

**The Author**

- One of Paul's friends

The letter to the Hebrews was written by a friend of the apostle Paul (as is clear from Hebrews 13:23), but probably not by the apostle Paul himself. The style of the Greek in which it was originally written is quite unlike the style of Paul's Greek, in which his thirteen letters are written. I suppose it is possible the letter could have been written on behalf of Paul (Luke would be a good candidate in my opinion, for the Greek of the letter reminds us of Luke–Acts) but there is no proof of this at all. All we can say is: one of Paul's friends wrote it.

**The Recipients**

- Jewish Christians – persecuted by Jews and under pressure to draw back

It was written 'to the Hebrews'. But who are 'the Hebrews' and where did they live? They are obviously Jewish Christians. They could have lived in Rome (which would explain Hebrews 13:24). Or maybe someone in Italy wrote the letter for Christians in Israel. We cannot give sure answers to these questions.

Much more important than these questions is another one. What were the problems of these people and why is our writer writing to them? This is a little easier to answer. (i) They were Christians. (ii) They were Jewish Christians. (iii) They had been through a time of persecution and were likely to face persecution again. (iv) They were under pressure to regard Jesus as an angel and no more than an angel.

**Purpose and flow of thought**

- Jesus greater than angels
- No going back
- Jesus greater than Moses

The position it seems is as follows. Jewish people were severely persecuting these Jewish Christians. If the Jewish Christians could draw back from their faith in Jesus as the Son of God, regard Jesus as no more than an angel and try to stay within Judaism, their lives will be much easier. But the writer says this is entirely impossible for the true Christian. This 'letter to the Hebrews' begins by focusing on the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not an angel. He is the divine Son of God, yet became a human being so as to be able to save human beings to the uttermost <sup>1</sup>. On no account must these Hebrew Christians draw back from what they have professed to believe about Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus is greater than Moses. These Hebrew Christians must not fail to hear the voice of God as the earlier Israelites failed to listen to God when he spoke to them through Moses. If they fail at that point they will lose much spiritual blessing just as an earlier generation of Jewish believers failed to enter the land 'flowing with milk and honey' <sup>2</sup>. They cannot go back to Judaism because Jesus is the fulfilment of everything that the Mosaic law was pointing to. He is a great high priest. They must press on to live upon his priesthood. In some ways he is the fulfilment of what the Levitical priests symbolized. Yet he has an even higher priesthood which is more like the priesthood of Melchizedek <sup>3</sup>. By living on Jesus as their high priest the new covenant promises will be fulfilled in their lives. Jesus is the fulfilment of the symbolism of the Day of Atonement.

<sup>1</sup> 1:1-2:18

<sup>2</sup> 3:1 – 4:13

<sup>3</sup> 4:15 – 7:28

- Jesus – a higher priesthood

• *Jesus blood – a final sacrifice*

His blood has been presented in heaven and it is that blood in heaven which enables the new covenant promises to be fulfilled in our lives. It is not the blood of animals which brings full salvation. Rather it is the sacrifice of Jesus in which Jesus was obedient to the point of death. It is that blood which has power to fulfil God's promises <sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> 8:1-10:18

• *Press on*

So the Christians have good reason to press on in faith. They must hold fast what they have claimed to believe. They must encourage each other to actually live the Christian life. Now that they know so much they must not sin against what they know. They must be like the heroes of faith mentioned in the Old Testament, and must follow Jesus, the greatest faith hero of all. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever. He will be faithful to them. They do not have to turn aside and become a Jewish sect. Jesus suffered outside the gate of Jerusalem. Jewish Christians have to go 'outside the camp' of the unbelieving nation of Israel and bear the reproach that Jesus endured. Here we have no lasting city. We seek the city that is to come. The God of peace will equip them with everything good that they may do God's will, in this testing time of their lives <sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> 10:19 - 13:25

• *Hold fast*

• *Examples – faith heroes*

• *Outside the camp of unbelieving Israel*

• *Equipped to do God's will*

• *Written about 68 AD*

When was all this written? At some time before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, maybe at about AD 68.

### The greatness of Jesus – eight things

Our writer begins by pointing to the greatness of Jesus. He actually says eight things in Hebrews 1:1–4. Let us begin to look at one of them.

1. *Jesus is God's last word*

1. **Jesus is God's last word to the human race.** The letter begins: <sup>1</sup>*In many portions and by many methods God spoke long ago to the fathers by the prophets* <sup>2</sup>*but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son...* The revelation of God before the coming of Jesus was varied ('In many portions and by many methods...'). It was given a long time ago to Israel. But now there is a new revelation. It has come to a point of unity. There is one person who fulfils everything God was saying in Old Testament times. The **fulfilment** of the Old Testament has come; it has initiated the last age of the human race. We are now in 'these last days'. The one who brought the last age into being is Jesus himself, the unique, divine, Son of God.



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