

## Introduction to NT Books

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### XVII. The Book of Hebrews

#### A. The Authorship of Hebrews

1. External Evidence: the Eastern patristics (Clement and Origen) accepted Pauline authorship whereas the Western rejected (Hippolytus and Irenaeus).
2. Internal Evidence: The book was written anonymously by a Christian Jew who knew the OT well. Peter said Paul wrote it (II Pet. 3:15-16), probably around AD 64.

#### B. The Audience of Hebrews

1. Audience is key in understanding the Book.
2. The issue of the audience of Hebrews invokes several questions which must be answered. 1) What was their ethnicity? 2) Where did they dwell? 3) What was their spiritual condition? The Lord has recorded in the very *Epistle* data which establish parameters for knowing possible answers to these queries. Concerning the audience's ethnicity, the numerous references to OT institutions, people, and practices would exclude Gentiles, unless they were God-fearers attending synagogue services. Only those with a full acquaintance of Jewish heritage would appreciate the message of the *Epistle*, traditionally known as "to the Hebrews." The dwelling place of the audience was not in Rome, as the writer was indeed in Rome, as he declared, saying, "*they of Italy salute you*" (Heb. 13:24). Since the author cited the Hebrew OT, and not the *LXX*,<sup>1</sup> he must certainly have directed the epistle to Jerusalem Jews (cf. Acts 15:21). Furthermore, animal sacrifices continued in Jerusalem, which the author condemned (cf. Heb. 8:4; 10:11). The center of all Judaism, including the Temple, the Aaronic priesthood, and the animal sacrifices, was at this time the city of David, Mount Zion, Jerusalem. The spiritual condition of the audience was the same as the mixed multitude of the first generation of "the covenant community"—those with a great deal of light of which some received by faith and others rejected (*vide* Heb. 3:7-19; 6:4-6).

#### C. The Purpose of Hebrews

1. Πρός Ἑβραίους emphatically declares the superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ over the OT prefigurements. Whereas, the first-century Jews had lived within the theological, spiritual and ethnical lineage of Judaism for fifteen centuries, their collective and personal effort of abandoning this for Christianity was difficult, to say the least. Both Peter (Acts 10:9-16; Gal. 2:11-16) and Paul (cf. Acts 16:3

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas M. Strouse, "Scholarly Myths Perpetuated on Rejecting the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament," *Emmanuel Baptist Theological Journal* 1 (Spring 2005): 37-61.

with Gal. 2:3; Acts 21:26-29) struggled with the question of how much Judaism they could retain as a faithful Christian. Therefore, the writer of *Hebrews* gave the biblical perspective which focused on the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. In addition, the writer designated his *Epistle* as “*the word of exhortation*” (τοῦ λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως<sup>2</sup> [Heb. 13:22]). This *dis legomena* occurs also in Acts 13:15 referring to a Pauline sermon based on the OT and encouraging the listeners to recognize and realize that the Hebrew Scriptures all point toward Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment (cf. Lk. 24:44). Several salient points give the nature of “*any word of exhortation*” (Acts 13:15, 17-41). Paul started his synagogue preaching with 1) God choosing Israel 2) Whose seed was the raised Jesus, 3) About Whom John the Baptist confessed, 4) Whom Pilate allowed to be slain on a tree, and 5) Whom God raised from the dead.

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<sup>2</sup>The Greek of Acts 13:15 reads λόγος ἐν ὑμῖν παρακλήσεως.