

Hebrews

Chapter 1:1-3

The Theme of the Writing

(Swindoll) In this context of severe persecution, many Jewish believers would have been tempted to follow the path of least resistance—returning to the synagogue. There they would have found refuge from the flames of fiery trials facing the church. They would have found protection under the canopy of a religion that had legal status under Roman law. And they would have returned to the ancient faith of their fathers, to the comfort of following the clear mandates of the Law, and to the familiar writings of Moses and the Prophets.

(Barclay) What was needed was a perfect priest and a perfect sacrifice, someone who could bring to God a sacrifice that once and for all opened the way of access to him. That, said the writer to the Hebrews, is exactly what Christ did. He is the perfect priest because he is both perfectly human and perfectly God. In his humanity, he can take us to God; and in his Godhead, he can take God to us. He has no sin. The perfect sacrifice he brings is the sacrifice of himself, a sacrifice so perfect that it never needs to be made again. To the Jews, the writer to the Hebrews said: 'All your lives, you have been looking for the perfect priest who can bring the perfect sacrifice and give you access to God. You have him in Jesus Christ and in him alone.'

(Barclay) The basic idea of this letter is that Jesus Christ alone brings to men and women the full revelation of God and that he alone enables them to enter into the very presence of God

(Hughes) The comprehensive theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews is that of the absolute supremacy of Christ—a supremacy which allows no challenge, whether from human or angelic beings.

The Date of the Writing

(Constable) The writer said that he and those to whom he wrote had come to faith in Jesus Christ through the preaching of others who had heard Jesus (2:3-4). Apparently, those preachers had since died (13:7). The original readers had been Christians over an extended period of time (5:12). So probably the earliest possible date of composition was about A.D. 60 ... The reference to Timothy's release from imprisonment (13:23) appears to date the book later in the life of that outstanding man. Almost all scholars believe that the Timothy referred to in Hebrews is the same one named elsewhere in the New Testament.

No other New Testament writer mentioned Timothy's imprisonment. The imprisonment of Christians seems to have been a well-known fact of life (10:34; 13:3). This was true after Nero launched an empire-wide persecution in A.D. 64. All of these factors, when taken together, seem to point to a writing date near **A.D. 68-69**.

(H. W. Montefiore) The best argument for the supersession of the old covenant would have been the destruction of the Temple

(MacArthur) The use of the present tense in 5:1–4; 7:21, 23, 27–28; 8:3–5, 13; 9:6–9, 13, 25; 10:1, 3–4, 8, 11; and 13:10–11 would suggest that the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system were still in operation when the epistle was composed. Since the temple was destroyed by General (later Emperor) Titus Vespasian in AD 70, the epistle must have been written prior to that date. In addition, it may be noted that Timothy had just been released from prison (13:23) and that persecution was becoming severe (10:32–39; 12:4; 13:3). These details suggest a date for the epistle of around **AD 67–69**.

The Writer

(Vincent) "Who wrote the Epistle God only knows." Such was the verdict of Origen, and modern criticism has gotten no farther.

(Brooke Foss Westcott) The language of the Epistle is both in vocabulary and style purer and more vigorous than that of any other book of the New Testament. "... The vocabulary is singularly copious. It includes a large number of words which are not found elsewhere in the apostolic writings, very many of which occur in this book only among the Greek Scriptures ...

(Constable) Commentators have made cases for the writer being Paul, Apollos, Barnabas, Luke, Peter, Jude, Stephen, Silvanus (Silas), Epaphras (Epaphroditus), Philip the Evangelist, Priscilla, Mary the mother of Jesus, Clement of Rome, Aristion, and others. However, the masculine participle *diegoumenon* ("to tell"), which refers to the writer in 11:32, would seem to rule out a female writer. Ancient testimony mentioned only four possibilities: Paul, Luke, Barnabas, and Clement.

(Paul Ellingsworth) None of these suggestions has found enthusiastic general reception for various reasons. Probably we should be content to share Origen's agnosticism on this question—and look forward to getting the answer in heaven.

The Style of the Writing

(Robertson) It [Hebrews] is called an epistle and so it is, but of a peculiar kind. In fact, ... it begins like a treatise, proceeds like a sermon, and concludes like a letter.

The Purpose of the Writing

(Constable) The writer urged the original readers to persevere in their faith, rather than turning from Christianity and returning to Judaism. A note of urgency and pastoral concern permeates the whole letter. This tone comes through especially strongly in the five warning passages and in the encouragements that follow these warnings.

¹ ***God***, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in *the prophets* in *many portions* and in *many ways*,

(Swindoll) Though English translations of Hebrews 1:1 usually begin with “God,” the original Greek text actually begins, “In many portions and in many ways . . .” For the sake of emphasis, the author points out the varied manner in which God’s messages were delivered “long ago.”

God > Compare to:

Genesis 1:1 > *1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

John 1:1-4 > *1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the Light of mankind. ⁵ And the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not grasp it.*

The Prophets > (Ray Stedman) To this supreme voice the author directs his readers' attention, and ours, by contrasting this final word with the past utterances. First, there were **the prophets**, God's ancient spokesmen (Hebrews 1:1-3); then **the angels**, Israel's guardians (Hebrews 1:4-2:18); then Israel's great leader, **Moses** (Hebrews 3:1-4:7); Israel's godly general, **Joshua** (Hebrews 4:8-13); and finally the founder of Israel's priesthood, **Aaron** (Hebrews 4:14-7:28). Each was a voice from Israel's past that needed to be heard but that was woefully inadequate if followed alone.

Many portions > (Strong's) in many parts

(What an interesting word!! *Polumeros* ... the first part of the word is *polus* > *much*, *many* ... and the second part is *meros* > *a part, portion, share*. My interest in it is that I use the same language when teaching my dental folks about the word *polymerization*. I use the term *many mers* in class. Think about it! A *monomer* is *one-mer*, a *dimer* is *two-mers*, a *trimer* is *three-mers*, a *polymer* is *many-mers*. The Lord taught His people using polymers > many connected pieces of information.)

Many ways > (HELPS) an adverb, derived from *polýs*, "many in number" and *trópos*, "way, manner") – properly, *many manners (avenues)*; (figuratively) the *multitudinous (infinite)* number of ways God shares His Word to (in) people.

(Wuest) *In many parts and in different ways God in former times having spoken to the fathers by means of the prophets,*

² *in these last days* has spoken to us *in His Son, whom He appointed* ⁽¹⁾ *heir of all things, through whom* ⁽²⁾ *He also made the world.*

In these last days > (Vincent) Lit. *at the last of these days.* ... The writer conceives the history of the world in its relation to divine revelation as falling into two great periods.

- The first he calls *these days* (Hebrews 1:2), and *the present season* (Hebrews 9:9).
- The second he describes as *the season of reformation* (Hebrews 9:10), which is *the season to come*: comp. *the world to come* (Hebrews 2:5); *the age to come* (Hebrews 6:5); *the city to come* (Hebrews 13:14). The first period is the period of the old covenant; the second that of the new covenant.

Hebrews 1:2 > ² *in these last days* has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom He also made the world.

Hebrews 9:9 > ⁹ *which is a symbol for the present time.* Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience,

Hebrews 9:10 > ¹⁰ *since they relate only to food, drink, and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.*

Hebrews 2:5 > ⁵ *For He did not subject to angels the world to come, about which we are speaking.*

Hebrews 6:5 > ⁵ *and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,*

Hebrews 13:14 > ¹⁴ *For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.*

(Vincent) The second period does not begin with Christ's first appearing. His appearing and public ministry are at the end of the first period but still within it. The dividing-point between the two periods is the *the consummation of the age*, mentioned in Hebrews 9:26. This does not mean the same thing as at the last of these days (Hebrews 1:2), which is the end of the first period denoted by these days,

but the conclusion of the first and the beginning of the second period, at which Christ appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. This is the end of the *the present season*: this is the limit of the validity of the old sacrificial offerings: this is the inauguration of the time of reformation.

In His Son > (Vincent) Note the absence of the article. Attention is directed, not to Christ's divine personality, but to his filial relation

(Robertson No article or pronoun here with the preposition *ev*, giving the absolute sense of "Son.")

(Constable) Seven facts in these verses (verses 2-3) stress the Son's unique greatness and the culminating character of His revelation.

- He is the "heir of all things"
- Through Him "He also made the world"
- He is "the radiance of His (the Father) glory"
- He is "the exact representation of His (the Father) nature"
- He "upholds all things by the word of His power"
- He "made purification of sins"
- He "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high"

Whom He appointed heir of all things > (Vincent) Christ attained the messianic lordship through incarnation. Something was acquired as the result of his incarnation which he did not possess before it, and could not have possessed without it. Equality with God was his birthright, but out of his human life, death, and resurrection came a type of sovereignty which could pertain to him only through his triumph over human sin in the flesh (see Hebrews 1:3), through his identification with men as their brother.

Philippians 2:5-11 > ⁵ *Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,* ⁶ *who, as He already existed in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,* ⁷ *but emptied Himself by taking the form of a bond-servant and being born in the likeness of men.* ⁸ *And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death: death on a cross.* ⁹ *For this reason also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,* ¹⁰ *so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,* ¹¹ *and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

The world > (Strong's) *aion* > a space of time, an age

(Swindoll) The Greek term translated as “world” (aiōn) literally means “ages.” It’s the word from which we get the term “eons.”

Through whom He also made the world > **John 1:1-3** > ¹*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* ²*He was in the beginning with God.* ³*All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being.*

(Wuest) *in the last of these days spoke to us in One who by nature is Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He constituted the ages;*

³ *And He is* ⁽³⁾ **the radiance of His glory** *and* ⁽⁴⁾ **the exact representation of His nature,** *and* ⁽⁵⁾ **upholds all things by the word of His power.** *When He had* ⁽⁶⁾ **made purification of sins,** *He* ⁽⁷⁾ **sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,**

Radiance > (HELPS) *apaugasma* from *apó*, "from" which intensifies and *augázō*, "shine," derived from *augē*/"dawn" – properly, someone who literally "shines," (is radiant).

(Vincent) Interpretation is divided between *effulgence* and *reflection*.

(An illustration would be the difference between the sun and the moon ... one is shining forth on its own ... the other is reflecting that brightness. Vincent will conclude the word is *effulgence* ... see below)

Effulgence or outraying accords better with the thought of the passage; for the writer is treating of the preincarnate Son; and, as Alford justly remarks, "the Son of God is, in this his essential majesty, the expression and the sole expression of the divine light; not, as in his incarnation, its reflection." The consensus of the Greek fathers to this effect is of great weight. The meaning then is, that the Son is the outraying of the divine glory, exhibiting in himself the glory and majesty of the divine Being.

Glorify > (Precept Austin) *doxa* > means to give a proper opinion or estimate of something and thus the *glory* of God expresses all that He is in His Being and in His nature, character, power and acts. *Doxa* is used repeatedly in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) to describe the (Shekinah) glory of God.

John 1:18 > ¹⁸ *No one has seen God at any time; God the only Son, who is in the arms of the Father, He has **explained** Him.*

Explained > (Precept Austin) The Greek word for **explained** is **exegeomai** [ek = out + hegéomai = tell, lead forward] means that Jesus as the God Man leads out or provides detailed information in a systematic manner of the glory of the Father. This word exegeomai gives us our English word "exegesis" which describes the exposition of God's word, unfolding the interpretation through teaching. Jesus then is the preeminent "Expositor" declaring the Father's glory thoroughly and particularly.

Exact representation > (Strong's) *charakter* > a tool for engraving. Usage > an impression, representation, exact reproduction; a graving-tool.

(HELPS) *xaraktēr* was originally a *tool* (used for engraving) and then came to mean "a die" ("mold"). Finally, it stood for a stamp or impress used on a coin or seal. In each case, the stamp conveyed the reality behind the image.

(Precept Austin) [a lot of the commentators miss a point here. Precept Austin nails it] *Charakter* is a **die** made by an **impress**, like on a signet ring, the impression being identical although they are *two separate entities*.

(Wiersbe) Our English word *character* comes from the Greek word translated *image*. Literally, Jesus Christ is "the exact representation of the very substance of God" (see **Col. 2:9**). Only Jesus could honestly say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (**John 14:9**). When you see Christ, you see the glory of God (**John 1:14**).

Col. 2:9 > ⁹ *For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,*

John 14:9 > ⁹ *Jesus *said to him, "Have I been with you for so long a time, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? The one who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*

John 1:14 > ¹⁴ *And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we saw His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Nature > (Strong's) *hupostasis* > a support, substance, steadiness, assurance

(Precept Austin) from *hypó*, "under" and *hístēmi*, "to stand" referring to a foundation, ground on which something is built) is literally that which stands under anything (e.g., the foundation of a building). *Hupostasis* is setting under and thus describes a support, a confidence, a steadiness, a foundation (refers to ground on which something is built = e.g., the foundation of things for which we hope in Heb 11:1). Stated another way *hupostasis* is that which underlies the apparent and which therefore is the reality, the essence or the substance.

Hebrews 11:1 > *Now faith is the **certainty** of things hoped for, a proof of things not seen.*

(Precept Austin) Considering these meanings of *hupostasis* in Hebrews 11:1 one could paraphrase this verse as follows...

- Faith is the title-deed of things hoped for.
- Faith is the foundation, the quality of confidence which leads one to stand under, endure, or undertake anything.
- Faith involves the most solid possible conviction, the God-given present assurance of a future reality.

Upholds > (Strong's) to bear, carry, bring forth

The word of His power > (Barnes) The phrase "word of his power" is a Hebraism, and means his efficient command. There could not be a more distinct ascription of divinity to the Son of God than this. He upholds or sustains all things - that is, the universe.

Purification > (Strong's) *katharismos* (do you see our word *cathartic* there?) > to bear, carry, bring forth. Usage > cleansing, purifying, purification

(Wuest) *who, being the out-roying of His glory and the exact reproduction of His essence, and sustaining, guiding, and propelling all things by the word of His power, having made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;*