

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

Its Importance: The epistle to the Hebrews is unique in that it is the only book in the Bible which deals primarily with the priestly work of our Lord Jesus Christ--His death for our sins, and His present ministry in heaven at the right hand of the Father.

The Writer: We do not know. Many names have been suggested: Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Luke, Peter, and others.

Some have taken 2 Peter 3:15, 16 as a reference to this epistle in seeking to establish the claim that Paul is the writer. But Hebrews 2:3 seems to indicate that the writer was a second-generation believer who had received the truth contained in this epistle from many others who did know the Lord. This would eliminate Paul who had received his knowledge of the Gospel by direct revelation from God. Cf. Gal. 1:11, 12.

Nowhere in the epistle does the writer refer to himself by name.

One thing we can be sure of is that it had to have apostolic authority behind it. Cf. Eph. 2:19, 20. Perhaps the best we can say is what Bishop Lightfoot has said in his commentary on Colossians and Philemon (p. 189): "The Epistle to the Hebrews seems to have been written by a disciple of St. Paul immediately after the Apostle's death."

The Hebrews: What particular group of Jews received this epistle? The contents would seem to indicate that they were Jews in Jerusalem where worship in the Temple would have been a special problem. (It should be noted, however, that the Temple is not mentioned once in the entire epistle.)

The Date: The reference in Hebrews 2:3 would suggest that some time had elapsed since the ascension of Christ, but the contents of the epistle seem to indicate that the Temple worship was still continuing. This would place the time of writing before A.D. 70, but probably not much before. It would seem that A.D. 68 would be a fairly accurate guess with the information provided in the epistle itself.

The Outline:

I. THE DOCTRINAL SECTION (1:1-10:18).

- A. The Theme: God's final revelation in His Son, His Person and His Priestly Work (1:1-4).
- B. The Superiority of Jesus Christ as a Person (1:5-4:16).
 1. Greater than angels (1:5-2:18).
 - a. As the Son of God (1:5-14)--proved by Old Testament Scriptures
 - b. Digression #1 (2:1-4)--a warning about the danger of neglecting salvation.

c. As the Son of man (2:5-18)--in His incarnation and death.

2. Greater than Moses (3:1-6).

3. Digression #2 (3:7-4:16)--a warning about the possibility of not entering into rest.

C. The Superiority of Jesus Christ in His Work as Our Great High Priest (5:1-10:18).

Note: In this section the superiority of Christ is established by comparing Him and contrasting Him with Aaron and the priestly ministry under the Law in the Old Testament.

1. Christ superior because He is a priest of a higher order, "after the order of Melchizedek" (5:1-10).

2. Digression #3 (5:11-6:20)--a rebuke and an appeal regarding the need for spiritual growth.

3. Christ superior because He lives forever (7:1-28).

4. Christ superior because His priesthood is established upon a better covenant (8:1-13).

5. Christ superior because His priesthood is in a better Tabernacle and with a better sacrifice (9:1-28).

6. Christ superior because His priesthood forever settles the problem of sin (10:1-18).

II. THE PRACTICAL SECTION (10:19-13:19).

A. The basic exhortations--having to do with faith, hope, and love (10:19-25). (See the American Standard Version on v. 23 where hope is used instead of "faith" as in the King James Version.)

B. Digression #4 (10:26-39)--a warning about the danger of drawing back.

C. The life of FAITH (11:1-12:2).

D. The patience of HOPE (12:3-24).

E. Digression #5 (12:25-29)--a warning not to reject Him who has spoken from heaven.

F. The LOVE of the saints (13:1-19).

III. CONCLUSION (13:20-25).

-- L. Dwight Custis
Central Bible Church
Portland, Oregon