

Associates for Scriptural Knowledge • P.O. Box 25000, Portland, OR 97298-0990 USA
 © ASK, December 2024 • All rights reserved • Number 12/24

Telephone: 503 292 4352

• **Internet:** www.askelm.com •

E-Mail: askoffice@askelm.com

The Book of Hebrews

by Ernest L. Martin, Ph.D., 1982

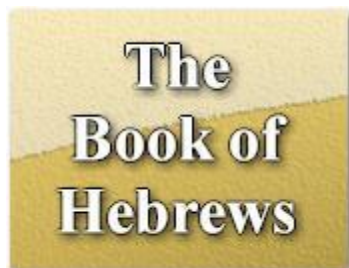
Edited and expanded by David Sielaff, 2004, December 2024

Read the accompanying "[December 2024 Newsletter](#)"

Listen to the Byte Show Interview on this article:

The Book of Hebrews - [Listen](#) • [Download](#) • [MP3](#)

[More Byte Show Interviews...](#)



The Book of Hebrews has a relation to what I call “the fullness of the Gospel,” the disclosure of God’s final doctrinal revelation to man which Paul called “the Mystery.” This discussion may be technical, but it is important. We need to ask some questions about the Book of Hebrews. What I present is not to be taken as dogma, but as something for us to study. We must ask some important questions: (1) Who wrote the Book of Hebrews? (2) When was it written? (3) To whom was it written?

To understand all the books of the Bible, you should ask those questions about each book and try to answer if you can. Most of the information should come internally from Scripture. If we can understand the Book of Hebrews (or any book of itself), we can begin to comprehend the collective teaching of Christ overall.

These questions about who wrote Hebrews, to whom it was written, and when, are questions scholars ask. However, in this day and age we need to know what God has to say from His word in a technical sense. We have to know the legal basis of our doctrines. Once we get the basics straight, then we can better understand the spiritual teachings. I am interested in the concepts God gives to us: concepts of living in this life, where we are going, and what to be teaching to all people. These are things we need to know.

Hebrews becomes a new book to many people when they look at the three questions in this fashion. The answers are also vitally important to understanding Paul’s teaching concerning “the Mystery.”¹ We should always rightly divide the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15) because not all parts of Scripture pertain to us. I have gone over this repeatedly, and we are all aware of it.

For example, certain sections of the Old Testament regarding the priesthood and how the Holy of Holies was to be entered only on the Day of Atonement by the High Priest have nothing to do with you, regarding your actions. It does, however, have to do with you in type, which is in the sense of the overall plan of God.

¹ The most complete explanation of “the Mystery” is in Dr. Martin’s book [The Essentials of New Testament Doctrine](#). DWS

But those scriptures do not pertain to the priesthood, but to a particular priest called the High Priest, and then only on that one day of the year.

In the New Testament, not a week before Christ was crucified, He said something interesting about the Scribes and Pharisees. Though He gave strong criticisms against them, He also said THEY sit in Moses' seat, therefore **“whatsoever they bid you observe, that OBSERVE and DO”** (Matthew 23:2). A few days later after His crucifixion and resurrection, especially after the dispensing of God's Holy Spirit to man, Peter stood up and spoke. When those scribes and Pharisees commanded him **not** to speak in the name of the Lord Jesus, Peter said **“We ought to obey God rather than men”** (Acts 5:29). So, even what Christ said back in the Gospels, in some cases, does not always pertain to us today. This is why we should rightly divide the Word of God.²

The Teachings of the Book of Hebrews

We need to know what teachings pertain to us at the present time. There were commissions given to the twelve apostles to go to Israel, to the circumcised, and there was a commission that went to Paul, Barnabas and those associated with them, to go to the Gentiles.

In the Book of Hebrews, we read quite a bit of information that pertains only to the priesthood, the Temple, the sacrifices, the furniture in the Temple, the New Covenant, the Old Covenant, what the High Priest would do and would not do, etc. Because of that, and particularly because the title “Hebrews” is at the beginning of the book, there is a feeling that this book is part of the ministry of the twelve apostles. Those who want to rightly divide the Word of God say it may not pertain to Paul's ministry, which was to go to the Gentiles.

This is what I want to examine. I am not sure I have complete answers to all these questions, but if we make a careful internal study of Hebrews we can come to some truths on the matter. We will find there is good practical teaching as well. If we do not get the practical, then forget the technical. One leads to the other.

A Key to Authorship in the Manuscripts

So, who wrote the Book of Hebrews? I am accustomed to saying that Paul wrote it, as are the majority of evangelicals. However, most critical scholars do not think that Paul wrote Hebrews. The style of Hebrews is quite different than Paul's other letters. There are other features about the book that give the impression perhaps it is not Pauline. However, the manuscript evidence (85% of them, including some of the earliest manuscripts) place the Book of Hebrews in a different position than we have it in our King James Bible.

The manuscript evidence is very important because they were the official documents read in *ekklesias* scattered throughout the Mediterranean world. I have a great deal of esteem for the ancient manuscripts³ where 95% of them have the order of the four Gospels and Acts that we have today. There is a fundamental difference in most manuscripts when it comes to the next 7 epistles. We call them the General Epistles (sometimes called the Catholic Epistles). Over 95% of manuscripts place these epistles before Paul's epistles.

Next come the 14 epistles of Paul (2 x 7).⁴ The Book of Hebrews is placed after Second Thessalonians and before First Timothy. Then afterward we have what are known as the Pastoral Epistles given to pastors or evangelists, all individuals: Timothy, Titus, Philemon and then last of all is the great Book of Revelation.

The position of Hebrews in the vast majority of official manuscripts shows it in the midst of the epistles of Paul. This would lead you to believe that the epistle comes from the hand of the apostle Paul. Many early Christian Fathers actually mention that the Book of Hebrews belongs there. From this point of view up to now

² The Book of Hebrews and the rest of the books of the New Testament give God's divine revelation to mankind. The first four are the Gospels. Christ Jesus gave the teachings in those four Gospels (as beautiful as they may be) to unconverted people. They did not have God's Holy Spirit until Acts chapter 2. The teachings of Acts were given specifically to the Jewish nation as well. They were given them before the New Covenant was even ratified by Christ Himself. So, we need to view these Gospels through the magnifying glass of the later epistles of Paul to arrive at the final revelation of God. This is sensible and right. *ELM*

³ A detailed discussion of the correct manuscript order of the New Testament books is the subject of Dr. Martin's book [Restoring the Original Bible](#), 1994, free online. See the graphic: [“Diagram: the Symmetry of the Bible.”](#) *DWS*

⁴ There are 7 church epistles of Paul. The 7 churches are: the epistle to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae and two to Thessalonica (the 7th church). Hebrews comes after the epistles to the 7th *ekklesia*. *DWS*

I think we would say that Hebrews comes from the apostle Paul. But let us go farther.

Look at the end of the epistle, the final salutation of it. We read about an individual who was closely associated with the apostle Paul from the beginning of his ministry in Asia Minor. **“Know you that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; WITH WHOM, if he come shortly, I will see you”** (Hebrews 13:23). The author of Hebrews is clearly someone close to Timothy who was with him at the time he wrote. This gives credence to the idea that the apostle Paul wrote Hebrews.

There is another point we ought to look at, and that is verse 13:24: **“Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints.”** I must comment on the word **“rule.”** In Greek it means to “lead,” those who lead you. (We need lots of leaders. I am not sure we need lots of rulers.) **“Greet all your leaders, and all the saints. Those from Italy are greeting you”** (Hebrews 13:24 CLV). The author of this passage apparently was in Italy at the time he wrote. He had a group of people around him and he says, **“Those from (or of) Italy are greeting you.”**⁵

Go to Hebrews chapter 2 where a small difficulty appears to arise.

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord [in Palestine to the original 12 disciples], and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.”

• *Hebrews 2:3 KJV*

This seems to give evidence that this could not be the apostle Paul. But why could it not be Paul? Look at it carefully, it says: **“... which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him”** (Hebrews 2:3).

There are those who say this could not be Paul because the apostle saw Christ and heard Him speak on the road to Damascus. Since Paul heard Him and later received revelations from God, surely the person writing Hebrews could not have been the apostle Paul. Whoever wrote Hebrews did not see the Lord, but had to have the message confirmed unto him (**“unto us”**) by those that did.⁶

However, upon closer examination of this verse I do not think there is any difficulty at all with Paul being the author because he says, **“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord”** (Hebrews 2:3). The phrase **“at the first”** means the teaching of the Gospel. Where was Paul when the message of the Gospels was first given? He was not a Christian at all.

Later on, after Paul was converted on the road to Damascus, he did go down to Peter. Paul asked him what Christ actually said, **“at the first.”** He went to James and was given information afterward about what the Lord first said. So, I do not think this verse gives any problem as far as the apostle Paul being the author of Hebrews.

The main reason I think Paul was the author is because of the book’s position in the manuscripts. All other reasons are subsidiary to me, although they should be considered carefully.

Paul in Italy

If the apostle Paul authored Hebrews, it had to be written at a particular time in his life because he says, **“They of Italy salute you”** (Hebrews 13:24). This means the author, likely Paul, was in Italy at this time.

Secondly, it says that Timothy was about to be released from prison. He says, paraphrasing: if he comes to you, I will come with him. So, the author is in Italy. He is with Timothy, and since we know that Paul was in prison in Italy at a particular occasion, perhaps Hebrews was written at that time.

⁵ I realize there is controversy on this among some critical scholars. They will say that this epistle may have been written in another area than Italy and that some people from Italy were with the author and it means, “Those of Italy also salute you.” I think that is hyper-criticism to be quite honest. The epistle was undoubtedly written from Italy. The man who wrote it said, “those of Italy are saying to you, hello.” And remember, Timothy was there. If this was the apostle Paul, it all makes sense. There would not be any difficulty at all. *ELM*

⁶ At first glance this makes sense. When I first read this argument I concluded that Hebrews was not Pauline. I started to look for someone I thought was the author. I picked Apollos, the eloquent man from Alexandria. I knew he had not seen Christ at all, and Aquila and Priscilla gave him the message of Christ more perfectly (Acts 18:24–28). He seemed to fit very well. Indeed, since much of the information seemed to be Pauline, as I would consider it, and Apollos seemed to be associated with him, I picked him. *ELM*

To recap Paul's chronology in Italy, in Acts chapter 21 the apostle Paul went to Jerusalem. He discussed with the apostles about events happening in the Gentile world. He went into the Temple and was about to offer a sacrifice after the conclusion of a Nazarite vow. Jewish authorities apprehended him there. They took him from Jerusalem down to the Mediterranean coast to the city of Caesarea. That was a Roman enclave and Roman governmental capital of Palestine at the time.

They put Paul in prison, and he stayed there for two years. Some have said that maybe he wrote Hebrews when he was in Caesarea. However, Caesarea is not in Italy. After being there about two years, he finally petitioned Caesar. Since he was a Roman citizen, the governor had no alternative but to put him on a vessel and to send him to Rome. We read in Acts chapters 26 and 27 about the journey to Rome.

In Acts chapter 28 Paul gets to Rome. When he arrives, he calls the Jewish elders of the community, talks with them about the kingdom of God and the majority of them reject him and the message. He then says from now on I will go to the Gentiles. The last two verses of Acts tell us something that happened to Paul while in Rome, Italy. We can take these historical incidents as not important, but when it comes to understanding the overall doctrines of the Scripture, we had better take everything into account. They are given for a reason:

“And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house [in Rome], and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.”

• Acts 28:30–31 KJV

Paul was under house arrest in Rome. He was incarcerated and he could not leave his home, although he could have anyone come to him. He had this privilege because he was a Roman citizen. If he were not a Roman citizen, the conditions of his imprisonment would have been very different. He was incarcerated but he was to be tried by Caesar himself for so-called crimes against the state. He was there for two whole years. Clearly that means he was released after two years. We know from later history, from First and Second Timothy that he had been released from incarceration at the hired house.

Scholars call this the first Roman imprisonment. The reason it is the first one is because he was later apprehended (perhaps 5 years later), and this time he was not released. He had his head chopped off, according to tradition. On the first occasion he was released, so apparently his appeal to the Roman government was successful. They let him go because there was no crime that would keep him in prison any longer.

It is interesting that he was able to do as he pleased in his own house in Rome. He could receive visitors, who could come and go, but he had to remain there at the same time. Though the Jews in Rome rejected him, it was a very profitable time for Paul, [1] for reflection, [2] for revelations he received, and [3] for epistles that he produced. At that time (there can hardly be any question) he wrote near the end of the two years: the epistles of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and perhaps Philemon. He may have written other epistles.

When Was Hebrews Written?

If the Book of Hebrews is Pauline (as I firmly believe) and was in Italy when he wrote it, and says Timothy is about to be released, and that if released **“I will come with him.”** (In other words, he will go wherever you Hebrews are.) Paul will see them again. The only time that would fit would be at the conclusion of his first Roman imprisonment. This would put the date when the Book of Hebrews was written to be about 61 AD.

The importance of this date is that Hebrews was written near and before he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. These three books are often called the Prison Epistles of Paul, written during or at the end of Paul's two years imprisonment in Rome. If he wrote these epistles at that time, and if he wrote Hebrews at that time, they in a sense go together.

The interesting thing is that Ephesians talks about something happening at that time, a new revelation had come: the fullness of the Gospel. In Colossians Paul talks about the filling to the top that was not known in former ages, as it is now made known by the Holy Spirit, that fullness of the Gospel of Christ, that doctrinal position that finally came by divine revelation given while Paul was in prison those two years. If that is the case then Paul wrote Hebrews knowing full well the Mystery of God by this time. That is why it is important

to put all of these things together and see if Hebrews does indeed come from Paul because Paul was given the teaching of the Mystery. [See my 2-page, July 2021 Commentary, "[The Mystery, A Definition.](#)" DWS]

I think we have arrived at some general conclusions as to who wrote it, though one cannot be dogmatic about it. At the beginning of Hebrews, the author says **"God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke ..."** (Hebrews 1:1). The author does not identify himself as Paul. He starts out as if it is a treatise of some kind. It is not titled in any way.⁷

To Whom Was Hebrews Written?

Back to the introduction, how did it get its title "Hebrews"? It starts out by saying **"God, who at sundry times ..."** It does not say, "I am writing to Hebrews." Indeed since it deals with the Tabernacle, the Temple, the priesthood, tithing, the New Covenant, the Old Covenant, sacrifices, things like that, explaining them in great detail from a Christian point of view, many come to the conclusion that the only people who would be interested, to have a spiritual interpretation of those things, would be Jews, would be Hebrews. So, it seemed fitting to give it the name "Hebrews." That is how the name was attached. The title was derived from its apparent contents. If a person wants to do so, call it "Hebrews." But I put quote marks around it, the name is not part of the divine text.

Many say this epistle was primarily written to Jews, and specifically Jews who lived in Palestine. However, there are difficulties if you look at the internal evidence of this epistle, and limit it to Jews or Jews of Palestine.

The apostle Paul (who, from now on, I will consider to be the author) has something to say about these people, to whom "Hebrews" was sent. They were a select group of people in a specific area, which had particular problems. They were under great persecution at the time. Paul refers to the persecution. This is what he says about these people, encouraging them to endure the persecution sent against them.

"For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds."⁸ You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

• **Hebrews 12:3–4 KJV**

Although you might say this is "backdoor reasoning," I think it is important. If these were Palestinian Jews he is writing to, that would not make much sense, especially if they were from Jerusalem. I will tell you why. We know that a man called Stephen (who was of the *ekklesia* and of the Jewish community in Palestine at Jerusalem) in the 7th chapter of Acts stood outside the gates of Jerusalem, and began to preach a sermon to the people. When he got to a particular point they became enraged. They took up stones and stoned him. He was the first Christian martyr that the Scriptures record. Holding the clothes of the people who stoned him was a man called Saul, who later became the apostle Paul. The Jerusalem *ekklesia* had a martyr **"unto blood"** in Stephen.

James (not the Lord's brother, but the other James, one of the apostles) was next. Herod Agrippa the First killed him **"because it pleased the Jews"** (Acts 12:2–3). How many others were killed in Palestine, we do not know, but there must have been many. Things changed over time. By Acts chapter 21 it says in the original Greek that there were tens of thousands of people who believed by that time. Believers were beginning to be more of a power at that time. At the beginning, though, they were not looked on with a great deal of esteem. I can imagine that there were all types of people who were imprisoned and perhaps even gave their lives in Palestine in particular. That was the hotbed of persecution. Certainly, we know that Stephen and James were killed, and their blood was shed in the Jerusalem area.

⁷ The King James Version gives a title, "The Epistle of Paul, the Apostle to the Hebrews," but this was put in much later and is not part of any early manuscripts before the end of the 2nd century AD. It began to be used around the 3rd century AD, and by the 4th century, about the time of the Council of Nicaea, there was still doubt whether Hebrews was Pauline. Nevertheless, I think the evidence shows the apostle Paul wrote it. *ELM*

⁸ Later I show that these people were on the verge of giving up Christianity, because of persecution not doctrine. *ELM*

If this epistle was sent to those Hebrews in Palestine, when they read this scripture, **“You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin”** (Hebrews 12:4) they might have said, what about Stephen? What about James? They resisted unto blood. Many scholars have made this point to show that the Book of Hebrews probably did not go to Palestine.

If it did not go to Palestine, then maybe it went to Hebrews or Jews in some other place. If the Book of Hebrews went to Jews generally then we have another problem. If Paul was the author, though he did preach in Palestine to Jews, and though he did speak to the Jews first wherever he went on his journeys, notice what happened systematically wherever he went:

- Paul went to central Asia Minor in the Roman province of Galatia and preached in Antioch. When the Jews turned against him he more or less dusted off his feet of them and said, from now on I will go to the Gentiles in this area.
- Then he went to Derbe and virtually the same thing happened there.
- Then he went to Lystra.
- Then to Iconium.

In each case Paul would **first** go to the synagogue where most everyone rejected him. **Then** Paul turned and went to the Gentiles. On his second journey he went into Asia Minor and then into Europe,

- He first went to Philippi and talked to the women by the riverside.
- Then he went to Thessalonica and talked to the people in the synagogue. They did not like what he said there, and they tossed him out.
- Then he went to Berea farther to the west. When he got there, they were more noble than the others because they studied their scriptures daily to see if those things were so.
- Then he went to Athens. After going to the synagogue, then he spoke with the philosophers.
- Then to Corinth. First he went to the Jewish synagogue and then he had to go aside to another area.
- When he was taken to Rome, the first people he saw were the Jewish elders.

He had nothing against the Jews. Paul loved the Jews. He talked to them. He wanted them to be converted to the truth, but they rejected him completely in Acts chapter 28. The last thing he said in Rome was that from then on he was turning to the Gentiles.

Though he went to Jews earlier on, it is interesting that up to about 61 AD (the time of the first Roman imprisonment), he had gone to Jews, Jews, Jews. And do you know what they did? In most cases they rejected him and his message. The reason he was in Rome at that first Roman imprisonment in jeopardy of his life was because the Jewish people in Palestine wanted to see him killed. He had to go to Rome, under Roman jurisdiction. The Roman government saved him from death.

Was “Hebrews” Written to Jews?

If Hebrews was written in 61 AD and Paul wrote to Jews, Jews, and more Jews, continually from Jerusalem to Rome and every place in between, and most rejected Paul, do you really think he wrote another epistle — “Hebrews” — to Jews? That would be hard to accept on the surface. But perhaps Paul did so!

But if he did that, there is a problem because in Galatians chapter 2 we find that the apostle Paul’s mission was primarily to go to the uncircumcision. That was his authority. Paul was with the Jerusalem apostles, James, Peter, John, and the rest. They discussed all the doctrines that were coming up. Paul explained what he was doing in Gentile land and that the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised.

“But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed UNTO ME, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter

to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)

And when James, Cephas [Peter], and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision [the Jews].”

• **Galatians 2:7–9 KJV**

The Jews really were the responsibility of James, Cephas (Peter) and John and the others associated with them. Paul said so. If the apostle Paul wrote this Book of Hebrews particularly to Palestine Jews, who was in Palestine in 61 AD? James the apostle, the head of the *ekklesia* was there in Jerusalem. He was not killed until 62 AD (Josephus the Jewish historian mentions his death in *Antiquities of the Jews* 20:200). As far as we know, Peter was also there. John was there, perhaps, although traditions have him in some other places.

These apostles must have been there because when you get tens of thousands of Jews that believe, do you just abandon them and go someplace else when problems arise? Of course not. There were all types of authorities speaking to those Jews in Palestine, including James, as late as 62 AD. If Paul wrote Hebrews in 61 AD, sent it from Rome by ship to Caesarea, and then someone took it to the Christian community where James and the rest, sitting around a table — then what? Paul is giving them instructions? Think about it, what affrontery! Was James unable to manage the situation? I guess not, if this goes to Jerusalem or Palestine.

Who was commissioned to go to the circumcised? They were. Paul tells us this in 2 Corinthians 10:14–16. He never went outside his limits, beyond the authority God gave to him. The areas God gave to Paul, no man went to before. He has not preached Christ in other areas. This would have been an offense against James and the rest of them. We can be sure they were able to manage the situation in Jerusalem or Palestine. Why would Paul have to write this epistle to them?

Other problems are involved here if “Hebrews” went to Jews, even those scattered throughout Paul’s areas. Let us look at some interesting scriptures to see if this went to Jews and examine some of the problems. Go to Hebrews chapter 7. Notice how Paul refers to the patriarch Abraham there, and others in the faith chapter in Hebrews 11, but particularly notice how he refers to Abraham.

Impersonal References

Abraham was the father of the Jews. They looked upon him with a great deal of sanctity, and rightly so. It was normal to refer to Abraham in intimate terms by Jews: **“our father Abraham.”**⁹ Paul did it on many occasions. But when you come here to Hebrews chapter 7, it speaks here of Melchisedek, **“To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all”** (Hebrews 7:2). This tells us little, but go down to verse 4: **“Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils”** (Hebrews 7:4).¹⁰

The apostle Peter is speaking: **“The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his Son Jesus”** (Acts 3:13). Notice **“our fathers”** there. Later, speaking to Jews again, he says: **“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you slew and hanged on a tree”** (Acts 5:30).

Go to Acts chapter 7. This is Stephen, a Jew, speaking to Jews in Jerusalem:

“And he said, ‘Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia ... Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance.”

• **Acts 7:2, 11 KJV**

Note the familiarity and the intimate expressions. Although Stephen was talking to a group that later proved

⁹ Regarding the high esteem Abraham was held as father of the Jews, see Joshua 24:2; Isaiah 51:2, 63:16; Matthew 3:9; Luke 1:55, 73, 3:8, 16:24, 30; John 8:39, 53, 56; Acts 3:13, 25; 7:2, 32; Romans 4:1, 12, 16; and James 2:21. DWS

¹⁰ You may think I am being picky and trying to make a point from nothing, but I will make it anyway. The normal way you would describe Abraham to a Jewish community, by one Jew talking to another would have been to say, “our father Abraham.” Here in Hebrews 7:4 Abraham is left in the common sense, not expressed in the intimate or familiar. Notice, however, in Acts how commonly Jews would refer to Abraham. Not all the time, of course, but commonly this is how they would refer to Abraham. ELM

hostile, still at the same time there were “**fathers**,” “**brethren**” and “**men**” — all children of Abraham.

“But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. ... So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers.”

• Acts 7:12, 15 KJV

“This is he, that was in the church [*ekklesia*, assembly] in the wilderness with the angel which spoke to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: To whom our fathers would not obey.”

• Acts 7:38–39 KJV

“Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, ... Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David.”

• Acts 7:44–45 KJV

Go to the apostle Paul in Acts chapter 13 in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia:

“The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt.”

• Acts 13:17 KJV

In Acts chapter 15 Peter speaks at the Jerusalem Council:

“Now therefore why tempt your God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”

• Acts 15:10 KJV

Do you see the intimate, familiar terms coming out when Jews are in the environment? Acts chapter 26 has Paul standing before Agrippa: **“And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers”** (Acts 26:6).

Acts chapter 28, when Paul was at Rome, he called together the chief of the Jews (verse 17):

“And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word,

‘Well spoke the Holy Ghost [Spirit] by Isaiah the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you shall see, and not perceive: ... Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God IS SENT UNTO THE GENTILES, and that they will hear it.’”

• Acts 28:25–26, 28 KJV

Paul uses the phrase “**all our fathers**” to Gentiles in 1 Corinthians 10:1, so maybe it is weakened somewhat. But go to Hebrews where Paul discusses these people quite commonly and not in the intimate sense whatsoever. Go to Hebrews chapter 7 (I covered verse 4 above): **“For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood”** (Hebrews 7:14). The reference to Moses is in the common and not the familiar sense.

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive ...” (Hebrews 11:8). Again, he does not say “**our father Abraham**” in the familiar sense. NONE of the men and women in Hebrews chapter 11 are ever referred to in the familiar sense. There is no expression of collective intimacy.

I know this for certain: if they had been exclusively Jews, the terms would have been differently expressed. I see no reason to suppose that these people were Jews at all, especially if the apostle Paul wrote it. As I said before, if this were sent to Palestine, James and the rest of them were there.

Could they not have handled the situation without someone writing a letter from Rome to remind them of the first principles of the Gospel of Christ? However, if the apostle Paul wrote it, and if he was writing to a particular people (which he certainly did, and he mentions particular afflictions they were suffering), then it all begins to make some sense. Perhaps we can establish the destination, address, and audience of Hebrews.

The Original Audience of “Hebrews”

First of all, I would like to show you the state of affairs of these “Hebrews” that prompted the apostle Paul to write in the first place. There were two main reasons he had to write, maybe three reasons.

- **One** was to clear up the matter of Temple services, sacrifices and all of that.
- The **Second** reason was because of angel worship and the idea of angels as intermediaries between man and God that developed since Paul saw them last. He did not want them to get into that error.
- **Third**, they were under great persecution. You find this discussed from the beginning in Hebrews chapter 2 after the general introduction, there is scripture after scripture where Paul is encouraging these people who are in great affliction.

Again, in Palestine in 61 AD. there were tens of thousands of Jews who believed, the persecution had subsided tremendously up until 66 AD when the Jewish-Roman war broke out. Most Christians were against that war, and there may have been persecution there. But the people of the Book of Hebrews were under great persecution. Now I want to mention that these people had been Christians for a long time, because Paul says in Hebrews chapter 5 as he begins to introduce the subject of Melchizedek:

“Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing you are dull of hearing. For when for the time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and [you] are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that uses milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

• **Hebrews 5:11–14 KJV**

Obviously, these people had long ago known Christ. If they were people the apostle Paul wrote to or knew, they would have come in contact with him at an early time of his ministry. That is very important. Chapter 6:

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ [Messiah], let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit.”

• **Hebrews 6:1–3 KJV**

He then goes on to give very mature teaching to these “Hebrews,” not the first principles. He says they **“ought to be teachers,”** so they had been a long time in Christianity, relatively speaking. But they were in great persecution. And from the context of Hebrews many of them, collectively, were getting close to giving up on their faith because of the great persecution.

The Challenge to the Faith of the “Hebrews”

Let us get into the context of Hebrews chapter 2. After the general introduction in chapter 1, notice he goes into encouragement. He wants to give them faith and strength to stay close to the truth and not give up.

“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation.”

• **Hebrews 2:1–3 KJV**

I previously read the rest of the verse [see above]. It seems like they were in the process of neglecting a great salvation, very near to letting it slip. Look at Hebrews 3:6 where he encourages them to, **“hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.”** This theme is developed throughout the entire epistle. He is telling them to hold on, to not fall away.

- Verse 3:12: **“in departing from the living God.”** [Paul says not to do that. *DWS*]
- Verse 3:13: **“lest any of you be hardened.”**
- Verse 3:14: **“if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.”**
- Verse 3:15: **“harden not your hearts.”**

You do not talk like that when people are strong. You talk like that when people are beginning to weaken. These long-time Christians were beginning to slip.

- Verse 4:1: **“Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”**
- Verse 4:7: **“harden not your hearts.”**
- Verse 4:11: **“lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”**
- Verse 4:14: **“let us hold fast our profession.”**

He does not stop with chapter 4, he continues:

- Verse 5:11: **“you are dull of hearing.”**
- Verse 5:12 **“For when for the time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one each you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God.”**

They slipped back doctrinally as well. (See chapter 6 verse 3 above.)

- Verse 6:11: **“show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.”**
- Verse 6:12: **“be not slothful [Greek, sluggish].”**
- Verse 6:12: **“through faith and patience inherit the promises.”**
- Verse 6:15: **“after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.”**

These people are just about to lose something very important if they do not watch out.

Melchizedek Teachings in Hebrews

Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10 contain the long doctrinal section with very mature teaching concerning Melchizedek, the New Covenant, the priesthood, the Tabernacle, the Temple, everything in it, and giving the spiritual significance of it all. We do not find him saying anywhere in these four chapters anything about them slipping. But in chapter 10, he begins again talking about their personal affairs:

- Verse 10:23: **“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.”**
- Verse 10:25: **“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.”**

They were departing from each other. They were in danger of slipping.

“But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after you were illuminated [with the Gospel], you endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, while you were made a gazing stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, while you became companions of them that were so used.

For you had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that you have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.”

• *Hebrews 10:32–34 KJV*

Paul is telling them to remember those former days and to stand fast.

- Verse 10:36: **“you have need of patience”**
- Verse 10:38: **“If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him”**
- Verse 10:39: **“We are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe [having faith] to the saving of the soul.”**

That is the last verse of chapter 10.

Hebrews Chapter 11, The Faith Chapter

We are all familiar with chapter 11. Why is this long chapter on faith included? Most of the faith expressed in this long chapter is faith of the patriarchs of old, the prophets, etc., who under great affliction and trial stayed steadfast to the truth. The reason for this whole teaching is to give them faith to trust in God in their time of great affliction. After the faith chapter we come to chapter 12:

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.”

• *Hebrews 12:1 KJV*

Paul pleads for patience. That is why he says faith is essential. Faith is not something you see by sight. Faith is something that you see through the spiritual eye. You do not see the possessions of it immediately.

“For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds. You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. ... For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives.”

• *Hebrews 12:3–4, 6 KJV*

It is for chastening that you endure, and Paul recommends that they do so endure.

“Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous ... Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.”

• *Hebrews 12:11–12 KJV*

Strengthen them up. They were about to lose these things that they gained from Christianity a long time ago. They were going backwards doctrinally, going backwards as to faith, going backwards in almost every way. Paul is here encouraging them and giving them strong spiritual meat in the central chapters telling them the truth of God regarding these things. **“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you ...”** (Hebrews 12:15).

The remainder of chapter 12 is commentary on that theme. But from chapter 2 all through to chapter 12 Paul is telling them to hang on, because they were just about to give up, doctrinally and in other ways.

The “Errors” of the “Hebrews”

What were some of the doctrines they were having difficulty with? Again, I want to point out, they were teachings that most Jews did not have trouble with, but Gentiles did. Paul introduces the subject.

“God, who at sundry times and in divers’ manners spoke in time past unto the fathers [not OUR fathers] by the prophets, Has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds [Greek: *aions*, ages of time].”

• *Hebrews 1:1–2 KJV*

Paul will exalt one person and one person only — that is the Son of God. Throughout all of the mature doctrinal section of Hebrews, it shows the exaltation of the Son above all priesthoods, above all sacrifices, above all Temples, above all principalities and powers. But he introduces the Book of Hebrews with a subject that was giving them doctrinal trouble and was causing them to slip from the central truths of Christianity that Paul taught them earlier. One of their main problems was that the “Hebrews” were beginning to forget that the Son had to be exalted, nobody else. Then suddenly Paul begins to say something about angels in Hebrews 1:4: **“Being made so much better than the angels, as he [Jesus] has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”**

The subject will be angels for the rest of chapter 1 and into chapter 2. They were having great difficulty understanding the role of angels and they were slipping back doctrinally in regard to this. The apostle Paul

from the very beginning of the epistle states directly that there is only one person that you look to, that is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. But these people were beginning to accept doctrines of angels and making angels to be intermediaries between them and God. This is why Paul in verse 4 says someone is better than angels.

“For unto WHICH OF THE ANGELS said he at any time, ‘You are my Son, this day have I begotten you? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?’”

• *Hebrews 1:5 KJV*

“Which of the angels?” Not even one angel. Only Jesus Christ shall be a Son to God His Father. **“And again, when he brings in the firstbegotten into the world, he says, ‘And let all the angels of God worship him.’”** (Hebrews 1:6). Angels? Is that what you want to go after, Paul says? Here is a man the angels must worship.

“And of the angels he says, ‘Who makes his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.’ But unto the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever [for the ages of the ages].’”

• *Hebrews 1:7–8 KJV*

Angels are ministering spirits, but they are far, far lower and are not even part of the Godhead. These “Hebrews” were taking up with doctrinal error concerning angels. Look at verse 13: **“But to which of the angels said he at any time, ‘Sit on my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool?’”** He never said that to any angel, but He certainly said it to Jesus Christ. Going on to verse 14:

“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? ... For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation.”

• *Hebrews 1:14, 2:2–3 KJV*

The word from the Son overrules the word by angels. Angels are mentioned again in Hebrews 2:6–8, and verse 16. The first two chapters show the apostle Paul entering abruptly by telling them to worship the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (as the angels do), and not to have angels stand in the way doctrinally. Why is this important? Most Jews at this time had very little difficulty with angels.

The Jews had many angels that they recognized, many more than we find mentioned in the Bible. But there was one thing about orthodox Jews, they believed there was one God and **one God ONLY**. No angel would take the place of God for an orthodox Jew. Not really. Though it was understood that angels had a hand in making the Law of Moses, that was all they did, they had a hand in it. Stephen mentioned this, as did Paul in Galatians and here in Hebrews. Even Josephus the Jewish historian said that angels had a hand in making Moses’ Law, but God who dispensed it. There was only one God. That was the God in heaven. This is why many Jews stumble over Jesus Christ and Him being God. They could not conceive of there being two “Gods.”

Gentiles on the other hand (or Jews who went over to Gentile ways later on, as we know from history), believed in a Godhead with a pyramidal structure with God in top. Underneath were other beings and then other beings, and others. We fit on the bottom of the pyramid. To get to God you had to go through various angelic groupings of beings. This view is contradicted by what Paul said: **“For there is ONE God, and ONE mediator [and one only!] between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”** (1 Timothy 2:5).¹¹

It is well known in history that in the 1st century and certainly in the 2nd century a great erroneous doctrine arose known as Gnosticism. I will just mention it here.¹² It involved the worship of angels, and it was primarily Gentiles who took it up. In Colossians chapter 2, written at the same time as Hebrews, we also see this problem of angel worship addressed. Here is what Paul said Christ did as far as the legislation of angels is concerned:

¹¹ This First Timothy 2:5 verse reinforces the sentiment and evidence presented by Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:6:

“But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.” *DWS*

¹² Dr. Martin’s book, [*The People That History Forgot*](#) tells of the rise of the Gnostic Christian heresy. *DWS*

“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers [angelic hosts], he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

LET NO MAN therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

LET NO MAN beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and **WORSHIPPING** of ANGELS, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, And not holding the Head [the Son] ...”

• *Colossians 2:14–19 KJV*

This word “**worshipping**” could mean the worship **by** angels, which is quite true, but people were actually using angels as intermediaries between man and God. Recall what Paul said in 1 Timothy 2:5: “**For there is ONE God, and ONE mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.**” Angels do not fit in. They are just ministering spirits; they have nothing to do with the process of salvation. Jesus Christ is the only one.¹³

Where Did Paul Send Hebrews To?

I am convinced the area the apostle Paul wrote to was not a prime or central area. Hebrews chapter 13 is a conclusion to the book, after he tells them to hang on with the truth, to have faith, and to get back to the ways of old, because they have long been Christians. Paul knew these people well, and I am convinced he had been their minister. He says: “**Remember them which have the rule over you**” (Hebrews 13:7).

“**Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy.**”

• *Hebrews 13:17 KJV*

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

• *Hebrews 13:24 KJV*

Three times in the conclusion Paul admonishes these people to pay attention to those leading them on the path to salvation. This may be false reasoning, but I do not think so. If this were a major area to James and the rest of them, epistles would be written to the ministers of the *ekklesia*. They would get up and read to the people. Timothy was an evangelist, and Paul wrote two direct letters to him and one to Philemon. The Catholic Epistles were written to *ekklesias* in general. But the person who would read aloud was someone in authority.

When we come to the Book of Hebrews it seems Paul starts out speaking to a group of people that had others over them, leading them. You might take it that he was saying to let the ministers in the area lead. But if it were taken the other way, I do not think this could be Palestine at all. I doubt this could be Antioch of Syria (where Paul began all his journeys). It was a place that was not a top area, an area in which others were leading them. And, at some time in the past Paul was their direct teacher. They knew and received information from him. From these factors it was not a powerful area of authority at all, but it was a lesser area.

Paul knew them and was in their midst before. Paul says in Hebrews 13:23: “**Know you that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you.**” Timothy had been in their midst and was their brother. If he comes I will come with him to see you. Where was Timothy from, from what area? We find the answer in Acts chapter 16. Paul was in Antioch of Pisidia. Then he went to cities near Antioch¹⁴:

¹³ What does this have to do with Hebrews? This was particularly a Gentile problem. Gentiles, not Jews, were involved in these doctrinal errors. The same errors that Paul addressed in Colossians and Ephesians, he discusses in “Hebrews.” If you remove that title “Hebrews,” and while the content may appear to be mainly Jewish, I think there were many Gentiles who were very concerned about what was going on in Palestine, in the Temple, in the sacrifices and related matters. ELM

¹⁴ Timothy was from the area of Galatia. Paul says he was “**our brother Timothy**” to these people. They all knew each other. Paul was to come to them soon with Timothy. When Paul wrote Hebrews, although Timothy was also associated with Ephesus, I do not believe the epistle of Hebrews went to Ephesus. Paul said in his last journey amongst the Ephesians, that they would not see him any more. If Paul were going to send Timothy to this place here, I would say Hebrews was not designed to go to Ephesus. ELM

“Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus [Timothy], the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him.”

• Acts 16:1–3 KJV

Summary: The Audience of the Book of Hebrews DWS

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1. They converted very early, and were long-time Christians | 2. They were taught by Paul |
| 3. They were very concerned about Jewish matters | 4. Possibly associated with Timothy |

I do not think any of these areas of Ephesus, Philippi, or Colossae qualify because at the time he was penning Hebrews, he wrote letters to those *ekkllesias*. So where would those recipients of Hebrews have been?

The only area that comes to my mind (and I am guessing) is the region of Galatia. All factors fit very well. This is the time period that Professor Ramsey (around the turn of the century) said that persecutions by Roman authorities and others were beginning. They were not everywhere, but were in areas around the region. It would have been a Gentile area (with Jews around certainly), but they would have been concerned about such things as angel worship.

Paul said he never went out of his limits. His preaching to Galatia was one of the first areas Paul went to in his first missionary journey. He was commissioned to go to the Gentiles and these Galatians could very well have been Gentiles. In Hebrews he never says **“our fathers”** in the intimate familiar way, which could also indicate they were Gentiles. The earliest area Paul preached, a subsidiary area, fits Galatia best. Paul said he would be restored to them. Maybe he went back there.

Paul wrote his last epistle, Second Timothy, during his second Roman imprisonment. Timothy was in Asia Minor. Paul knew he was about to die. He mentioned events that took place after his first release from Roman imprisonment, when he said he would visit them with Timothy. Paul was apprehended again, and taken to Rome for his second Roman imprisonment. There he was beheaded [according to tradition, DWS]. In the meantime, he discusses with Timothy some of the things that happened to him.

“Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and ALL THAT WILL LIVE GODLY in Christ Jesus SHALL suffer persecution.”

• 2 Timothy 3:11–12 KJV

If you put it all together, it seems that after Paul’s first Roman imprisonment, he wrote that he would return with Timothy (Hebrews 13:23). If that area was Galatia, in 2 Timothy 3:11–12 it says he did return to Galatia and suffered many persecutions there. It is possible he endured persecutions similar to those suffered by the recipients of the Book of Hebrews. However, I am not dogmatic at all about this reasoning.

Hebrews and “The Mystery”

What about all this as it deals with “The Mystery”? What does this all mean? It has to do with Paul’s commission to Gentiles. What I presented above cannot be confirmed, but many details seem to show that “Hebrews” was sent to an area that the apostle Paul was responsible for. Hebrews is placed in the early New Testament manuscripts among Paul’s letters (after the Prison Epistles). **IF** Paul wrote Hebrews, **IF** it was NOT sent to Jews in Palestine, or to any Jews, it may form part of the message of the Mystery of God. It may form a part of this message recently revealed to Paul and others. Though it seems to have Jewish overtones to it, in my judgment it contains very mature teaching to help us understand the overall plan of God in its fullness.

I hope I have given you something to make you think. The Bible is here to let us know what the fullness of the Gospel of Christ is. “Hebrews” is an important book! It is from Paul, and I think it will help us to understand more of God’s total message if we put it to work.

Ernest L Martin, 1982
Edited by David Sielaff, December 2024