

LVIII

HEBREWS

WHO WROTE IT?

Although some include the book of Hebrews among the apostle Paul's writings, the certain identity of the author remains a mystery. Missing is Paul's customary salutation common to his other works. In addition, the suggestion that the writer of this epistle relied upon knowledge and information provided by others who were actual eye-witnesses of Christ Jesus (Hebrews 2:3) makes Paul's authorship doubtful. Some attribute Luke as its writer; others suggest Hebrews may have been written by Apollos, Barnabas, Silas, Philip, or Aquila and Priscilla. Regardless of the human hand that held the pen, the Holy Spirit of God is the divine author of all Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16); therefore, Hebrews speaks with the same canonical authority as the other sixty-five books of the Bible.

WHEN(ISH) WAS IT WRITTEN?

The early church father Clement quoted from the book of Hebrews in AD 95. However, internal evidence such as the fact that Timothy was alive at the time the epistle was written, and the absence of any evidence showing the end of the Old Testament sacrificial system that occurred with Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70, indicates the book was written around AD 65.

WHY WAS IT WRITTEN?

The late Dr. Walter Martin, founder of the Christian Research Institute and writer of the best-selling book *Kingdom of the Cults*, quipped in his usual tongue-in-cheek manner that the book of Hebrews was written by a Hebrew to other Hebrews telling the Hebrews to stop acting like Hebrews. In truth, many of the early Jewish believers were slipping back into the rites and rituals of Judaism in order to escape the mount-

ing persecution. This letter, then, is an exhortation for those persecuted believers to continue in the grace of Jesus Christ.

SOME KEY VERSES

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, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

HEBREWS 1:1-2

How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

HEBREWS 2:3

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

HEBREWS 4:14-16

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

HEBREWS 11:1

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

HEBREWS 12:1-2

A QUICK SUMMARY

Hebrews addresses three separate groups: believers in Christ, unbelievers who had knowledge of—and an intellectual acceptance of—the facts of Christ, and unbelievers who were attracted to Christ but who ultimately rejected Him. It's important to understand which group is being addressed in which passage. To fail to do so can cause us to draw conclusions inconsistent with the rest of Scripture.

The writer of Hebrews continually makes mention of the superiority of Christ in both His personage and in His ministry work. In the writings of the Old Testament, we understand the rituals and ceremonies of Judaism symbolically pointed to the coming of Messiah. In other words, the rites of Judaism were but shadows of things to come. Hebrews tells us that Jesus is better than anything mere religion has to offer. All the pomp and circumstance of religion pales in comparison to the person, work, and ministry of Jesus. It is the superiority of our Lord Jesus, then, that remains the theme of this eloquently written letter.

OLD TESTAMENT TIES

Perhaps nowhere in the New Testament does the Old Testament come into focus more than in Hebrews, which has as its foundation the Levitical priesthood. The writer to the Hebrews constantly compares the inadequacies of the Old Testament sacrificial system to the perfection and completion in Christ. Where the Old Covenant required continual sacrifices and a once-a-year atonement for sin offered by a human priest, the New Covenant provides a once-for-all sacrifice through Christ (Hebrews 10:10) and direct access to the throne of God for all who are in Him.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Rich in foundational Christian doctrine, Hebrews also gives us encouraging examples of God's faith heroes who persevered in spite of great difficulties and adverse circumstances (Hebrews 11). These members of God's "Hall of Faith" provide overwhelming evidence to the unconditional surety and absolute reliability of God. Likewise, we can maintain perfect confidence in God's rich promises, regardless of our circumstances, by meditating upon the rock-solid faithfulness of God's workings in the lives of His Old Testament saints.

The writer of Hebrews gives ample encouragement to believers, but there are five solemn warnings we must heed. There is the danger of neglect (Hebrews 2:1-4), the danger of unbelief (Hebrews 3:7-4:13), the danger of spiritual immaturity (Hebrews 5:11-6:20), the danger of failing to endure (Hebrews 10:26-39), and the inherent danger of refusing God (Hebrews 12:25-29). And so we find in this crowning masterpiece a great wealth of doctrine, a refreshing spring of encouragement, and a source of sound, practical warnings against slothfulness in our Christian walk. But there is still more, for in Hebrews we find a magnificently rendered portrait of our Lord Jesus Christ—the Author and Finisher of our great salvation (Hebrews 12:2).

MY NOTES