Wednesday Evening Bible Study
February 18th, 2026
Series: The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul
The Letter to the Hebrews
"Overview of the Letter to the Hebrews"

Text – Key Verses

Introduction

Memory Verses

*"By so much was Jesus made a surety of a **better** testament."* (Hebrews 7:22)

"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen… But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Hebrews 11:1, 6)

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." (Hebrews 12:1-3)

I. The Audience

The readers to The Epistle to the Hebrews are apparent in the name. Hebrews is written to Hebrews. People who have been brought up in Judaism and converted to Christianity needed to be reinforced to keep them encouraged, and to prevent them from being tempted to turn their back on Christ and go back to the traditions that they were raised in. Imagine the man that grew up in a Jewish home: everyone he knows has believed the same way for his or her entire life; his family in many cases has disowned him, his friends have now left him, and his business associates will no longer trade with him. This type of sacrifice is something that we cannot completely understand in the culture that we live in today. He begins to wonder, is this sacrifice worth it? Is this Christian religion truly the religion that Abraham and Moses and David looked to? Is Jesus really the Messiah? The Letter to the Hebrews reassures the Jewish believer that he is exactly where he needs to be.

It also gives the Jew who is not yet a Christian a lot to think about. Christianity had caused quite a stir in the first century. There were many Jews who were giving closet consideration to the doctrines of Christ. This Letter would answer many of their questions and would give some the faith that they needed to yield to their true Messiah.

The Letter to the Hebrews can be divided into three key sections:

1. The Person of Christ is Better (1:1 – 2:4)
2. The Principles of Christianity are Better (2:5 – 10:39)
3. The Practices of Christians are Better (11:1 – 13:25)

You might ask – better than what? - Better than the shadow that they had in Judaism. Christ was the substance – the Old Testament worship system was filled with shadows and types that were mere pictures of the reality. The Old Testament Temple was merely a type of the true temple in Heaven. The Old Testament sacrifices all pictured and pointed to the true sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary.

II. The Author

The writer to *The Letter to the Hebrews* has been the subject of much debate for centuries. It is an anonymous book. However, we can be sure about the fact that God is the author to The Letter to the Hebrews because "All scripture is given by inspiration of God". (2 Timothy 3:16)

"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter 1:21)

As far as whom the human instrument was that was used of God to pen these words, we cannot be sure, but here are the theories:

A. Luke – Some say that the writing is like Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts. We are told that Hebrews is a masterpiece of Greek literature much like Luke's writings. However, Luke was most likely a Gentile, and probably not an expert in the Jewish religion, and would not have been able to fully appreciate the conversion of the Jewish believer. Possibly, Luke translated the letter from Paul's original letter in Hebrew to Greek, or collaborated with him.

B. Barnabus – Bryan Wagner enthusiastically supports the belief that Barnabus wrote Hebrews because he was called an apostle (Acts 14:14) and a prophet (Acts 13:1). He was also a Levite and a Hellenistic Jew, which would explain the polished Greek style of writing. Hebrews 13:22 refers to the "word of exhortation" (παρακλήσεως from παράκλησις – *paraklēsis*), which is the same original word used to refer to Barnabus in Acts 4:36 - son of consolation." Tertullian also referred to Hebrews as the *Epistle of Barnabus.*[1]

C. Apollos – Martin Luther among others believed that Apollos was the author, but none of the early writers shared in this opinion.

C. Paul – Paul is the most popular choice for the following reasons:

[1] Brian H. Wagner, "Another Look at the Authorship of Hebrews from an Evangelical Perspective of Church History," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 14, no. 43 (December 2010): 46–47.

1. He had a tremendous burden for the Jewish people, and he was certainly qualified to instruct Jewish believers considering his background. (Romans 9:3; 10:1)

2. Paul was an expert in the Law as well as Jewish customs and traditions. (2 Corinthians 11:22)

"I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day." (Acts 22:3)

3. Peter tells us that Paul wrote to Jewish believers. (2 Peter 3:15)

4. The letter mentions Timothy as do other of Paul's works. (13:23)

5. The letter, though definitely unique from Paul's other writings, also contains many similarities, which will be pointed out as we study the Letter. Hebrews, as with Paul's other letters begins with a doctrinal discussion and concludes with practical instruction.

6. The fact that the letter is anonymous does not prove that Paul is not the writer, because Paul knew that the Jews were very suspicious of him. He was well known by them, and he perhaps thought that his name attached to the letter might cause it to be immediately dismissed.

7. Paul's first recorded sermon may have been the basis for this letter. (Acts 16:14 – 43)

8. Paul frequently used sports illustrations. (Hebrews 12:1; 2 Timothy 4:7 – 8; 1 Corinthians 9:24 – 27)

9. Paul's "Token" (Hebrews 13:25) - Paul always ends his letters offering his readers grace.

"The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with you all. Amen." (2 Thessalonians 3:17-18)

A possible problem to Paul's authorship is the fact that the writer claims to have received confirmation regarding the truth of salvation from someone other than the Lord. (Hebrews 2:3) Paul claimed in Galatians:

"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Galatians 1:11-12)

D. Others

Among the group of other suggested possibilities are Silas, Philip, Aquila and Priscilla, and Clement of Rome.

III. The Atmosphere

This Letter was written at a time when the persecution against the Jews, and more specifically against Jewish believers was intensifying. (Hebrews 10:32 – 39; 12:4) The City of Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed in 70 AD, just a short time away from the writing of this Letter.

IV. The Age

Hebrews had to have been written prior to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by General Titus Vespasian, which occurred in 70 AD. (Note the present tense references to the Jewish sacrificial system in Hebrews 5:1 – 4; 7:21, 23, 27 – 28; 8:3 – 5, 13; 9:6 – 9, 13, 25; 10:1, 3 – 4, 8, 11; 13:10 – 11.)

Here is where Hebrews fits within the rest of Paul's Letters

Letter To:	Approx. Date	Where From
Galatians (region; churches)	49 AD	Possibly Antioch
1 Thessalonians (city; church)	51 AD	Corinth
2 Thessalonians (city; church)	51 AD	Corinth
1 Corinthians (city; church)	55 AD	Ephesus
2 Corinthians (city; church)	57 AD	Philippi
Romans (city; no church yet)	58 AD	Corinth
Ephesians (city; saints)	61 AD	Rome (prison)
Philippians (city; saints)	61 AD	Rome (prison)
Colossians (city; saints)	61 AD	Rome (prison)
Philemon (person; in Colossae)	61 AD	Rome (prison)
1 Timothy (pastor)	63 AD	possibly Laodicea
Titus (pastor)	65 AD	Necropolis
2 Timothy (pastor)	67 AD	Rome
Hebrews (the Jews)	61 or 67?	Rome

Note – Dates are approximate

Key Words and Phrases

1. Better – 13 times (Hebrews 1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24)
2. Perfect, Perfection – 11 times (Hebrews 6:1; 7:19)
3. Let us – 12 times (Hebrews 4:1, 11, 14, 16; 6:1; 10:22, 23, 24; 12:1; 12:28; 13:13; 13:15)

Note – The Law said, "Thou shalt", or "Thou shalt not"; the New Covenant says, "Let us".

4. Heavenly – 6 times (Hebrews 3:1; 6:4; 8:5; 9:23; 11:16; 12:22)
5. Eternal (5 times - 5:9; 6:2; 9:12, 14, 15) and for ever (9 times – 1:8; 5:6; 6:20; 7:17; 7:21; 10:12; 10:14; 13:8; 13:21)

Warning Passages

1. Hebrews 2:1 – 4
2. Hebrews 3:7 – 4:13
3. Hebrews 5:11 – 6:20

4. Hebrews 10:26 – 39
5. Hebrews 12:14 – 29

Note – Warren Wiersbe labels these passages, which he calls "exhortation" passages.

> With this truth in mind, we can now better understand the significance of those five "problem passages" in Hebrews. Each of these passages encourages us to heed God's Word ("God … has spoken") by pointing out the sad spiritual consequences that result if we do not. Let me list these passages for you and explain their sequence in The Letter to the Hebrews. I think you will see how they all hang together and present one message: heed God's word.
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> Drifting from the Word—2:1–4 (neglect)
>
> Doubting the Word—3:7–4:13 (hard heart)
>
> Dullness toward the Word—5:11–6:20 (sluggishness)
>
> Despising the Word—10:26–39 (willfulness)
>
> Defying the Word—12:14–29 (refusing to hear)
>
> If we do not listen to God's Word and really hear it, we will start to drift. Neglect always leads to drifting, in things material and physical as well as spiritual. As we drift from the Word, we start to doubt the Word; because faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). We start to get hard hearts, and this leads to spiritual sluggishness which produces dullness toward the Word. We become "dull of hearing"—lazy listeners! This leads to a despiteful attitude toward the Word to the extent that we willfully disobey God; and this gradually develops into a defiant attitude—we almost "dare" God to do anything![2]

Wiersbe goes on to state that these warnings or exhortations are written to saved people who are not in danger of losing their salvation but rather are in danger of being chastised by God (Hebrews 12:6) or even losing their lives (Hebrews 12:9). *"There is a sin unto death"* (1 John 5:16)

Conclusion – John Phillips on the Book of Hebrews

> The trumpets of the Temple sound long and loud the daily summons to the evening sacrifice, and the priests perform their required washings, attire themselves in their gorgeous vestments, and set out for the house of God, which crowns the hill Moriah like a golden diadem, glittering and flashing in the sun. Again, the summons rings forth, and yet again for the third and last time. The officiating priests of the day hasten up the broad steps leading to the outer court. From all over Jerusalem the people, the Levites, and the priests flock toward the Temple as the surrounding hills echo back the trumpet sound.
>
> Through the outer court, the court of the Gentiles, they bustle through pillared cloisters leading to the stately dwellings of the priests and the Temple's ministering officers. On they go toward the inner

[2] Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 277). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

or holy Temple, looking with pride and admiration on the marble walls, the gold and silver gates, the gleaming gold ornaments of clustering grapes and pomegranates, the cedar roofs and splendid hangings of purple and scarlet, and the altars of rich incense that fill the air with fragrant perfumes.

The sacrificing priest for the day approaches the altar now surrounded by the gathering crowd and takes the appointed animal victim from the hands of the attending Levites. After slaying it in accordance with all the necessary forms, he presents it before the Lord. The fire burns and the smoke ascends while the sacrifice is consumed.

Standing somewhere in the assembled crowd is a Jew, born of the tribe of Levi and of the house of Aaron, thus by every right a priest. But he has become a Christian, so this splendid Temple and its gorgeous ritual, decreed by Holy Writ and by traditions reaching back from century to century, is no longer for him. However, he gazes at it somewhat wistfully, feeling a tug at his heart. Although he knows that the Temple and its functions are mere shadows, and that the substance is Christ, the Temple looks so real and the rituals speak with such authority that the shadow looks like the substance, while the substance seems like the shadow. The epistle to the Hebrews was written for him.

In a house off an alley a few blocks back from the massive wall of Jerusalem is another Jew. In his home there is a prized possession—a copy of the books of Moses, of the prophets, and of the psalms. It has been in his family for years, and he knows most of it by heart. Lately he has been reading it again. He is thinking things through. *Can the blood of bulls and goats really take away sin?* he asks himself. *Of what value are all these rituals? Surely they must speak of something else. There must be a reality behind them all. And is it really Calvary? Can it be that the Christians are right after all?* He opens one of the scrolls. *And what of all these prophecies concerning the Messiah? Ought not Christ to have suffered? How else can Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 and Psalm 16 be explained? "They pierced my hands and my feet," it says. "Thou wilt not … suffer thy holy one to see corruption." What can that mean but resurrection from the dead? And what then? Are the Christians correct when they say that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled such Scriptures as these?*

He goes from scroll to scroll, finding in each one unexplained ceremonies, unsatisfied longings, unfulfilled prophecies. Deciding to stake everything on the despised and rejected Jesus of Nazareth, he becomes a Christian, makes his faith known, and is cut off from his people. His outraged parents disinherit him, cast him out of the family and outside the camp, hold a funeral for him, and consider him dead. His heart aches for his loved ones, for the close-knit family ties of the Jews. Missing the cheer and comfort of home, missing the rich ritual in which he has been reared, missing the synagogue and its forms, he begins to wonder if he should go back. The epistle to the Hebrews was written for him.[3]

[3] John Phillips, *Exploring Hebrews: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009).