

Overview of the letter to the Hebrews

From the WordGo Bible Study Fellowship Notes

God's inspired words first addressed specific people at particular times. His words connect us to those first recipients of this letter. **God's words carry equal authority value and meaning to each of us today.** God chose to conceal this letter's human author or authors. This mystery does not take away from the letter's credibility or importance. Authors commonly considered include:

- **Barnabas**, a Levite who became a Christian. He taught and encouraged Paul, John Mark, Peter, and others
- **Apollos** or his teachers **Priscilla** and **Aquila**. All three ministered with Paul and in early churches.
- **Paul**, although there are style, word choice and material difference from his acknowledged letters.

When was the letter written? Its exact date is unknown. One clue comes from Clement of Rome, and early Christian leader. He wrote a letter to the Corinthian church in A.D. 95 containing quotations from this letter. The locations of the author and recipients are also uncertain. In Hebrew 13:25, "those from Italy send you their greetings." Maybe the author was in Italy, most likely Rome, and the readers were somewhere else. Or, maybe the recipients were in Rome, and Roman Christians sent the letter from elsewhere.

Whatever the location, the recipients were in danger of abandoning their faith in Christ and returning to Judaism. **These Hebrew Christians lived under strong Jewish opposition.** They had left the synagogue and temple worship, but their persecution increased. The letter's first recipients were:

- **Believers** in community as "brothers and sisters" and "dear friends."
- **People raised in Judaism** who now believed Jesus is the Messiah.
- **Second-generation Christians** taught by students of the apostles.

They were at risk. Would they grow weary and lose heart? Some had stopped meeting with other Christians to avoid problems. Similarly, **today's distractions, stresses and suffering threaten to shake our confidence in Jesus' promises.** Fear, ignorance, and spiritual immaturity tempt us to:

- **Drift from faith** by forsaking truths we already claimed belief in and lived by.
- **Neglect faith** by refusing to meet together to avoid conflict or rejection.
- **Compromise faith** by clinging to both Christ and traditions.

Struggling with our fears leaves us weary, burdened, suffering and needy. We fear what will happen in the future or the shame and guilt of our past. We fear current events beyond our control and problems we cannot fix. We fear others will let us down. We fear failure, or we fear we will never measure up. We fear our imperfection.

God gives us perfect reasons not to fear. He creates every human for His perfect purposes. All people are meant to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. God shows us the way to realize this aim. **The letter's main message is the superiority of Jesus Christ.** Its instructions, warnings and encouragements relate to

His glory. Its truth – Jesus is our only sure hope – confronts and comforts those who shrink back from trusting Him and His words. The author repeatedly warns against drifting away from Christ or clinging to anything other than Him.

Hebrews is a call to endurance. The letter's truths and warnings remind Christians of all times and places to fix our eyes on Jesus for perseverance in God-given faith. **Those who worship Jesus Christ and live consistently by faith know there is no turning back.** The wonder of identifying with Christ makes resisting sin as well as suffering persecution overwhelmingly worthwhile!

Hold Fast and Apply It

Hebrews is one of the most awe-inspiring books in the Bible. It connects Old Testament prophecy with the revelation of the Son as creator, heir and sustainer of everything in the universe – galaxies, angelic beings, creatures and all men, women and children from countless cultures and languages. Further, the Son is the exact manifestation of God's nature. The opening chapters point to the Son's superiority over angels and Moses. His is the perfect purifying sacrifice on the cross as our perfect High Priest. He is exalted to God's right hand – the ultimate seat of power. One day He will physically return to earth to rule and reign.

God's rest is the splendid, vibrant benefit of His salvation. It is His purpose fulfilled for those He has freed from sin's control and penalty. God's rest fulfills all He created you to be and do in relationship with Him. It is unhindered productivity and satisfaction. It is the end of self-effort and self-focus. God's purposes for His redeemed people include Christ-awareness and true oneness with Him. Jesus said "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Jesus Christ is humanity's fullest reality. He is the Son of God and the Savior of His people. **Jesus is the fulfillment of all God planned for humankind.** Jesus achieved this by His sacrifice on the cross. He died to save us from sin, death and the devil. However, merely hearing these truths is not enough. We live by faith in Christ. Have you believed the gospel? With Jesus Christ's superiority revealed, why would any person reject or neglect faith today? Today, right now, God's Word invites all people to believe the gospel. This is to live and rest in His grace-filled presence, where we find mercy and the solutions to our needs.

The warnings in Hebrews are not meant to create doubt in believers. Rather, they encourage self-examination for confirmation. Do you live by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone? If you believe, you have a high priest who identifies with you in your struggles. Do you turn to Jesus to find inner strength to face disappointments, to persevere through hardships, to resist temptations and to receive hope and joy? **God's purpose for your life is more perfect than anything you could imagine!**

Reflect

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." – Hebrews 1:3

At this point in this week's study, take some time to meditate on this verse.