

# Hebrews 1

## Who Wrote Hebrews?

There is a great deal of uncertainty about who wrote the book of Hebrews. Most of the other books in the Bible explicitly identify their author – for example, Paul's various letters all state that they were written by Paul himself. This makes it very clear who the letter was coming from.

Hebrews, though, is different. Whoever wrote it did not identify himself anywhere in the letter. Many people throughout history have claimed that Paul wrote the letter, but there are a number of problems with that theory.

First of all, Paul begins every single one of his letters with the word “Paul”. He *always* identifies himself as the author. The reason Paul did this was in order to weed out imposters who might claim to be him:

**2 Thessalonians 3:17:** “The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write.”

As you can see, Paul went on record as saying that he *always* signs his letters and identifies himself. That fact alone makes it extremely unlikely that Paul wrote the book of Hebrews: if he had written it he would have signed it.

The second problem with Pauline authorship is that the author of Hebrews doesn't claim to have heard the gospel firsthand. Instead he claims to have heard it from the apostles:

**Hebrews 2:3:** “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;

4 God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?”

As you can see, the author claimed to have heard the gospel secondhand, from people who did miracles. Paul, however, not only did miracles himself but said that he heard the gospel firsthand from Jesus Himself:

**Galatians 1:12:** “For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Paul, then, was not in the group of people who heard the gospel secondhand from other people who did miracles. Instead Paul was one of those who heard the gospel firsthand and who actually did miracles. This is extremely strong evidence that the author was not Paul.

On top of those two points, there is the fact that the grammar of Hebrews is completely different from Paul's style of writing. This is not the sort of thing that translates into English, but the differences in the original Greek are very obvious. The Greek that Paul used in his letters was fairly simple and straightforward, whereas Hebrews was written in a very complicated way that was more similar to

Classical Greek. Also, Hebrews quotes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, whereas Paul quoted straight from the original Hebrew.

If Paul did not write this book, then who did? Scholars have suggested a whole list of possibilities: Luke, Barnabas, Priscilla, Peter, Timothy, Silas, Philip, Jude, and Clement of Rome. But there is simply no way to know.

## When Was Hebrews Written?

Even though the book of Hebrews doesn't contain a date, we can still approximate its time of writing. Since Clement of Rome used Hebrews in AD 95, it must have existed by then. Since the author didn't mention the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, then it was almost certainly written before that date. After all, one of the key themes of the letter was that the Temple system was passing away, and if the Temple had already been destroyed then that would have been a huge argument in the author's favor. If the Temple had already been destroyed, the author would definitely have mentioned it.

There is also the fact that in the book the author mentions that the audience was being persecuted, but had not yet suffered martyrdom:

**Hebrews 12:4:** “Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.”

Emperor Nero began killing Christians in AD 64. Therefore, it seems likely that this letter was written in the early 60s – if not earlier than that.

As far as the *place* of writing goes, the author says he was writing from Italy:

**Hebrews 13:24:** “Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints.  
They of Italy salute you.”

However, this doesn't mean the letter was written from Rome. It could have been written from anywhere in Italy.

## Who Was The Letter Sent To?

At first glance it seems that the answer to this question is obvious. After all, the letter is called “Hebrews”. However, that title was attached to the book in the late second century and is not actually part of the text.

Since the letter appears to assume that the audience has a good working knowledge of the Levitical sacrificial system, it seems highly likely that the original recipients were Jewish Christians. Only they would have had the background needed to understand all the references to the Mosaic system that the letter makes. Gentile believers would have had a great deal of trouble understanding the links between the Jewish sacrificial system and the death of Christ, because they wouldn't have been familiar with the Mosaic Law. This letter makes a lot more sense if it really was written to Jewish believers.

One thing that we don't know is where these recipients lived. People have made all sorts of guesses, but there's simply no way to know. Some people have speculated that this may have been

written to the believers in Jerusalem, but the book doesn't actually say that.

## The Themes Of The Book

The book of Hebrews has a number of key points:

1. Jesus, God's Son and His Ultimate Word, is superior to the prophets, angels, and Moses.
2. Believers must not neglect their salvation
3. Jesus shared our humanity and provided the means for our atonement
4. God's Word is living, effective, and discerning
5. Christ's priesthood is superior to Aaron's priesthood
6. Believers must avoid the peril of spiritual stagnation and persevere in the faith
7. Jesus is the mediator of a new and superior covenant
8. Christ's self-sacrifice is all-sufficient and eternal
9. The Heavenly Father disciplines His children

As this series continues we will explore these points.

Now that we've been introduced to the book, let's take a look at what the book has to tell us.

## Hebrews 1

The book begins by taking a look at the way things used to be:

**Hebrews 1:1:** “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,”

In the Old Testament, God used a variety of ways to speak to His people. Sometimes God spoke to them through prophets: He sent men like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Samuel to tell His people His messages. In other times He spoke to people through angels – like the time He sent angels to remove Lot and his family from Sodom. Sometimes God spoke to people through a dream, such as the time He spoke to King Solomon and asked him what gift he wanted. There was even a time when God opened the mouth of Baalam's donkey and used that donkey to rebuke the errant Baalam.

So we see that God used a wide variety of methods. However, all of that is now changed. In these last days God has *stopped* speaking through prophets, and visions, and angels, and donkeys. He now uses just one method to speak to His people:

**Hebrews 1:2a:** “Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son”

God now speaks to us through His Son, and *only* through His Son. He no longer speaks to people through angels or visions or dreams; He only speaks to us *through His Son*. In the days of the Old Testament God would speak to His people from time to time and give them new revelation, but God no longer does that. Instead God has taken the words of His Son and has combined them into the

New Testament. It is crucial to realize that the Bible says that it has 100% of the revelation that we need:

**2 Timothy 3:16:** "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:  
17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

What this passage is saying is that the information contained within the Bible is enough to enable us to perform *all* good works. In other words, *we do not need any other divine revelation*. The Bible contains all of the revelation from God that we need in order to do *everything* that God wants us to do.

Now, this does not mean that we don't need to listen to sermons or go to church. Listening to the pastor preach the Word is a good thing, because if he is doing his job then he is telling us what God has said to us in His Word. That is something we very much need to hear.

What it does mean is that if someone comes to us and tells us that God gave them new revelation, we know immediately that they are wrong. If someone says "God told me this" or "God revealed this to me" then they *must* be wrong, because God has stopped giving new revelation. If God was continuing to give new revelation then that would mean the Bible was *not* sufficient, which would mean that 2 Timothy 3:17 was a lie – but Jesus said the Scripture could not be broken.

You see, you cannot have it both ways. If God is giving people new revelation then the Bible is not sufficient. It means that God left important things out of the Bible and then lied about it – but we know that is impossible. Since that is impossible, God must not be giving out new revelation. (I know I'm repeating myself, but this is a critical point: *God is not giving out new revelation.*)

In our day people claim to receive new revelation all the time. Popular Bible teachers stand up and say "I had a vision, and God told me to tell you these things". But the truth is the Bible says that God *does not do that*. God used to do that, but He doesn't do it anymore. If someone is claiming that God came to them and gave them new revelation that is outside of what the Bible says, then you should run from them. Those people are false prophets, and false prophets are very dangerous.

I really want to emphasize this point. When a person stands up and says "God told me to tell you this", when in fact God did no such thing, then people are lying about what God has said. This is a very, very serious sin. In fact, under the Mosaic Law that sin was punishable by death:

**Deuteronomy 18:20:** "But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die."

You were simply *not allowed* to say "Thus saith the Lord" when God actually said no such thing. In our day it is very easy to spot false prophets: anyone who stands up and claims that God gave them new revelation is a false prophet. All of the revelation that God wants you to know can already be found in the Bible. God is not going to reveal anything new to anybody.

Another example we see of this is the case of people who claim to have had visions of Heaven. There are no end of books where the author claims to have gone into Heaven and seen all sorts of things. I have always viewed these books with great suspicion, because the books never agree with each other. When you have 5 different books about Heaven and all 5 disagree with each other on what Heaven is like, then I can only conclude that all 5 books are lying to me. After all, 5 accounts that contradict each other cannot all possibly be true.

But there is a bigger problem. In the Bible, there are a number of people who died and then

came back to life – and *not a single one of them was allowed to tell what they saw*. Lazarus had nothing to say about his time in the afterlife. Paul was embarrassed to even mention the event at all. No one who died and came back was ever permitted to talk about it. Only one person was ever allowed to talk about Heaven, and that was the apostle John. Everyone else was forced to be silent. This is what the apostle Paul had to say about his experience:

**2 Corinthians 12:4:** “How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”

It seems extremely unlikely that the *apostle Paul* would be forbidden to talk about Heaven, but all these other people that we know nothing about are allowed to write entire books about it and have movies made. Even though Paul's credibility is unimpeachable, he was allowed to say nothing. Yet we are to believe that God has chosen to reveal the hidden secrets of Heaven to people who are not apostles and whose story we cannot verify? Does that really seem likely to you?

There is also the fact that these books about Heaven constitute new revelation. They are telling us things about God and God's home that are not included in the Bible – yet the Bible tells us that it contains everything that we need. If these books about Heaven are true then that means the Bible isn't sufficient and God left out a lot of details that we need to know – but we know God wouldn't do that! That can only mean that the books on Heaven are a lie. You simply cannot have it both ways: either the Bible is sufficient and contains everything that we need, or it isn't.

After talking about the way God has chosen to speak through His Son, the writer goes on to point out the preeminence of Christ:

**Hebrews 1:2b:** “whom he hath appointed heir of all things”

This is a very significant statement that looks forward to the coming reign of Christ. One of the great truths that has been largely lost in our day is the fact that Christ is *King*. Not only is He *a* king, but He is *the* King – the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The day is coming when He will rule over the world and all that it contains:

**Revelation 11:15:** “And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”

Revelation 20 speaks of the Millennium – the time when Jesus will reign over the world for a thousand years of peace. The reign of Christ is not limited to that time, however. The book of Daniel tells us that He will create an everlasting kingdom:

**Daniel 2:44:** “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.”

Jesus Christ is going to reign forever and ever.

After telling us that Jesus is the heir of all things, the book of Hebrews goes on to tell us that Christ is the Creator:

**Hebrews 1:2c:** “by whom also he made the worlds”

Not only will Christ one day rule over the world, but He is the one who created the world in the first place! Jesus Christ created the world, saved the world, and will one day rule over the world. The one who died for us is the one who formed us in the first place.

As if all of that were not enough, we are also told that Christ is a perfect image of God the Father:

**Hebrews 1:3a:** “Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person”

What this means is that God the Son is a perfect reflection (or copy) of God the Father. The Son does not do His own will, but instead He does the will of the Father. The Son is perfect, as His Father is perfect. Jesus Himself told His disciples that seeing Him was the same thing as seeing the Father:

**John 14:8:** “Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.  
9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?”

That is not because the two are actually the same being (they are *not*), but because Jesus perfectly reflects the person, work, and character of His Father.

Taken together, all of these verses paint an amazing picture of Christ – but the writer is not done. He has more to say:

**Hebrews 1:3b:** “and upholding all things by the word of his power”

Throughout history there have been people known as Deists, who believed that God created then world and then walked away from His creation to allow it to do whatever it wanted. Deists believe that God doesn't interfere with mankind. However, the Bible tells us that is not the case. As we read through the Scriptures we see that God is the one who directs the flow of history, and who sets up kings and nations and destroys them. This verse tells us that Jesus actually holds Creation together – in fact, the the universe continues to exist because of His divine power. The universe is not something that Jesus made once and then walked away from; it is something that He continues to uphold. That is an amazing thing.

Not only did Jesus create the universe, but as we said earlier He also saved us from our sins:

**Hebrews 1:3c:** “when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high:”

It is an astonishing thing that God, the everlasting creator, would willingly die for the sins of His creation, mankind. That is an incredible testament to His surpassing love for us. He freely gave Himself for us, and suffered a cruel death on the cross for our sins. He took on Himself the punishment that we deserved. What amazing love!

The author of Hebrews is making it clear that Jesus is of surpassing greatness. Jesus is the heir

of all things; He will one day rule over all. Jesus is the one who created the universe. Jesus is the perfect image of God the Father. Jesus upholds the universe by His power. Jesus saved us from our sins by offering Himself as a sacrifice. The author then goes on to point out that Jesus is much, much better than the angels:

**Hebrews 1:4:** “Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

5 For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?

6 And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.

7 And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.”

Some cults claim that Jesus is just an angel, but that is a lie. Jesus is far greater than the angels; He is God, part of the Trinity. In fact, Jesus is the one who created the angels in the first place! As we can see in verse 6, the angels are commanded to worship Jesus. Our Lord is far superior to the angels. His power, His position, and His glory are vastly greater. God has given Jesus an everlasting throne:

**Hebrews 1:8:** “But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.

9 Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”

The angels are not kings; they do not rule over creation. As we can see in Hebrews 1:7, the angels are servants – they carry out the will of God. Jesus, however, has an everlasting throne. He will rule over all of creation with perfect righteousness.

This matters much more than it seems. Islam teaches that its god Allah can do as he pleases: he can be both evil and good, and can choose to do right or choose to do evil. Allah is not bound by his oaths, but can break them freely. In other words, he can choose to be as evil as he wants.

That is a tremendous difference from the God revealed in the Bible. The Scriptures tell us that God is utterly perfect and righteous: He hates evil and cannot even be tempted by it. God always keeps His promises and never breaks His word; in fact, His word *cannot* be broken:

**John 10:35:** “If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken;”

God is utterly upright and holy. As Hebrews 1:9 tells us, He loves righteousness and hates iniquity.

Jesus is also eternal. The universe itself will one day come to an end, but Jesus will endure forever:

**Hebrews 1:10:** “And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands:

11 They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment;

12 And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.”

The apostle Peter also speaks of the fact that one day the world and all that it contains will be destroyed by fire:

**2 Peter 3:10:** “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”

Throughout the Bible the phrase “day of the Lord” refers to the Tribulation period. The Bible teaches that during the Tribulation, God will pour out His wrath upon a sinful and wicked world. At the end of that period God will destroy this world and create a new one, which He will reign over during His Millennial Kingdom. Isaiah 65:17-25 talks about this glorious world that is coming:

**Isaiah 65:17:** “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

18 But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.”

The passage goes on to say that the lion will lay down with the lamb, and there will be great peace and harmony. People will live so long that someone who dies at the age of 100 will be considered to be just a child. It will be a time of tremendous joy.

But even this is not the end. Revelation 20 tells us that at the end of the Millennium, Satan will be freed from his prison. He will deceive the nations and gather together a mighty army, and will attempt to overthrow God. However, God will defeat the devil and cast him into the Lake of Fire. There will then be a final judgment, where God will judge the wicked and will put an end to all evil and to death itself.

After that is over God will create yet another new heaven and earth. This one, though, will be different:

**Revelation 21:1:** “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

In this perfect world to come, there will no longer be any sin or suffering or pain or death. The devil will be gone forever, and evil will have been ended once and for all. On top of that, God will now live with mankind on Earth. Right now God is in Heaven and man is on Earth; a holy God cannot live in a sinful world. In the world that is to come, though, there will be no such divide: God and man will



live together in the same world. This world will pass away, and God will replace it with a much better one.

The chapter concludes as the author makes his point that Jesus is vastly superior to the angels:

**Hebrews 1:13:** “But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?

14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”

The angels are servants, sent to minister to mankind. They do not rule over mankind, nor are they gods. There are some people who worship angels, but that is a sin. God is the only one who we should worship. Angels are the servants of God, and God uses them to minister to us – the heirs of salvation. Jesus is the one who will rule over all things.