

1 – THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS: A BACKGROUND

I. The Author

A. His Identity

- The authorship of the letter has been in doubt since its publication.
- None of the early church fathers who mention this letter identify the writer.
- No one has been able to identify the author.

B. Internal Evidence

- He was a second-generation believer (Hebrews 2:3).
- The author was probably a Greek-speaking Jew.
- The author seems to rely on the Greek version of Old Testament, the Septuagint.
- The Letter to the Hebrews contains Pauline teaching.
- The author knew the Pauline circle of friends since he mentions Timothy (Hebrews 13:23).

C. Early Church Positions

- Those on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea associated the letter with Paul.
- Those in North Africa held that Barnabas wrote the Letter to the Hebrews.
- Those in the west were unanimous in their thought that it was not Paul.
- While the thoughts of the letter are Pauline, the language and grammar is someone else's.

D. Possible Candidates

1. Paul

- This is the traditional view.
- The Scofield Reference Bible reads "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews."
- The Council of Trent (A.D. 1545-1563) identified Paul as the author.
- There is a considerable theological difference between Paul's letters and Hebrews.

2. Barnabas

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- Barnabas was a Levite who would be familiar with the priestly services.

3. Apollos

- Apollos was a Jew, a native of Alexandria, and well versed in the scripture.
- Apollos, being from Alexandria, would have been quite familiar with the Septuagint.

4. Luke

- Some church fathers believed that Luke translated Paul's original writing.

5. Others

- Various members of Paul's circle of friends have been proposed.

II. The Date

- The letter must have been written prior to A.D. 95 when Clement of Rome used it.
- The letter does not mention or refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70.
- The letter was written to Jews who dominated the church prior to A.D. 70.
- The letter was probably written in the early fifties or sixties A.D.

III. The Recipients

- The letter was written to Jewish Christians who were considering a return to Judaism.

IV. The Purpose

- To present the sufficiency of Jesus Christ to those who were ready to abandon the faith.
- To warn against drifting away from Jesus Christ.
- To exhort its readers to faithfulness.