

GOD'S AMAZING BOOK

THROUGH THE BIBLE, BOOK BY BOOK

led by: Pastor Josh Franklin, Good Hope Baptist Church (www.goodhopechurch.org and www.joshfranklin.org)

STAY WITH JESUS, HE'S THE BEST

A Quick Look at the General Epistle to the Hebrews

<p>Fast Facts on Hebrews</p> <p>Written by? Unknown</p> <p>Written to whom? Jews</p> <p>Written when? A.D. 65-67</p> <p>Written why? To exhort a Jewish audience to go on in the better way made possible in Jesus Christ, God's final and climactic revelation. The book is for anyone who asks, "Why should I have faith in Jesus Christ?"</p>	Prologue:	Better in His Person	Better in His Priesthood	Better in His Pattern	Epilogue:
	"God . . . has spoken to us by His Son"	Better Than: Prophets Angels Moses Joshua The Sabbath	Greater Than: Earthly Priests Aaronic Priesthood Old Covenant (Mosaic Law) Animal Sacrifices Daily Offerings	Let Us Have: Boldness to enter the Holiest (10) Faith to trust God (11) Jesus as our example (12) Love to bless others (13)	"I appeal to you . . . with the word of exhortation"
	1:1-4	1:5—4:13	4:14—10:18	10:19—13:21	13:22-25
	Key Verse	"Seeing . . . We have a great high priest . . . Let us hold fast our confession (4:14)			
	Major Emphasis	What to Believe		How to Live	
	Key Idea	"Better than . . ."	"Greater than . . ."	"Therefore let us . . ."	
5 Warnings	Don't Drift 2:1-4	Don't Doubt 3:7—4:13	Don't Grow Dull 5:11—6:20	Don't Despise 10:19-39	Don't Defy 12:14-29

Source: Danny Akin

Hebrews begins like an essay, proceeds like a sermon, and ends like a letter. - T. Rees

The book of Hebrews was written to the Hebrews to tell them to stop acting like Hebrews. - Donald Barnhouse

The book of Hebrews in the New Testament is, as it were, a religious Consumer Reports magazine. The author lays out the person of Jesus Christ and what he has done, and then sets him against the Old Testament religious system that was native to most of his audience and to which some were feeling tempted to return. – Mark Deverⁱ

Persecution is a real threat to the Jewish Christians in the newly forming churches intense persecution as they try to live out their newfound faith in Christ while living in Jewish communities where the Old Testament is the focus of religion. The unknown writer of the book of Hebrews believes that many Jewish Christians are in danger of slipping back into Judaism because of growing opposition. They need to mature and become stable in their faith. By demonstrating the superiority of Christ over all the Old Testament rituals and sacrifices, this unknown author exhorts these early believers to stay true to the gospel of Jesus Christ.ⁱⁱ [T]he onset of persecution was prompting them to waver and wonder if the faith was worth all the trouble after all. It appears from the warnings issued in this book that many of these Christians were sorely tempted to desert the faith.ⁱⁱⁱ

THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT HEBREWS^{iv}

1. Hebrews is the only New Testament book with an unknown author.
2. Hebrews is the only New Testament book that deals specifically with the present ministry and activities of Jesus Christ as our High Priest.

3. More than twenty descriptive phrases are used of Christ in this book (“heir of all things,” “High Priest,” etc.).
4. Hebrews is the only New Testament book to give us some typological understanding of the Old Testament feasts and offerings found in Leviticus.
5. Hebrews contains five very serious warnings against turning away from the Lord (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:20; 10:26-39; 12:25-29).
6. Hebrews contains more than 150 Greek words that are unique to this book.
7. Hebrews is considered by many scholars and commentators to be the greatest literary work in the New Testament, written in some of the most elegant Greek of the New Testament.
8. Hebrews is sometimes referred to the “fifth gospel” because of its emphasis on Jesus’ past work on earth and his present work in heaven (Hebrews 2:9 and 4:14).

John Owen, Puritan theologian and preacher, spent sixteen years of his life writing an eight-volume commentary just on the book of Hebrews! And William Gouge, an eighteenth century preacher who pastured one of the largest churches in London for forty-five years, spent thirty-three of those years just preaching on the book of Hebrews!

Hebrews: A Summary

BACKGROUND

- Jews under persecution (by Judaism and possibly Roman-Nero) 10:32-34; 12:4; 13:13-14.
- Second generation Christians (true believers, perhaps converted priest) 3:1
- False teachers 13:9
- Spiritually immature 5:13; 6:1; Slack in worship 10:25

MAJOR THEMES

1. Exhortation to progress (13:22) by hearing and heeding the word (“To live by faith” cf. chapter 11).
2. Superiority of Christ!!!
3. Evaluation of present spiritual state.
4. Expectations for the future.

KEY WORDS

1. “Better” (13 times) 1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24.
2. “Perfect” (14 times) 2:10; 3:9, 14; 6:1; 7:11, 19, 28; 9:9, 11; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:2, 23.
3. “Eternal” (9 times).
4. “Established” (8 times) 2:2; 6:19; 12:28; 13:9.

KEY CONCERN OF HEBREWS: THE WARNING PASSAGES (5)

The most discussed portions of Hebrews are the 5 warning passages.

- 1st Warning: 2:1-4, “Don’t DRIFT”
- 2nd Warning: 4:12-13, “Don’t WANDER”
- 3rd Warning: 5:11-6:8, “Don’t LANGUISH”
- 4th Warning: 10:26-31, “Don’t SHRINK BACK”
- 5th Warning: 12:25-29, “HEAR”

Are they for:

1. Believers in danger of losing salvation?
2. Professing church members but not possessing church members?
3. Believers in danger of losing earthly blessings and heavenly rewards by turning back?

OUTLINE OF HEBREWS:

1. JESUS - THE NEW AND "BETTER" DELIVERER (Heb 1-7).

Jesus the God-Man - better than angels ([Heb 1:1-2:18](#)).

Jesus the new Apostle - better than Moses ([Heb 3:1-19](#))

Jesus the new Leader - better than Joshua ([Heb 4:1-13](#)).

Jesus the new priest - better than Aaron ([Heb 4:14-7](#)).

2. CALVARY - THE NEW AND "BETTER" COVENANT ([Heb 8:1-10:18](#))

New covenant has better promises ([Heb 8:6-13](#)).

And it opens up a better sanctuary ([Heb 9:1-14](#)).

And is sealed by a better sacrifice ([Heb 9:15-28](#)).

And it achieves far better results ([Heb 10:1-18](#)).

3. FAITH - THE TRUE AND "BETTER" PRINCIPLE ([Heb 10:19-13](#)).

Faith the true response to these "better" things ([Heb 10:19-39](#))

It has always been vindicated as such: examples ([Heb 11:1-40](#)).

Is now to endure, patiently looking to Jesus ([Heb 12:1-13](#)).

Is to express itself in practical sanctity ([Heb 12:14-13:21](#)).

Parting words [Heb 13:22-25](#).

[J. Sidlow Baxter]

4. Hypothetical cases to warn and encourage believers to press on?
5. Combination of views 2 and 3?

7 DANGERS Based on the 5 Warning Passages^v:

- 1) Ignoring what God has done in Christ (2:1).** Seek to understand who He is and what He has done.
- 2) Not believing God (3:12, 14).** Having listened, there is still the danger of unbelief.
- 3) Ceasing to grow (5:12).** Mark Dever states, “Many people have the idea that someone can be a ‘baby Christian’; that somehow a Christian can persist for years and decades in a state of spiritual immaturity. Is that real? There are people I might be tempted to describe that way. But is it a biblical category? You will be hard pressed to find it in the Bible. Rather, severe warnings are given in Scripture to anyone who has heard and claims to believe but who has then stopped and not pressed on. By analogy, we know we are physically alive because we are living, aging, and even growing until our very last breath. The idea that something can be alive even though it has stopped growing is a curious idea, and I am not sure the New Testament is familiar with it.”
- 4) Not persevering in holiness (10:22; 26; 35-36; especially 12:14!!).** If we remain unholy, we show that Christ’s sacrifice has been ineffective in our lives.
- 5) Losing faith (11:1; 12:2).** We must persevere in faith.
- 6) Rejecting discipline (12:10-11).** “If we will not accept God’s discipline, we may not know his love. Disciplining children is so important as a part of showing them love, concern, and care. It is the same with God and his children. And just as it is important for the child to listen to his or her parents while being disciplined, so it is important to cultivate the ability to hear God when he disciplines you. We need to take the filters off our ears and listen to God even when he says the difficult things we may not want to hear.”
- 7) Refusing this warning (12:25, 28-29).**

Life Lessons from HEBREWS^{vi}

1. The superiority of Christianity is based on the superiority of Christ.
2. Salvation in Christ and freedom from sin are gifts from God, but you are given the responsibility to grow and strengthen your faith and trust in God.
3. The process of maturing your faith in God takes time.
4. Maturity keeps you from being easily swayed in your beliefs.
5. You can have victory in your trials when you keep your eyes focused on Christ.

BACKGROUND MATERIAL ON HEBREWS^{vii}

1. Authorship

There is no consensus concerning the author of Hebrews. The book itself is anonymous. The text makes no direct reference to the author and there is no explicit evidence as to who the author might be. The author must have been a Jew who was very familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures and the practice of first-century Jews. Several suggestions have been made concerning who the author might have been.

- a. Paul.** Many have argued that Paul was the author. Several reasons are given: (1) Faith is a very important topic in the book; (2) The writer was associated with Timothy (Heb. 13:23); (3) Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted three places in the New Testament—Rom. 1:17, Gal. 3:11, and Heb. 10:38; and (4) There is a strong emphasis on the person and work of Christ. However, there are important elements of the book that do not seem to be Pauline. The author never uses his name, which is contrary to Paul’s style. The writer seems to put himself outside of the circle of the New Testament Apostles (Heb. 2:3-4). The style of writing is much more classical than Paul’s style (like Luke). The stress on the priesthood of Jesus is not found in any Pauline material.
- b. Silas.** Some have maintained that there are similarities between 1 Peter and this epistle and note that Silas was the amanuensis of that letter.
- c. Barnabas.** Tertullian thought that Barnabas must have been the author. Barnabas was a Levite (Acts 4:36), and he would have been well versed in the Old Testament system of worship. Barnabas, the “son of encouragement,” could have written a book, which is full of encouragement (cf. 13:22). Some of the Pauline ideas and phrases could be explained on the basis of Barnabas’ close association with Paul.

- d. **Apollos.** This was the view of Luther and also W. A. Criswell. There is no early support for this position. Apollos was gifted in the explanation of the Old Testament Scriptures that would be a prerequisite for the authorship of Hebrews.
- e. **Luke.** David Allen of Southwestern Seminary, in a doctoral dissertation, has proposed that Luke is the author of Hebrews and that he wrote to the many former Jewish priests who had become “obedient to the faith” as recorded in Acts 6:7. **[Almost entire argument comes from his dissertation]**

1) Patristic Evidence

- Clement of Alexandria (c. 155-220) is quoted by Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, VI. 14) as saying that “the Epistle to the Hebrews is the work of Paul, . . . it was written to the Hebrews in the Hebrew language; but . . . Luke translated it carefully and published it for the Greeks, and hence the same style of expression is found in this epistle and in the Acts.”
- Origen (c. 185-254) is quoted by Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, VI. 25) as saying “but who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows. The statement of some who have gone before us is that Clement, bishop of the Romans, wrote the epistle, and of others that Luke, the author of the gospel and the Acts, wrote it.”

2) Lexical Similarity

1. Fifty-three words unique to Luke, Acts, and Hebrews in the New Testament.
2. Similarity of vocabulary in Luke, Acts, and Hebrews.

3) Stylistic Similarity

1. Near-Classical style of the prologues of Luke, Acts, and Hebrews.
2. The conjunction *te* is used most frequently in Luke’s writings and Hebrews.
3. The use of the phrase *en gar to* is found only in Hebrews 2:18 and Acts 11:15.
4. The particle *kaitoi* is found only in Hebrews 4:3 and in Acts 14:17 and 17:27.
5. The infinitive *prosechein* followed by the dative case is found only in Hebrews 2:1 and Acts 16:14.
6. *os* with the infinitive is found only in Luke 9:52, Acts 20:24, and Hebrews 7:9.
7. *othen* is used frequently by Luke and Hebrews, but never by Paul.
8. The future infinitive occurs only in Acts and Hebrews.
9. The future participle to express purpose is found only in Acts 8:27 and Hebrews 13:17.
10. The use of the phrase “how much more” is common to Luke and Hebrews.
11. The ratio of participles to total occurrences of verbs and verbals is identical in Hebrews and the last half of Acts (chapters 16-28).
12. Luke, Acts, Hebrews make almost exclusive use of the LXX (the Greek trans. of the O.T.) instead of the Hebrews text in quoting the O.T.
13. The employment of quote formulas is similar in Luke-Acts and Hebrews (cf. especially Acts 13:35 and Hebrews 5:6).
14. B. F. Westcott says in his commentary on Hebrews, “It has been already seen that the earliest scholars who speak of the Epistle notice its likeness in style to the writings of St. Luke; and when every allowance has been made for coincidences which consist in forms of expression which are found also in the LXX or in other writers of the N.T., or in the late Greek generally, the likeness is unquestionably remarkable” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. lxxvi).

4) Theological Similarity

1. Christology
 - a) Emphasis on the humanity of Christ is strong in both Luke and Hebrews.
 - b) Enthronement Christology is prominent in both Luke-Acts, and Hebrews.
 - c) Christ as God’s final revelation is central to Luke’s gospel (esp. chapters 1-2) and Hebrews (esp. 1:1-4).
 - d) The perfection of Christ is emphasized in both Luke-Acts and Hebrews.
2. Angelology

Luke records more instances of angelic activity than any other N.T. writer and the author of Hebrews is the writer most interested in their theological status.

3. Approach to Old Testament History

Cf. Acts 7 and Hebrews 11, the two longest expositions of Old Testament history in the New Testament.

5) Evidence from Discourse Analysis

1. The prologues of both Luke and Hebrews are very similar in structure.
2. Both Luke and the writer to the Hebrews make use of chiasmus as an overall framework for their works.

6) Historical Reconstruction

1. Author Luke
2. Recipients Former Jewish Priests (Acts 6:7)
3. Date of writing c. A.D. 65-67
4. Place of writing Rome
5. Place of recipients Antioch (Syria)

The Sacrifices under the law: The sacrifice of Christ:

A reminder of sin	The removal of sin
Offered continually	Offered once
The blood of animals	The blood of Christ
A covering for sin	The cleansing of sin
Involuntary	Voluntary

[Jim George]

7) Purpose of Luke-Acts and Hebrews

Hebrews 2:3-4 can be seen as a summary of the entire book of Acts.

2. Date.

The date of the epistle is directly related to the author and the destination of the letter. There are several things that should be noted about the possible date.

- a. The letter must have been written before A.D. 96 because Clement of Rome quotes from the letter at that time. If the letter was written to Palestine, Cyprus, or North Africa, then it would have had to have been written well before 96 in order to have had such wide circulation by that time.
- b. The letter must have been written before A.D. 70 because the priestly service was still functioning (Hebrews 8:4; 9:6; 10:1-2; 13:10). It would seem strange that the letter would not mention the fact that the worship had been cut off if the letter was written after A.D. 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.
- c. If the letter was sent from Rome, then the letter was probably written A.D. 64-67 during the persecutions that began in earnest against the Christians during the reign of Nero. It would seem strange that there was no mention of persecution if the letter was written after that time.

3. Recipients^{viii} - an unknown but specific group of (predominantly) Jewish Christians; perhaps a house church in Rome (13:24) that is opting out of relationships with the larger Christian community (10:25; 13:7, 17).

THE AUTHOR'S USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: Four things are important about his use of Scripture^{ix}:

- (1) His and their only Bible was the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. This means at times that his citations, which are very exact, do not always read as does your Old Testament, and sometimes his point is made from the wording in the Greek Bible.
- (2) He regularly uses a very common rabbinic way of arguing, namely, "from the lesser to the greater" (= if something is true of *a*, how much more so of *z*).
- (3) He reads the entire Old Testament through the lens of Christ, understanding well that the royal psalms point to David's greater son, the Messiah.
- (4) His form of scriptural argument is to cite his text and then show how other texts and the event of Christ support his reading of these texts.

ⁱ Mark Dever, *The Message of the New Testament*, 414.

ⁱⁱ Jim George, *The Bare Bones Bible Handbook*, pg. 259.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mark Dever, 415.

^{iv} Jeff Lasseigne, *Highway 66* (Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Chapel Publishing, 2004), 179-180.

^v Mark Dever, *Message of the New Testament*, 420-423.

^{vi} Jim George, 262.

^{vii} Heavily dependent upon Daniel Akin's handout for a local church on "Hebrews" www.danielakin.com

^{viii} Gordon Fee, 390.

^{ix} Gordon Fee, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, 392-393.