

Session 1: Jesus is Better (1:1-4:13)

The author of Hebrews begins by establishing Jesus' credentials. In the first four chapters he seeks to show how Jesus is God's ultimate communication - better than the prophets, the angels, Moses and Joshua - before addressing the theme of 'rest' and considering how we might come to enjoy it.

Theology Matters: An Introduction to Hebrews

Who wrote the letter?

Paul?

Almost certainly not:

- The language is very different to Paul's letters
- Major Pauline themes are absent (justification by faith, union with Christ, resurrection, grace and works, flesh and spirit)
- The author claims not to have heard the gospel from the Lord, but from others (2:3) which was the charge levelled against Paul, which he rejected (Gal 1:11-12)

A Pauline Associate?

- Barnabas? (Acts 9:27; 11:19-30; 13:1-15:35; 1 Cor 9:6; Gal 2:13) - see Tertullian
- Apollos? (Acts 18:24-28) - see Martin Luther



'Who wrote the epistle, in truth God only knows' (Origen, cited in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.14)

- Presumably male, since he refers to himself using masculine participles (11:32)
- Not an eyewitness of the Lord, but someone who received the gospel from one of the apostles (2:3)
- Likely from a Jewish background, with a good knowledge of OT themes
- Well-educated in philosophy, grammar, vocabulary and Greek rhetorical conventions
- Had an intimate connection with the believers and an understanding of their needs and struggles (3:1, 12; 10:19; 13:22). He addresses them as 'dear friends' (6:9)

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Who were the recipients of the letter?

Where?

Most likely Rome:

- This was the place the letter was first known (see 1 Clement, from AD 96 which quotes Hebrews.)
- 13:24 may refer to Italians who were living away from Rome and sending greetings back home.
- Timothy was known to the Romans (Heb 13:23; Rom 16:21).
- Many Roman Christians were foreigners who knew what it was like to be aliens in their earthly city (Heb 11:8, 13-16; 13:14)

When?

Possibly 60-64 AD

- Within Timothy's lifetime (13:23)
- Late (see refs to passing time 5:12; 10:32)
- The Temple seems active, so it must be before the destruction in AD 70 (7:27-28; 8:3-5; 9:7-8, 25; 10:1-3; 13:10-11)
- Refs to persecution probably aren't about Nero (AD 64), as 12:4 says the readers haven't experienced martyrdom. More likely Claudius' expulsion of Jews (AD 49). See Acts 18:2

Why?

Seems to be written to encourage Jews who had become Christians and were now tempted to return to Jewish rituals because of:

- Passive Dangers: Weariness, neglect, laziness, immaturity (2:1, 3; 4:1, 14; 5:11-14; 6:9-12; 10:19, 23; 12:1, 12-13; 13:9)
- Active Dangers: Disobedience, sin, apostasy, rejecting God (3:7-4:11; 6:6; 10:25-26, 29; 12:25)
- External Pressures: Suffering through persecution, torture, imprisonment and abuse (10:32-34; 12:4; 13:3, 13)

Our Working Hypothesis

The letter was written between 60-64 AD to Jewish Christians who had returned to Rome after the expulsion (circa 53 AD). They were able to remember the persecution under Claudius, but had not yet experienced the persecution of Nero.

In the Roman Empire, Christianity was considered a cult, whilst Judaism was a protected religion. It seems that the readers may have been tempted to abandon Christianity and return to Jewish rituals, which would amount to abandoning Christ himself!

Jesus is better than... previous communication (1:1-4)

Why is Jesus a better communication?

'In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.' (1:1-4)

Heir (v2)	Creator (v2)	Radiance and Representation (v3)	Sustainer (v3)	Seated (v3)
'He said to me, "You are my son; today I have become your father. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.'" (Ps 2:8)	<p>Wisdom (Prov 8:22-31; Baruch 3:37; 1 Enoch 42:1-2; Wisdom 9:4 etc)</p> <p>Word: 'The Lord Said...' (Gen 1:3 etc)</p> <p>'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... Through him all things were made' (John 1:1-3)</p>	<p>Identification and distinction.</p> <p>Exact representation is the language of stamping coins.</p>	<p><i>pherō</i> suggests not simply bearing a dead weight (like Atlas) but carrying towards a particular goal.</p>	<p>'The Lord says to my Lord "sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool"' (Ps 110:1)</p> <p>Right hand = Honour and favour (1 Kgs 2:19; Ps 80:18; Jer 22:24) victory (Ps 20:6; 44:3; Isa 41:10) and power (Exod 15:6; Ps 89:13; Isa 48:13)</p> <p>The priest stands until his work is done (10:11-14)</p>

Jesus is better than... angels (1:4-2:18)

What do angels do and how is Jesus better than them?

Angels communicated messages from God and revealed Him (Ex 3:2; Isa 63:9)
Angels mediated the law (Acts 7:38-39; Gal 3:19)

The author gives three pairs of verses that show Jesus' supremacy, before returning to Psalm 110:1

Unique relationship to the Father	Superior ministry	Eternal unchanging nature
<p>Psalm 2:7</p> <p>Angels are called 'sons' of God (Gen 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7) but no individual angel has been called 'Son' of God</p>	<p>Psalm 97:7 / Deut 32:43 LXX ?!</p> <p>Firstborn suggests preeminence and inheritance rights (Gen 43:33; Ex 4:22; Ps 89:27)</p>	<p>Psalm 45:6-7</p> <p>"See! I made you like God to Pharaoh!" (Exod 7:1)</p>
<p>2 Samuel 7:14</p> <p>Son of God = Davidic Messiah</p>	<p>Psalm 104:4</p>	<p>Psalm 102:25-27</p>

'We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?' (Hebrews 2:1-3)

Jesus is better than... Moses (3:1-6) and Joshua (4:1-11)

What is 'rest'? How do we experience it?

