

## HEBREWS

### Introduction

Author. Origen's famous line about the authorship of this book, *Only God knows*, is still applicable. This does not preclude, however, a good honest, and educated guess. This writer's theology of inspiration would demand that either an apostle or one authorized by an apostle has written the work. Thus, the combination of Luke and Paul is suggested. Some of the support for this hypothesis is that the two had previously produced two works in the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. In addition, the polished style of Greek would reflect the pen of Luke rather than Paul, whereas the theology and weight of the letter would reflect the thought of the apostle. The fact that the writer was in bonds (10:34) would accommodate Paul. The author was close to Timothy (13:23). The closing of the book is very typically pauline: a request for prayer on his behalf (13:18; cf. Ephesians 6:19), the concern for a good conscience (13:18; 1 Timothy 1:5, 19); the reference to the Father as "God of peace" (13:20; Romans 15:33; Philippians 4:9).

Luke accompanied Paul on his first imprisonment in Rome and might have had opportunity to either become acquainted with or at least minister to the Roman congregation (assuming a Roman destination of the letter). Once again, Peter referred to an epistle to his Hebrew readers sent by Paul (2 Peter 3:15, 16); this may have been the present work, the third product of the collaborative efforts of Luke and Paul.

Date. Because the readers had endured some persecution but had not yet shed their blood (12:4), and yet were anticipating more persecution it may be that the author saw the Neronian persecution on the horizon. Because the destruction of Jerusalem and thus the Jewish sacrificial system took place in 70 A. D. and the fact that this book would surely have referred to such an event, a date of 64 or 65 A. D. is suggested.

Occasion. Because of the difficulty of establishing not only the date, the author, but also the recipients of the letter, much has to be assumed. For purposes of this exercise, the writer is assuming Lukan authorship to Jewish Christians in the vicinity of Rome just before the Neronian persecution. Evidently the author discerned a tendency on the part of his readership to not only despair of their Christian profession but also to turn back from it. Thus, to prevent these from turning back, the author writes concerning the impossibility of turning back to previous revelation which has now been replaced by the new revelation found in Jesus Christ. This is the definitive work in the New Testament which proclaims the end of the Old Testament dispensation. It not only proclaims this truth but also proves it from the writings of both Moses and David. Practically, then the author's counsel is to persevere in faith as did countless examples before them who trusted in the revelation which they had received.

Message Statement. *The final revelation of God in Jesus Christ demands greater obedience than former revelation and displaces former revelation.*

Argument

1A INTRODUCTION TO AND BASIS FOR THE ARGUMENT: GOD HAS SPOKEN HIS GREATER REVELATION IN THE SON 1:1-3

In the first section and in fact in the first verse the author introduces us to and summarizes his argument: *God . . . has spoken . . . in His Son*. The focus is upon the *revelation* of God. This revelation is greater than previous revelation because of the medium through which it has come, namely, God Himself. This simple concept (God has spoken) serves as the basis for the argument of the book from which two major applications (points 2A and 3A) are drawn.

1B Comparison of the Former Revelation to the Latter Revelation 1:1-2a  
The author compares all previous revelation with the revelation given through Christ. All which has come before has come through human messengers. This latest revelation was delivered by God Himself in the person of Christ.

2B Credentials of the Son to Speak for the Father 1:2b-3  
This section makes clear that Jesus is qualified to speak for the Father. The Son's position, work, character and exaltation all undeniably qualify Him as the Spokesman *par excellence* for the Father.

1B THIS GREATER REVELATION DEMANDS GREATER OBEDIENCE 1:4--4:16

The first implication of having received greater revelation is that the recipients are under *greater* obligation to obey it. If previous generations of Gods people received revelation and neglected it (as the current congregation is in danger of doing) they were certainly punished. Thus, if we neglect a greater revelation, our punishment will be even more severe. The author draws two examples from the Old Testament, one general and one specific, to prove his case. In both examples he is careful to point out the difference in the *revelation* by following the comparison with which he began (1:1-2) between the different *messengers* of that revelation. In chapters one through two the messengers which now serve as a foil for Christ were angels; in chapters three through four, Moses.

1B Illustrated by Comparison with the General Case of Those Who Turned from the Law 1:4--2:18

If the context of this section (1:4--2:18) is not considered one might mistakenly think that the author's point is simply a comparison between the person of Christ and that of angels. But it must be kept in mind that the motif/pattern/strategy already announced by the writer (1:1-2) is to demonstrate the finality and greatness of this most recent revelation by asserting the superiority of the messenger. The focus is not upon the messengers *per se* but only as their inherent quality reflects upon the importance and thus, the finality of the message. Thus, the comparison between Christ and angels is not for the ultimate goal of asserting his preeminence over angels. If this were the writer's only concern the comment by A. B. Bruce would certainly be appropriate (for us and certainly for those well informed, though perhaps stalled recipients) "the thing to be proved is so much a matter of course." The pinnacle of his argument concerns the comparison between "the *word spoken* through angels" and "so great a salvation [grace] which we must not neglect" (2:2-4).

The word spoken through angels is, as Stephen would agree (Acts 7:53) the Law. The reference then to those who "transgressed" and "disobeyed" it (2:2) is evidently a general reference to any and all who in the Old Testament were punished for disobedience, in contrast to chapters 3-4 where a specific generation is mentioned. The writer's basic strategy then from 1:4--2:4 may be best understood as *a fortiori*, moving from the lesser to the greater, the simple to the more difficult or the proven to the unproven. He moves from that which no one will contest (the superiority of Christ to that of angels) to prove that which has escaped their notice (His revelation therefore demands greater obedience).

That which enables Him to be a better revealer than the angels of God to men is basically twofold: He is at once both God (1:4-14) and man (2:4-18), of which angels are neither.

2B Illustrated by the Comparison of the Specific Case of Those Who Turned From Moses 3:1--4:16

Having established his basic premise in 1B, the author now reinforces that premise with a second, more specific and graphic illustration: Moses and the wilderness generation. Once again we find a comparison between Jesus and another medium of revelation (Revelator). As before, however, the author's ultimate goal

is not simply to assert the superiority of the person, but rather the relative importance of the revelation given.

That the author's comparison concerns revelation is clear from his analogy of a house and its stewards. He evidently draws from Moses' experience in Numbers 12, where Aaron and Miriam began to question Moses' ability as a spokesman for God. *And they said, 'Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?' And the LORD heard it (12:2).* God's response concerning Moses' position as recipient of revelation is forceful:

He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses, He is ***faithful in all My household***; with him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and He beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?" (Numbers 12:6-8).

Once the point is made, the author moves to the application, to hold fast to the revelation given by Jesus. Two particular situations motivate the reader: 1) the historical example (3:7-19) of those who disobeyed Moses and thus failed to enter the rest of Palestine and 2) the eschatological hope (4:1-10) of ultimate millennial rest which the reader will miss if he fails to obey this greater revelation.

The section closes appropriately with an exhortation concerning the power of the revelation of God and its ability to pierce our inner thoughts (rationalizations about unbelief).

- 1C THIS GREATER REVELATION DISPLACES OLDER REVELATION 5:1--12:29  
Having laid the groundwork concerning the necessity of obedience the author now moves to his second and perhaps more crucial point that this newer revelation displaces older revelation. The shock which this must have given a first century Jew must be understood. For a millennia and a half the primary test of a prophet was doctrinal: "Did his message agree with Moses?" All revelation which had come from Judges to Malachi either explained, applied or built upon the bedrock foundation of the Pentateuch. Now for the first time revelation has come which demands that Moses be set aside. The skepticism with which this teaching was met is understandable. For this reason the author spends two chapters introducing his main point.
- 1B Introduction Of The Theme 5:1--6:20  
If the author is to succeed in persuading his Jewish audience he must base his argument on more than his personal authority. It is necessary that he prove his point about displacing Old Testament from revelation, which he does drawing from two grand patriarchs, David (Psalm 110) and Moses himself (Genesis 14).
- 1C Jesus is a Melchizedekian priest 5:1-10  
He makes the point that Jesus is a priest like Melchizedek but does not draw the all important and (perhaps not immediately appreciated) implication until chapter 7. Before that all too delicate subject is broached the author feels the need to give a warning and a reassurance.
- 2C The gravity of this theme for audience 5:11--6:12  
The warning (5:11--6:12) encourages the people to move on in their understanding of the revelation of God. *For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the **word of righteousness** . . . but solid food is for the mature . . . . Therefore leaving the **elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity** . . . . (5:13--6:1).* If they don't move on they may find themselves in a situation similar to the generation which experienced the full revelation and miracles of Jesus, yet rejected Him and ultimately were cursed (6:4-12).
- 3C Reassurance of God's commitment to keep His promises made in the old revelation: His promise and oath to Abraham 6:13-20  
The reassurance (6:13-20) seems designed to meet the natural reaction to the truth which is next presented. If the new revelation displaces Moses then the next question would most likely be, "Has God forgotten his promises to bless Abraham and his seed?" The answer comes powerfully in 6:13-20 that not only has God not forgotten his promises to the Jew but that it is Jesus himself, who, *by being a priest like Melchizedek*, will fulfill those promises.
- 2B Elaboration Of The Theme 7:1--10:39  
The author now begins to unfold the implications from Jesus' priesthood, in this the heart of the epistle.
- 1C Jesus' priesthood displaces Aaronic priesthood 7:1-28  
Already having established that Jesus is a priest like Melchizedek he now demonstrates that Jesus'

priesthood is superior to and therefore replaces the aaronic priesthood (7:1-10). He then notes that of course the laws of the Pentateuch regulating the levitical priesthood are no longer relevant under the administration of Christ. This is why . . . *when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of Law also* (7:12). Thus the laws of Moses must be displaced with new revelation which regulates worship appropriate to the new dispensation.

- 2C Jesus' priesthood requires a new covenant which replaces the old covenant 8:1--10:18  
What was implied in chapter seven is now stated clearly.
- 1D Statement of principle: A new covenant must replace an old covenant 8:1-13  
Since a new priest has undeniably been inaugurated (8:1-3) and since His priesthood is incompatible with the laws governing the old priesthood (8:4-5) it is necessary that a new covenant replace the old one (8:6-12). Thus it is now time for the promise given through Jeremiah to be *realized* and thus to *replace* Moses (8:13).
- 2D Statement of relevance: The new covenant is in fact in effect 9:1-28  
and has displaced the old  
The author first recalls the state of affairs under the old covenant (9:1-10). He remembers that the whole arrangement was offputting for man since it attempted to accomplish the impossible: provide fellowship between a holy God and sinful man. Christ however has effected redemption and thus allows the believer access to God (9:11) and cleansing from sin (9:12-14). Not only is this change now in effect, but it took place at his death (9:15-28). Every covenant is inaugurated with blood. The old by Moses at Sinai, the new by Christ at Calvary. This is why when Jesus returns a second time it will not be with reference to sin (as if to die to inaugurate a new covenant) but to reign (9:27-28).
- 3D Statement of specific application: Sacrifice has become obsolete 10:1-18  
Having laid the foundation for this teaching in chapters 7-9 the author now becomes painfully specific in his application of truth. Because a new priesthood has replaced an old one and a new covenant has replaced an old one it is clear that the sacrifices prescribed in Moses are now obsolete. Once the ultimate forgiveness of the New Covenant has come (10:16-17) there is no longer a need for the shadow of animal sacrifice (10:18) *Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.*
- 3C Application of this truth 10:19-39  
The application of chapters seven through ten is very simply that the recipients ought to hold fast to their profession of faith in their new priest rather than drift back to one which is no longer operative.
- 3B Application Of The Theme: Respond In Faith To New Revelation 11:1--12:29  
At this point the essentials of the author's message have been communicated. All that remains is to give a hearty exhortation to respond to the word by faith and hold fast their confession. Chapter 11 is replete with examples of people who responded properly to revelation of God thus providing encouragement to the readers. Chapter 12 involves specific exhortations to obedience and concludes with a final warning not to turn back.
- 1D CONCLUSION 13:1-25  
The author concludes with several miscellaneous and specific commands demonstrating his familiarity with, and concern for, this congregation.

