

Hebrews – Introduction

1. Introduction – structure, themes, author, purpose
2. The warnings of Hebrews – the problems facing the community

Author

Not Paul: Heb 2:3 “It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard”. Compare with Gal 1:12 “For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

“Most of the other names that have been proposed as the author of Hebrews are Paul’s companions. This is due in part to a recognition of theological affinities between Hebrews and Paul’s letters, and to the mention of Timothy in Hebrews 13:23. If this ‘Timothy’ was Paul’s associate, which is likely (see on 13:23), then the author must have been connected with the Pauline circle.”¹

Luke – vocabulary very different, 154 words unique to Hebrews

Jude – ruled out for same reason

Stephen – probably too early

Barnabas

Silas

Apollos

Priscilla (and Aquilla)

Nearly didn’t make it into the New Testament as a result of this

Audience

Christians – Jesus is the Son of God and Lord, assumed, not explained as it would in evangelistic letter

Jewish or Gentile audience? Both? Great deal of Old Testament knowledge assumed, law, priesthood, sacrifice, OT figures such as Moses and Melchizedek

Date

Referenced by Clement of Rome around AD 96

The majority – pre AD 70, as no mention of the destruction of the temple. Perhaps as early as AD 64.

Purpose

Heb 1:1-4 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, (2) but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (3) He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (4) having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Persecution (12:4), false teachers (3:12, 13:9), wavering (12:3), immature (5:11-14)

¹ O'Brien, Peter T.. The Letter to the Hebrews (The Pillar New Testament Commentary (PNTC)) . Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.

The Structure of Hebrews.

Why structure matters:

1. Understanding the logic of an argument
2. Special structures can give important clues for interpretation

A typical structural analysis of the Hebrews: Paul Ellingworth

I. THE FINALITY OF CHRISTIANITY (1:1-2:18)

1. God's Final Revelation in His Son (1:1-4)
2. Christ Better than Angels (1:5-14)
3. First Admonition: The Gospel and the Law (2:1-4)
4. The Humiliation and Glory of the Son of Man (2:5-9)
5. The Son of Man the Savior and High Priest of His People (2:10- 19)

II. THE TRUE HOME OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD (3:1-4:13)

1. Jesus Greater than Moses (3:1-6)
2. Second Admonition: The Rejection of Jesus More Serious than the Rejection of Moses (3:7-19)
3. The True Rest of God may be Forfeited (4:1-10)
4. Exhortation to Attain God's Rest (4:11-13)

III. THE HIGH PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST (4:14-6:20)

1. Christ's High Priesthood an Encouragement to His People (4:14-16) 16)
2. Qualifications for High Priesthood (5:1-4) 3. Christ's Qualifications for High Priesthood (5:5-10)
4. Third Admonition: Spiritual Immaturity (5:11-14)
5. No Second Beginning Possible (6:1-8)
6. Encouragement to Persevere (6:9-12)
7. The Steadfastness of God's Promise (6:13-20)

IV. THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK (7:1-28)

1. Melchizedek the Priest-King (7:1-3)
2. The Greatness of Melchizedek (7:4-10)
3. Imperfection of the Aaronic Priesthood (7:11-14)
4. Superiority of the New Priesthood (7:15-19)
5. Superior because of the Divine Oath (7:20-22)
6. Superior because of its Permanence (7:23-25)
7. Superior because of the Character of Jesus (7:26-28)

V. COVENANT, SANCTUARY AND SACRIFICE (8:1-10:18)

1. Priesthood and Promise (8:1-7)
2. The Old Covenant Superseded (8:8-13)
3. The Sanctuary under the Old Covenant (9:1-5)
4. A Temporary Ritual (9:6-10)
5. Christ's Eternal Redemption (9:11-14)
6. The Mediator of the New Covenant (9:15-22)
7. The Perfect Sacrifice (9:23-28)
8. The Old Order a Shadow of the Reality (10:1-4)
9. The New Order the Reality (10:5-10)
10. The Enthroned High Priest (10:11-18)

VI. CALL TO WORSHIP, FAITH AND PERSEVERANCE (10:19-12:29)

1. Access to God through the Sacrifice of Christ (10:19-25)
2. Fourth Admonition: The Wilful Sin of Apostasy (10:26-31)
3. Call to Perseverance (10:32-39)
4. The Faith of the Elders (11:1-40)
5. Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of Faith (12:1-3)
6. Discipline is for Sons (12:4-11)
7. Let Us Then be Up and Doing (12:12-17)
8. The Earthly Sinai and the Heavenly Zion (12:18-24)
9. Pay Heed to the Voice of God! (12:25-29)

VII. CONCLUDING EXHORTATION AND PRAYER (13:1-21)

1. Ethical Injunctions (13:1-6)
2. Examples to Follow (13:7-8)
3. The True Christian Sacrifices (13:9-16)
4. Submission to Leaders (13:17)
5. Request for Prayer (13:18-19)
6. Prayer and Doxology (13:20-21)

VIII. POSTSCRIPT (13:22-25)

1. Personal Notes (13:22-23)
2. Final Greetings and Benediction (13:24-25)²

An a-typical structural analysis of Hebrews: Albert Van Hoyer

A. 1:5-2:18 Eschatology

B. 3:1-5:10 Ecclesiology

C. 5:11-10:39 Sacrifice (The unequalled value of the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ)

B¹. 11:1-12:13 Ecclesiology

A¹. 12:14-13:18 Eschatology

A chiasm is a literary structure resembling something like an A-frame ladder, where, just as the rungs of the ladder stand in parallel to each other up both sides, leading to an apex in the middle, parallel words or phrases can be seen in a text leading to a central thought. There are many chiasmic structures in the Bible, some of the more famous being the story of the flood in Genesis 6:10-9:19, the Tower of Babel narrative in Genesis 11, the whole of the letter of James, and the letters to the seven churches in Revelation. The apex of a chiasm is most often the main point of the text, as in the story of the flood, which has at its centre the statement, "God remembered Noah".

² Paul Ellingworth. The Epistle to the Hebrews (New International Greek Testament Com (Eerdmans)) (Kindle Locations 1868-1873). Kindle Edition.

A	Noah (6:10a)
B	Shem, Ham, and Japheth (6:10b)
C	Ark to be built (6:14-16)
D	Flood announced (6:17)
E	Covenant with Noah (6:18-20)
F	Food in the ark (6:21)
G	Command to enter ark (7:1-3)
H	7 days waiting for flood (7:4-5)
I	7 days waiting for flood (7:7-10)
J	Entry to ark (7:11-15)
K	Yahweh shuts Noah in (7:16)
L	40 days flood (7:17a)
M	Waters increase (7:17b-18)
N	Mountains covered (7:19-20)
O	150 days waters prevail (7:21-24)
P	GOD REMEMBERS NOAH (8:1)
O'	150 days waters abate (8:3)
N'	Mountain tops visible (8:4-5)
M'	Waters abate (8:5)
L'	40 days (end of) (8:6a)
K'	Noah opens window of ark (8:6b)
J'	Raven and dove leave ark (8:7-9)
I'	7 days waiting for waters to subside (8:10-11)
H'	7 days waiting for waters to subside (8:12-13)
G'	Command to leave ark (8:15-17)
F'	Food outside ark (9:1-4)
E'	Covenant with all flesh (9:8-10)
D'	No flood in future (9:11-17)
C'	Ark (9:18a)
B'	Shem, Ham, and Japheth (9:18b)
A'	Noah (9:19)

Themes

The unequalled value of the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ!

- Revelation
- Priesthood
- Sacrifice
- Covenant

Perseverance

Apostasy

A major difficulty – the warning passages

(6:4-8) For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

(10:26-31) For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

A major battleground for Calvinism and Arminianism – can someone lose their faith?

The concept of “perfection” as a way into the mind of the author

(Heb 5:7-6:3) In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. (8) Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. (9) And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, (10) being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (12) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, (13) for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. (14) But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. (6:1) Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, (2) and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. (3) And this we will do if God permits.

The three words used here, the verb in 5:9, the adjective in 5:14 and the noun in 6:1, are really just the tip of the iceberg. Jesus has already been described as “made perfect” in 2:10 and will again in 7:28; in 7:11 we’re told that perfection could not be attained through the Levitical priesthood; the law cannot make any one perfect in 7:19 and 10:1; in 9:9 gifts and sacrifices offered through the old covenant system of worship cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper; Christ entered the more perfect tent in 9:11; by a single offering Christ has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified in 10:14; in 11:40 those that died having never received the promises died in hope that they would be made perfect with us; in 12:2 Christ is the founder and perfecter of our faith; and in 12:23 the recipients of the letter are told that “you have come to... the spirits of the righteous made perfect”.

Perfection in 1 Corinthians 13

1Co 13:7-13 ESV Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (8) Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. (9) For we know in part and we prophesy in part, (10) but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. (11) When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. (12) For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. (13) So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

A Contrast between three things that “pass away” and three things that “abide”.

Why do prophecies, tongues, knowledge pass away?

Why do faith, hope and love remain?

A Chiastic structure to 1 Corinthians 13:7-13

...bears all things, **believes** all things, **hopes** all things, endures all things. 1Co 13:8 **Love** never ends.

As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. 1Co 13:9 **For we know in part** (ἐκ μέρους γὰρ γινώσκομεν) and we prophesy in part,

1Co 13:10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will **be set aside** (καταργηθῆσεται).

1Co 13:11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. [

When I became a man, I **set aside** (κατηργηκα) childish ways.

1Co 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. **Now I know in part**; (ἄρτι γινώσκω ἐκ μέρους) then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

1Co 13:13 So now **faith, hope, and love** abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1Co 14:20 Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. (Heb 5:11-14, 1 Cor 3:1-2))

What does the perfect/complete/mature Christian look like according to Paul?

Discipleship 101 in the early church: Faith Hope and Love in Paul

Romans 5:1-5: Therefore, since we have been justified by **faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (2) Through him we have also obtained access by **faith** into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in **hope** of the glory of God. (3) Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, (4) and endurance produces character, and character produces **hope**, (5) and **hope** does not put us to shame, because God's **love** has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

1 Corinthians 13:7: ... bears all things, **believes** all things, **hopes** all things, endures all things. **Love** never ends.

1 Corinthians 13:13: So now **faith, hope, and love** abide, these three; but the greatest of these is **love**.

Galatians 5:5-6: For through the Spirit, by **faith**, we ourselves eagerly wait for the **hope** of righteousness. (6) For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only **faith** working through **love**.

Ephesians 1:11-16: In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, (12) so that we who were the first to **hope** in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. (13) In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and **believed** in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, (14) who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (15) For this reason, because I have heard of your **faith** in the Lord Jesus and your **love** toward all the saints, (16) I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,

Ephesians 4:1-6: I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, (2) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in **love**, (3) eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (4) There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one **hope** that belongs to your call— (5) one Lord, one **faith**, one baptism, (6) one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Colossians 1:3-5: We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, (4) since we heard of your **faith** in Christ Jesus and of the **love** that you have for all the saints, (5) because of the **hope** laid up for you in heaven.

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3: We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, (3) remembering before our God and Father your work of **faith** and labor of **love** and steadfastness of **hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:8: But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of **faith** and **love**, and for a helmet the **hope** of salvation.

1 Timothy 4:10-12: For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our **hope** set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who **believe**. (11) Command and teach these things. (12) Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in **love**, in **faith**, in purity.

“Perfection” in the rest of the New Testament

Jas 1:2-4: Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, (3) for you know that the testing of your **faith** produces steadfastness. (4) And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be **perfect** and complete, lacking in nothing.

1Jn 4:16-18: So we have come to know and to **believe** the **love** that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (17) **By this is love perfected with us**, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. (18) There is no fear in love, but **perfect love** casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been **perfected in love**.

Mat 5:48: You therefore must be **perfect**, as your heavenly Father is **perfect**.

1Pe 1:14-16, 20-22 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, (15) but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, (16) since it is written, **“You shall be holy, for I am holy.”**... (20) He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you (21) who through him are **believers** in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your **faith** and **hope** are in God. (22) Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere **brotherly love, love one another** earnestly from a pure heart,

2Pe 1:3-7: His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, (4) by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped from the corruption

that is in the world because of sinful desire. (5) For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your **faith** with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, (6) and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, (7) and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with **love**.

Perfection in Hebrews

Is there reason to think that the Author of Hebrews has this same understanding of “perfection?”

Yes – and it’s connected with the warning passages.

Immediately following the first large warning passage in 6:4-9 we have in 6:1-12:

For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the **love** that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of **hope** until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through **faith** and patience inherit the promises. (Heb 6:10-12)

And immediately preceding the second large warning passage in 10:26-29 we have in 10:22-24:

let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of **faith**, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our **hope** without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to **love** and good works (Heb 10:22-24)

Warning
Love
Hope
Faith
Faith
Hope
Love
Warning

There are in fact 6 warning passages in Hebrews, which help us to identify the structure:

A. **WARNING 1** (2:1-3)

B. **WARNING 2** (3:12)

C. **WARNING 3** (6:4-8)

LOVE (6:10)

HOPE (6:11)

FAITH (6:12)

The Basis of our Faith (6:13-10:18, with summary
10:19-21)

FAITH (10:22)

HOPE (10:23)

LOVE (10:24)

C¹. **WARNING 4** (10:26-31)

B¹. **WARNING 5** (12:15)

A¹. **WARNING 6** (13:9)

A. **WARNING 1** (2:1-3) Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

B. **WARNING 2** (3:12) Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

C. **WARNING 3** (6:4-8) For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

C¹. **WARNING 4** (10:26-31) For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

B¹. **WARNING 5** (12:15) See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

A¹. **WARNING 6** (13:9) Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings

Where are we going?

1. Introduction

2. Understanding the warnings of Hebrews and knowing how to respond.

3. Heb 1:5 – 2:18 & Heb 12:1-13:25

Jesus the **founder** of their salvation made **perfect** through suffering;
Jesus, the **founder** and **perfecter** of our faith

4. Heb 3:1-6:12 & 10:32-11:12:1

The faithful One and the faithless,
The faithful One and the faithful

5. The basis of our faith: Jesus is the best!