

AUTHOR OF THE BOOK

This issue merits some attention since the authorship of *Hebrews* is the subject of much debate & even controversy simply because the writer does not give his name in the epistle. The argument is – Paul does identify himself in his letters thus why did he not do so in this epistle if it is.

Paul's authorship was generally accepted – though with some dissent – until the time of the Reformation. But then great scholars like Luther, Calvin and Erasmus rejected the Pauline authorship, the chief issue being the Greek style in which the book was written, being highly cultured and different from Paul's usual style. Most commentators ever since take this same line. But there are strong arguments in favour of Paul as the author.

First, the book is addressed to Jewish Christians as its title signifies. Now see 1 Pet 1: 1 and 2 Pet 3: 15 – Peter's epistles are addressed to Jewish believers and Peter states that Paul wrote to the same people. Thus, we know that Paul did write an epistle to this category of believers.

Second, the author is known to these Hebrew Christians as a sufferer for Christ to the extent of being imprisoned for the sake of the Gospel; and he is also a close companion of Timothy, ch 10: 34 & 13: 23. Such details give the impression that the writer is Paul.

Third, the writer uses a term found only in Paul's writings, ch 13: 20 – *the God of peace*. This term is found seven times in the NT and in all other instances apart from Heb 13: 20 only in Paul's epistles. Such a fact argues in favour of the point that the same author is in view in this epistle.

John Brown wrote a commentary on *Hebrews* and supported the Pauline authorship of the book. He makes some valuable comments. With regard to the style being different from Paul's he makes the point that "variety of subject is calculated to produce variety of style." That is – the subject of *Hebrews* is such a lofty one that it necessarily demands a suitable style of writing. Brown also points out that in the early church period the prevailing tradition was that Paul was the author of the book. Brown argues that when the original recipients of the letter would have passed copies to other believers they would not have concealed the identity of the author. Thus, since the tradition of that period is that Paul was the author, the probability is that the tradition is right unless there is clear internal evidence of its falsehood. Since there is no such internal evidence, then there is no reason to doubt that Paul is the author of this epistle.

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

Its purpose is to present the transition from Judaism to Christianity. As would be obvious, this was a matter that deeply perplexed many Jewish Christians. When Paul wrote this epistle the temple & its entire ceremonial system was still in existence and functioning, ch 10: 12. Since they had been steeped in the ceremonial or Levitical system Jewish Christians struggled to grasp the connection between the Gospel of Christ and the temple system. Moreover, when the issue was understood and Jewish believers turned away from the old system they found themselves bitterly opposed and persecuted by those Jews who remained zealous for the law. Thus, Paul wrote this epistle to deal with this vital matter and to encourage the suffering Hebrew Christians to persevere in the faith.

THEME OF THE BOOK

In a nutshell – its theme is that the Gospel is the person and work of Christ and that in Him there is the fulfilment of the OT revelation. Many professing Christians today do not grasp these facts, thus they do not grasp the meaning & the value of both the OT and the NT. The NT does not replace the OT. The NT is not new in the sense of replacing the OT or in the sense of not being related to it. Instead, the NT sets forth the fulfilment of what the OT set forth of Christ in type & shadow in the ceremonial system. Thus see Heb 10: 9 – in a real sense this is the key text of this epistle, for throughout Paul demonstrates how there is a taking away of one thing but the transition of another thing out of it which is then established in the place of the former thing. The OT system provided the historical background and basis for the full revelation of the Christ as seen in the NT.

Therefore, the OT must be understood in the light of the NT; and this is a central aspect of *Hebrews* – the OT means what the NT declares it to mean. Moreover, since *Hebrews* presents the fact that the OT is fulfilled in Christ, it also sets forth that to return to the old Levitical system is to come under the wrath of God. In the OT period, people came under God's wrath for their disobedience to the Gospel as presented in type. Therefore, how much more will sinners come under God's wrath if they hold on to the OT Levitical system or return to it, see Heb 2: 2 & 3. Christ is the perfect fulfilment of the OT types, thus the types are not required anymore. And for anyone to go back to them means that there is no escape from divine wrath.

CENTRAL ARGUMENT OF THE BOOK

It is that in Christ there is God's full and final revelation to men. This is the message of the opening statement of the epistle. Note Heb 1: 1-3 – certain points should be noted here:

1. The Old and New Testaments are essentially in view.
2. Clearly there is a contrast presented here between the Old and New Testaments, and careful thought will note that contrast:
 - (a) O.T. Scripture was given over a lengthy period, but N.T. Scripture in one generation.

(b) O.T. Scripture was delivered progressively through many messengers, but N.T. truth essentially was given through one person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

(c) Scripture was not complete with the close of the era of the prophets – there was more to come. But in contrast, special revelation given through Christ is marked by finality. There is nothing more to come – this is the clear sense of the language employed here by the Apostle. In the person & work of Christ special revelation was brought to finality with a dramatic suddenness. Note the words – *“hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.”* Note this well – when the epistle to the Hebrews was written the “last days” had arrived. In other words, the whole period from Christ’s first coming to His second coming comprises the “last days”. But here we are told that in the last days God has spoken through His Son, which means that what He has said through Christ as comprised in the N.T. is final and complete and nothing more is to be expected. God’s Son as sent forth by the Father embodies all that the Father purposed to give to His Church by way of final revelation. Nothing needful was held back for subsequent times. Moreover, no greater revelation could be given, for Christ as set forth in the N.T. is the ultimate truth and reveals in the fullest, most complete fashion all that God wishes His Church to possess by way of truth.

Thus, Christ is God’s full & final revelation to men. In the very first two chapters Paul sets forth His person – He is the Godman, the Great Prophet and Priest of His people. The Apostle then proceeds into great detail to show that the work that Christ has done is alone sufficient to save. This then is what comprises God’s final word to men; and deviation from it is apostasy and will lead to exposure to wrath & judgment.

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