

Hebrews: God's Final Word: An Overview (1:1–2:4)

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A Foreword

Before we get into this rich treasure of words that exalt the living Christ, we need an overview, answering a few questions about the book.

Who wrote it?

When was it written?

To whom was it written?

What issues does the author seek to resolve?

How should the book impact the lives of those who study it?

I. The Basics of the Book

1. Who wrote Hebrews?

- a. Second-century elders, Clement of Alexandria and Origen both affirm that Hebrews was written by Paul, the Apostle. Problems—
 - 1) Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, not the Jews. However, Paul was a Jew with great longing to see his kinsmen converted (Rom. 9:1–3).
 - 2) While the arguments are Pauline, the style is clearly not Paul's style.
 - 3) Note 2:3 and compare with Gal. 1:11ff; 1 Cor. 15:8.
- b. Some have suggested that a disciple of Paul's, perhaps Barnabas, wrote it. Luther argued for Apollos (Acts 18:24). Perhaps it was Luke.
- c. The closing mentions Paul's son-in-the-faith, Timothy (11:23) and refers to "*those from Italy*" who evidently knew these saints.
- d. The book does not say, and it does not matter because Hebrews is clearly the Word of God.

2. To whom was Hebrews written?

- a. The book is silent here also. The Hebrews is an epistle, but does not open as a typical letter.
- b. The content of the letter points to Hebrew Christians who were worn down through persecution and the delay of Christ's return, resulting in a lack of confidence and hope (6:13–20).
- c. The main thrust is an exhortation to *perseverance* involving three major issues (10:36):
 - 1) *Drifting* from God's purpose through *hardening* of their hearts by the deceitfulness of sin, which led to disastrous and deadly *unbelief* (2:1; 3:7—11, 19)
 - 2) *Unwillingness* to pursue the true *Sabbath rest* in Christ, which God promised to those who trust Him and *strive* to enter it (4:9–11; 5:11–14)

3) *Withdrawing* from fellowship of the saints (10:25–39), fearful of exhorting others because of the backlash of the God-haters wanting to silence them

3. Hebrews was probably written in the 60s.

- a. The recipients had been Christians for some time (5:12).
- b. They had also endured a considerable period of suffering (10:32–34).
- c. They had elders who had passed away (13:7).
- d. Timothy was still alive (13:23).
- e. Temple rituals were still practiced (9:6–9; 10:1–4).
- f. If after AD 70, why was that disaster not mentioned?

II. The Argument of the Book

1. There is a unique argument developed in the book using the following pattern:
 - a. It gives us a statement of Christ's superiority.
 - b. Then it presents an application to reader.
 - c. Next, it supports the application with a follow-through developing the declaration presented. For example: Jesus is a better priest (3:1–6), so the reader is exhorted to faithfulness (3:7–4:13), and this is encouraged by the compassion of Jesus shows us (4:14–5:10).
2. A. W. Pink lists seven areas of Christ's superiority: better than OT prophets (1:1–3), angels (1:4–2:18), Moses (3:1–9), Joshua (4:1–13), Aaron (5:14–7:18), the Old Covenant (7:19–10:39), OT saints (11:1–12:3)
3. Because we have Christ, we have much better prospects: a better hope, a better testament, better promises, better sacrifices, better substance, a better country, and a better resurrection.
4. But there are also stern warnings (2:1–3; 3:7–4:11; 6:4–8; 10:26–39; 12:15–17).
5. Finally, these arguments teach us how to interpret the OT and apply its teaching to our personal lives.

Application

Jesus is superior to everything that has gone before Him.

Whatever came before in the OT—the prophets, the priests, the tabernacle and temple, the wars and struggles, the sins and the judgments—all pointed to the coming of the One fulfilling every symbol, type, and shadow.

He is glorious beyond words to describe, and that is the message of Hebrews for us. Prepare to be amazed.

Where do you stand with Jesus now?