning with the same sound. For example, "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers...." Alliterations were often used as a tool for memorizing.

v. 1--



Polymeros	At many times
<i>kai</i>	and
polytropos	in various ways
palai	long ago
<i>ho</i>	--
<i>Theos</i>	God
<i>lalesas</i>	having spoken
<i>Tois</i>	to the
patrasin	fathers
<i>en</i>	in
<i>tois</i>	the
prophetais	prophets

v. 2—"these last days" is not a chronological term; it's a theological one, meaning that

“we have reached the turning point in the plan that God has had all through the ages.”⁹
“What does it mean to “be appointed heir of all things?” (v. 2)
[READ ACTS 2:32-36]

v. 3a—“the Son is the radiance of God’s glory.” A good paraphrase would be, “The Son is the radiance of his glory just as the ray is the light of the sun.” (Charles Barclay)

Jesus is the “exact representation of [God’s] being...”

The phrase “exact representation” is a translation of the Greek word *charakter*. It originally meant “to engrave,” but by Jesus’ time it had come to mean “an exact representation.” Thus, Jesus Christ is not simply *like* God; he *is* God. (We do not find the word *charakter* anywhere else in the Bible.¹⁰)

v. 3b---“[Jesus] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”

When one was allowed to sit at the king’s right hand it was not simply a display of honor; it implied that this person was an equal.

This imagery is repeated in v. 13.



v. 4—Christ is superior¹¹ to the angels. This seems logical to us, but to the ancient Jews it was astounding because they held angels in very high regard as the highest beings next to God.¹²

v. 6--We again see an admonishment given to the angels.

[READ HEBREWS 1:5-6]

HEB 1:5-14 presents us with seven OT quotations as proof of Jesus being one-and-the-same with God. Excerpts are pulled from Psalms, Deuteronomy, 1st Chronicles, and 2nd Samuel, offering them as evidence that Jesus Christ is indeed Lord.

⁹ Hagner, p. 22.

¹⁰ Our English word “character” derives from this ancient word. According to Webster, one of its archaic definitions remains with us: “to engrave” or “inscribe.”

¹¹ Literally “better.” It was the author’s favorite word (used 13 times) and it sums up the book’s message: Jesus Christ is better than even the angels.

¹² MacArthur, p. 6. “One sect of Judaism had even established a community at Qumran that taught that the archangel Michael’s authority rivaled or surpassed that of the Messiah.”

v. 7—Almost as if he is emphasizing the diminished role of angels, our author lets them know their place when he quotes Psalm 104:4-- “He makes his angels *spirits*....” Some translations say “winds.” The Hebrew word is *ruwach*, which is quite versatile: it is used for “spirit” 203 times, “wind” or “windy” 107 times, and “breath” 32 times.¹³ Both “spirits” and “winds” are correct here because both words infer that angels are of a transitory, fleeting nature, as well as subordinate to Jesus.

vs. 8-12 are praises for Jesus and his everlasting glory.

v. 13 further emphasizes the fact that no angel has ever been at God’s right hand.

v. 14 serves as one final dig against angels, reminding them of their servant duties toward others. They are to be ministering spirits. Finally, “God’s concern is not with angels, but with us, and he accordingly sends them to bring help to those who will inherit salvation.”¹⁴

Amen



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¹³ NASB translation as found in Bible Hub, Ps. 104:4

¹⁴ Hagner, p. 36.