

HEBREWS—AN INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION¹

In this world so marred by sin and strife, it is most comforting, stabilizing, and strengthening to study and to bask in the assurances of Holy Writ (John 8:32). What a blessing it is to study in-depth the wonderful book of Hebrews, with its great emphasis upon the "better" things and the tremendous blessings and hope in Christ our Savior! In order to understand this remarkable book, one must have an understanding of the overall theme and message of the whole Bible. The Old Testament is truly the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament, under which covenant we live, is the Old Testament revealed (cf. Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11; Col. 2:14-17). The burden of our present study is to introduce the book. Often, "a book thoroughly introduced is half explained." The book of Hebrews has been productive of much discussion, argumentation, and debate. Perhaps there is no other part of the Bible about which there have been so many differences in thought and opinion. These disputes have risen largely because the epistle does not explicitly state the identification of the author, or the audience, or the time or place of writing.

ITS PLACE IN THE CANON

The authorship of Hebrews has been disputed virtually ever since it was written, though its place in the canon has been attested and uncontested during the same years.

The origin and history of the Epistle to the Hebrews was a subject of controversy even in the Second Century. There

is no portion of the New Testament whose authorship is so disputed; nor any of which the inspiration is more indisputable. The early Church could not determine whether it was written by Barnabas, by Luke, by Clement, or by Paul (Conybeare 848).

It has been "extensively debated," but it "has a secure place in the Canon, having been so received from the earliest times upon the most solid grounds of evidence" (Coffman 1, 8). During the last one and one-half centuries, destructive criticism has viciously attacked God's Word. The canonicity of the sixty-six books of God's one Book, the Bible—including that of the book of Hebrews—has been assailed, and yet, the evidence is clear that the earliest versions of God's Word contain Hebrews, the earliest listings of the New Testament books contain Hebrews, and the "apostolic fathers" quote from Hebrews. The atheistic critics have utterly failed, and God's Word has stood and continues to stand the test.

In addition, when the objective seeker of truth reads Hebrews, he is immediately struck with the fact that it is inspired of God (Heb. 1:1-3; 2:1-4; 4:2; 5:12-14; et al.). Mere men could not have written the book, for its themes are so profound, so challenging, and so inexhaustible! External **and** internal evidence proves conclusively that Hebrews is canonical.

ITS AUTHORSHIP

Perhaps greater scholarly ingenuity has been exhibited in efforts to determine the authorship of Hebrews than has been exhibited with any other book of the Bible. However, the end results of these noble efforts leave the matter in absolute uncertainty to date (Carter 10).

There are some who feel that since Hebrews unquestionably belongs in the canon and since the name of the writer is not given, "it might appear to some that there is no need to entertain the question; especially when so many have held that it is one to which no answer can be given with any approach to certainty." However, F.C. Cook rejects that idea. "We are unable to adopt this conclusion." The controversy, Cook says, has been "most remarkable" and "of deep interest" (4). The title found in some Bibles, "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews," was

added "because the majority of the students concluded Paul must have been the author" (Stancliff 5). The title is not inspired. Brother J.B. Briney stated, about the authorship:

This has been a disputed question for quite a while, and perhaps the preponderance of critical judgment is against the Pauline authorship. While this fact gives me some embarrassment in taking the opposite view, this is a matter which is not to be decided by a majority vote. It is not to be inferred that the Pauline authorship is without the support of scholarship and critical ability, for some as good scholars and critics as the world has produced maintain that Paul wrote the Epistle (346).

Some are very strong in maintaining that Paul was not the writer of Hebrews. For example, the author of this chapter recalls hearing brother Hugo McCord, Hebrew and Greek scholar, state that he does not know who wrote the book but that he knows who did not write Hebrews—Paul. He cited Paul's affirmation in 2 Thessalonians 3:17, "The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand which is the token in every epistle: so I write." Just as strong on the other side was the author's Hebrews teacher in Alabama Christian College, the scholarly and long-time teacher of the book, James A. Turner, brother of the illustrious Rex A. Turner, Sr. He **stressed** that he "knew" that Paul wrote the book. Brother Rex A. Turner, Sr., affirmed the same conclusion. Of course, each of these men knew and loved brother McCord. The author studied at these men's feet for years, as well as for over a decade teaching undergraduate and graduate classes with them. He also had classes under brother McCord. The author realizes that the authorship of Hebrews has not been absolutely proven, but he feels strongly that the preponderance of evidence is on the side of Paul. Nonetheless, "Whoever is the author of the epistle, its value and authority remain the same" (Saphir 14). The author is certainly not alone in believing the evidence points to Paul. Robert Milligan wrote:

But to my mind, it is quite evident that [Paul] is the only hypothesis that is really worthy of our consideration, because it is the only one that is sustained by any reliable evidence. The others are all purely conjectural; and hence if it can be shown that Paul did not write the Epistle, then indeed we may as well give up all further inquiry about its authorship, and wait patiently for the revelations of the day of judgment (5).

In examining who wrote Hebrews (of course, God inspired its writing), it is appropriate to examine: the background considerations which impact the question of authorship; the strongest arguments against the Pauline authorship and the question of their validity; if not Paul then who? and, evidence cited relative to the Pauline authorship.

ITS DATE OF WRITING

Of foremost importance to the understanding of Hebrews and of its possible authorship is the date when the book was written. It can be "alleged confidently" that Hebrews was "written a considerable number of years after the community addressed had received the faith, and hence, if during Paul's life, not long before its close. Some time between A.D. 62 and 70 would very well suit the conditions" (Spence ii). It had been long enough after their conversions for the readers to have become teachers (Heb. 5:12-14), and they had "endured a great conflict of sufferings" (10:32). In addition, they were soon to experience more severe persecutions (12:3-4; 10:23-25). The priesthood was still offering sacrifices in the temple, thus it was earlier than 70 A.D. If Paul wrote the book, since he was in prison in Rome at about 62-63 A.D., then the earliest date is approximately 63 A.D. (Stancliff 12-13). Cook says that if Paul wrote the book "from Rome, the obvious inference from xiii.23 is, that the Epistle was finished shortly before the close of the Apostle's first imprisonment; that is, A.D. 65" (21). Conybeare and Howson state that the temple was standing and undisturbed services were being conducted (7:23; 13:11-13), before 70 A.D.; "its author was at liberty in Italy; and Timotheus was just liberated from imprisonment (xiii.23,24). If St. Paul wrote it, this would fix the date at 63 ... it would seem more probable that [Timothy's] imprisonment here mentioned took place about the time of St. Paul's death; and that he was liberated after the death of Nero," placing "the date of the Epistle in A.D. 68 or 69, if our chronology be correct" (854). The author favors the 63-65 date.

ITS AUDIENCE

Of further importance to the understanding of Hebrews and of its possible authorship is the people to whom the book was written. It is generally affirmed that the audience of the Hebrews letter was composed of Hebrews in Palestine, very possibly

Jerusalem. However, based upon Hebrews 2:3 and upon the supposition that the audience addressed in Hebrews was a "spiritually backward church," who had not yet matured (5:12, 6:1-2), that they as yet had not suffered martyrdom, and that the clause "They of Italy salute you" could well be translated "Those who are **from** Italy salute you" (according to Gleason L. Archer, Jr.), Archer takes the position that the unnamed writer addresses the church **at** Rome. In other words, the author would be writing, not from Italy, but to Italy and would be sending greetings from his present companions who had once lived in Rome and were greeting the Roman Christians (6-7).² Though Vincent acknowledges this possibility, he rejects the idea that the epistle was addressed to a mixed group, like at Rome.

It is evidently addressed to a definite circle of readers, and that circle could hardly have been a mixed church of Jews and Gentiles, since it would have been impossible in that case for the letter to avoid allusions to the relations between the two, whereas it contains no allusion to Gentile Christians (367).

He further avers that "the hypothesis ... in modern criticism ... that the epistle was not addressed to Jewish Christians at all, but to Gentile Christians ... presents formidable difficulties ... The whole argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews is **technically** Jewish, and not of a character to appeal to Gentile readers" (Vincent 367-69).

Many affirm that the phrase "To the Hebrews" describes the epistle correctly. This is indicated by the word "fathers" in the first verse, the ones "spoken unto ... in the prophets." The descendants of the "fathers" would be the Hebrews (Welch 10). Cook states, "The most prevalent opinion has been, that the Hebrews addressed in this Epistle were the Christians of Palestine; especially, therefore, those of Jerusalem" (21). He answered the charge that they would not have been familiar with the Grecian games (10:32; 12:1-3). "The internal evidence is of the highest character that it was written to Hebrew converts," stated Albert Barnes (iv). He cited the title of the book, though not affixed by inspiration, which expresses "the current sense of the church in ancient times in reference to a question on which they had the best means of judging." He pointed out that "This inscription is found in all our present Greek manuscripts and in nearly all of the ancient versions." He also cited the testimony of the "church

fathers" and the internal evidence, which "treats of Hebrew institutions. It explains their nature. It makes no allusion to Gentile customs or laws. It all along supposes that those to whom it was sent were familiar with the Jewish history ... the temple ... functions of the priestly office; and with the whole structure of their religion" (Barnes iv). After giving a number of evidences that Hebrews was addressed to Palestinian Hebrew Christians (i.e., early testimony, the use of "Hebrews" in the inscription instead of "Hellenists," internal evidence, and the great temptation of the temple and its pomp and ceremony), Barnes stated that the "great probability" is that "it was directed to the church in Jerusalem" (v-vii).

ITS PURPOSE

Of still further importance to the understanding of Hebrews and of its possible authorship is the purpose for which the book was written. The astute student of the Word is keenly aware that the Hebrew Christians had come out of Judaism. As in the cases of the Israelites who had been delivered from Egypt, or Lot's wife who had come out of Sodom, or those who have escaped the pollutions of the world, the Law of Moses, the traditions of the Jews, the outward pomp and ceremony of the temple services and its physical attractiveness likewise would have its pull upon the Hebrew Christians to abandon Christ and to return to Judaism. Besides, had not God Himself given the Law of Moses and had not the temple been a dwelling place of His very glory? Had not the temple been termed the house of God? Just as the Israelites had been saved out of Egyptian slavery, Lot's wife out of the perversions of Sodom, the redeemed out of the mire and repulsiveness of sin, the Hebrew saints had likewise been saved from the Law of Moses, which was "a yoke ... which neither [their] fathers nor [they] were able to bear" (Acts 15:10). The Law of Moses killed (pointed out sin, made the Jews guilty, and made sin exceedingly sinful but could not forgive sin except in promise, and that only temporarily [2 Cor. 3]), but the law of the Spirit had brought life (Rom. 8:1-2). The Law of Moses could:

never with the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect them that draw nigh. Else they would not have ceased to be offered ... in those sacrifices there is a remembrance made of sins year by year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should

take away sins. Wherefore when he [Christ] cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice an offering thou wouldest not [accept as atonement for sin], But a body [the virgin birth] didst thou prepare for me ... By the which will [the New Covenant, or Testament] we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ once for all (Heb. 10:1-10).

Now, why would those who had received immediate and full cleansing from sin through the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:13-14; Rev. 1:5-6) return to Judaism?

Sometimes when trials, problems, and discouragements come (as with the Israelites in the wilderness), we tend to forget the wonderful blessings which we have close at hand. Israel forgot the slavery in Egypt but remembered the fish, the cucumbers, the melons, the onions, and the garlcs in Egypt; they longed to return (Num. 11:4-5; 14:1-3). Though mere shadows of the real substance in Christ (Col. 2:14-17), the Law of Moses might have seemed to these Hebrews to be the ultimate. Were not the temple and its rituals real? Had not the traditions in their families been centered in the Law of Moses; had not they from their childhood seen and been involved with taking their sacrifices to the temple; were not their relatives and friends still engaged in the Jewish rituals; had not the scrolls of the Old Testament books been prized, treasured possessions of themselves and their families? Yes, it would be a temptation to return to Judaism, especially if they had been disinherited and disowned by their father, mother, brother, and sister. Add to this the unrelenting pressure of the Judaizers, and the temptation to revert back to Judaism would have been quite strong.

Realizing the temptations they would have faced, one can begin to appreciate the tremendous emphasis upon "faith," the ability to see the unseen (Heb. 11:1), and without which no one can please God (Heb. 11:6)! Looking at the things not seen through the eye of faith (2 Cor. 4:16-18) is far superior to looking at the things which are seen through physical eyes; one is eternal, whereas the other is but temporary. We are reminded that our spirits are eternal. In addition, one can appreciate the writer's use of the key word "better." Christ is "better than the angels" (Heb. 1). He became man that He might become man's Savior (Heb. 2). He was/is counted worthy of more honor than Moses (Heb. 3). He provides a more wonderful rest than Joshua (Heb. 4). He was glorified to serve as a superior High Priest

(Heb. 5). He makes possible better blessings and fullness of hope (Heb. 6). He established "a better covenant" (Heb. 7), which would enable our sins to be "remembered **no more**" (Heb. 8). He shed His own superior blood and took it to the mercy seat of God in heaven in order to establish His superior, spiritual tabernacle, the church (Heb. 9). He, as our High Priest, is ruling at the right hand of God as King and shall ultimately judge those who tread Him and His blood under foot (Heb. 10). He, through our faith and obedience, "provided some better thing" for us (Heb. 11). He is "the author and perfecter of our faith" who brings us to a superior mount (not Sinai), even to mount Zion, the church/kingdom which "cannot be shaken" (Heb. 12). He provides a superior altar, to which those who reverted back to the Law of Moses had no right and to which we offer our spiritual sacrifices (Heb. 13). The height of folly would be for the Hebrew Christians to forsake the Lord. What a **tremendous** lesson that also is for you and me today, dear reader!

ARGUMENTS AGAINST PAULINE AUTHORSHIP

In extensively debating the authorship of Hebrews, many have rejected Paul as the writer. Those arguments against Paul follow, along with possible answers to the objections and questions relative to their validity. The arguments against Paul seemed to be strong in the last century. For example, B.F. Westcott said that Paul "cannot" be the author (Coffman 1). Coffman stated that "the most important interest of the Christian student lies 'in an examination of the seemingly persuasive reasons why so many scholars reject the traditional Pauline authorship,' rather than in choosing 'who **might** have written Hebrews'" (1).

A first objection is that the author did not affix his name to the epistle, thus, it could not have been Paul, since he signed all his letters (2 The. 3:17). It was atypical of Paul, since "the very first thing he normally did was to identify himself and establish his right to speak as an apostle of Jesus Christ" (Stancliff 9-10). It does not begin with "the apostolic salutation as the thirteen other Pauline epistles do" (Archer 4).

However, as Coffman observed, "... it [this objection] is greatly diminished by the very plausible and valid reasons that may be seen as the grounds of it" (5). It is not the only book of the New Testament which omits the author's name; John's name

is omitted from his three epistles for some unknown reason; and how can its omission in Hebrews be explained no matter who, other than Paul, wrote it? Would not this objection weigh against any other person as writer (Barnes xi)? Coffman powerfully argued:

Due to Paul's repudiation of Judaism and the fierce prejudice that existed against him throughout Jewry, it could have easily been that considerations of tact induced Paul to omit his name, in order to prevent stirring up unnecessary bias against the epistle, even before it was read. No such possible and plausible reason may be thought of as explaining why anyone, other than Paul, should have omitted his name. Who but Paul had a good reason for not signing such an epistle? (5-6).

Spence and Exell quoted Clement of Alexander, who quoted Pantaenus, his teacher, thus:

... it is not prefaced by "Paul the apostle" with good reason: "for" (says he) "as he was sending it to the Hebrews, who had conceived a prejudice against him and suspected him, he very wisely did not repel them at the beginning by using his name" (iii).

Augustine said Paul omitted his name "lest the Jews who were obstinately opposed to him, taking offense at this name, should either read with an unfriendly mind, or neglect altogether to read what he had written respecting their salvation" (Milligan 12). Milligan wrote:

The simple fact that the Epistle is anonymous is presumptive evidence that it was written by Paul. For surely the author, whoever he was, had some valid reason for withholding his name from a portion of those for whose benefit the Epistle was written. But what other reason can be assigned for this extraordinary omission, that so well accords with all the known facts of the case, as that which was alleged by Clement, Origen, Eusebius, Augustine, and other Christian Fathers: viz., that Paul did not prefix his name to the Epistle, lest its appearance might prevent many of his Jewish brethren from reading it, and judging of it by its own merits? Certain it is, that no better reason than this has ever been assigned for the omission of the author's name; and it is moreover equally certain, that in the light of all history, this reason applies to no one else so well as to

the Apostle Paul, against whom a very strong and general prejudice existed among both the converted and the unconverted Jews of that age (17).

Bible students are much aware that there are some exceptions to certain rules. Christ called to Him His apostles, who accompanied Him during His personal ministry and ate and drank with Christ after His resurrection (Acts 10:41); however, on the other hand, Christ appeared to Paul "last of all, as to the child untimely born" (1 Cor. 15:8). He was an exception to the rule, yet Paul was no less an apostle. There were good, valid reasons why Christ did not choose Saul of Tarsus earlier. It was promised that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was to guide the apostles into all truth; and yet, the Spirit was poured out upon Cornelius and his household as on Pentecost upon the apostles, but, they were **not** guided into all truth (Acts 10). There were other legitimate reasons why the Holy Spirit came upon the unconverted Gentiles (Acts 15:7-8). It is also true that "in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22), but is it not also true that those living on earth when Christ returns will not die physically (1 The. 4:15-17)? The action of Paul during the thirteen times he wrote the epistles to other brethren was that he signed his name; however, for the valid reasons mentioned above, it is the writer's belief that Paul wrote Hebrews (the only letter to them) and that he, by inspiration, did not identify himself, an exception to his normal practice. Not only did the Jews resent Paul for having abandoned Judaism (He was no doubt their champion defender), but Paul was very much aware of the **strong, bitter** feelings of many because of his refusal to demand the Gentiles be circumcised. He gathered the bounty for the poor in Jerusalem to help alleviate these vicious feelings. It is the writer's opinion that many among the mob at the temple who wanted to kill Paul were members of the church (Acts 21:17-40). If the letter was to the Hebrews in Jerusalem (and the writer thinks it was), then there is good reason for Paul not to have affixed his name, thus a wise exception to his usual practice. "Who but Paul had a good reason for not signing his name?" (Coffman 6). (Since this seems to be the strongest objection and for the sake of space, the others will be handled more briefly.)

A second objection is based on Hebrews 2:3: "... how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation? Which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard." The argument goes thus:

This sounds like the "us" did not actually hear the Lord, but had to depend upon others who had heard him. Paul did hear the Lord. The objections to Paul as the author feel they must look for an author who was a close companion of an apostle (Stancliff 10).

Saphir depicts this argument in this way: "A few expressions (as Heb.2:3) seem such, as could not have come from his pen" (15-16), but, he did not hold to that argument. Archer says Hebrews 2:3 "would have been extraordinary language for one like Paul, who had seen the Lord personally on several occasions, and had been personally instructed by Him by direct revelation (Gal. 1:12). Nor would Paul have by implication thus denied his apostolic authority" (4).

However, the author often personally "associates himself with his readers for the purpose of more effectually winning their hearts and softening his own admonitions," Milligan says (14-15). Examples he gives include the "us" in 6:1, the "we" in 2:1 (Milligan 14-15). He could have given examples from other books such as 1 Thessalonians 4:14 ("For if we believe"), ("them also that are fallen asleep"); 4:17 ("we that are alive"), etc. Shall Paul be both dead and alive when the Lord comes, or was he simply speaking editorially, identifying with both groups?

Manifestly, then, it was not the intention of the writer in all this to say that he was not an Apostle; that he had not seen and heard Jesus; and that he was now merely retailing to his brethren the second-hand reports of those who had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. Nay verily. This is but one of those masterly strokes of rhetoric in which the Epistle abounds from its alpha to its omega.

It should also be borne in mind that, in this instance, the writer may, and probably does, refer simply to Christ's personal ministry on earth. And if so, then Paul might speak even literally as he does, without in any way renouncing his claims to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ (Milligan 15-16).

In affirming that this argument from 2:3 is "altogether a mistake," Cook said:

In addressing the Christians of Judea, St. Paul could not have selected a more correct way of representing the facts of the case. He had not supplied them with **the historical evidence** of the death and resurrection life of Jesus. In

speaking to the Jews of Pisidian Antioch, Paul prefaced his own declaration of the Gospel to them by saying, that Jesus was "seen many days of them which came up with Him from Galilee, **who are His witnesses** unto the people" (Acts xiii.31,32; compare Luke xxiv.48; Acts i.22, ii.32). The passage, therefore, which has caused so many to stumble, is in full accord with St. Paul's known mode of address (17-18).

Also, we remember that Paul was "untimely born." Hebrews was not written by one of the original apostles who taught the Hebrews in Jerusalem (Welch 11). He was not an eyewitness of Christ's activities on earth, "but by far the most probable explanation is that Paul, or whoever wrote it, was merely identifying himself with his intended readers for the purpose of making a more delicate and persuasive appeal to them," Coffman says (2-3). Does the author's use of "us" in 6:1 mean that "he himself was lingering upon first principles, having made no effort to go on unto perfection?" Coffman concludes, "Invariably, those denying Paul's authorship of this epistle make much of this passage (2:3,4), far too much!" (2-3).

A third objection is that the great beauty and style of Hebrews cannot be Paul's. "... the author of Hebrews cites Old Testament Scripture and incidents differently than does Paul." His sentences and paragraphs are different; Hebrews is "calm," but Paul's words are "rugged," and his terminology is different. "... the author of Hebrews appears to be oblivious to the pagan world" (Carter 10). Unlike Paul, "The writer is master of his words," never careless in language, and he does not have "the tempestuousness of Paul." He "is never ungrammatical" and "never struggles for expression"; he is "a man who thinks as well as writes in Greek," having "purer Greek" than Paul, who is "rude in speech, and lacks polish" (Nicoll 224-25).

However, though the writer is neither a Greek scholar, nor the son of a Greek scholar, nor "a dresser of sycamore trees" (as he heard an esteemed preacher say on one occasion years ago), he has never considered Paul the apostle so ignorant and unlearned. Spence and Exell wrote that a writer greatly varies his words, phrases, and structure in various works "in accordance with his train of thought, surrounding influence and associations, books lately read, or the subjects treated" (xi). We might add such things as audience addressed, outward circumstances, et al. Further:

It may indeed be said that, when St. Paul set himself to the careful composition of a work which, though in epistolary form, was meant as a lasting treatise on a great subject, he would be likely to depart from his usual epistolary style, and that a man of his learning and versatile powers would, even humanly speaking, be capable of adopting both the language and the arrangement suitable to his purpose (Spence xi).

John Phillips wrote:

Such differences might be explained by the fact that in all his other letters, Paul was addressing Gentiles, whereas in Hebrews his audience was the Jews. Certainly Paul was an instructed scribe, a pupil of the celebrated Gamaliel, and thoroughly conversant with the thought forms of the Hebrew people. That Paul did write an epistle to the Hebrews is evident from 2 Peter 3:15 (Phillips 33).

Cook, in answering this objection, said that Paul's language to the Hebrews would naturally differ from the epistles to the Gentile churches. It even differed widely among his other epistles, i.e., the word "law" mentioned seventy-five times in Romans and in 2 Corinthians not once. Why? It was because in one he needed it, in the other he did not. He used different words in his various other epistles, but that does not mean he did not write all thirteen others. Again, Paul knew Greek through and through, disputing against the Hellenists (Acts 9:29). Also, Paul was schooled in "no mean city," Tarsus, "to which he next retired, [which] was reckoned inferior neither to Alexandria nor to Athens as a school of philosophy." There he studied Grecian thought and speech even more. Further, Paul dealt with the Epicureans and Stoics in Athens.

Dr. Farrar speaks of St. Paul's address on Mar's Hill as exhibiting "a power of reasoning and eloquence to which they [the Athenians] could not be insensible," and notices "the consummate skill with which it was framed," and "the pregnant meanings infused into its **noble and powerful sentences.**" He also observes that St. Paul could, when he chose, wield a style of remarkable finish and eloquence" (Cook 19-21).

Truly, when compared to Paul's speeches and other writings, not even considering his inspiration by God, he certainly **could have**

written Hebrews. Even Paul's enemies spoke of his writing genius, "For, His letters, they say, are weighty and strong; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account" (2 Cor. 10:10). Of course, Paul's modesty is exhibited when he speaks of himself. Paul shook the world; how was one so ignorant and crude able to do that? In the Hebrews letter, Paul was "in his own element. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees," who had advanced far above his fellows. Coffman observes, "Every artist must be allowed his masterpiece; and in all probability, the epistle to the Hebrews is Paul's" (Coffman 4-5). Milligan asks, "Why then, should it be thought incredible by anyone, that God by his Spirit, should, in some cases exercise an influence over even the style of the inspired writers?" (14).

A fourth objection to the Pauline authorship is that the "Roman church" rejected that Paul wrote Hebrews. Milligan stated that the epistle "was commonly received throughout the East as an Epistle of Paul. Indeed, it was very generally so regarded from the beginning in the Egyptian, Greek, and Syrian churches. It was chiefly in the West that its Pauline authorship was, for a time, denied or doubted." He continued, "And this uncertainty prevailed in the West till about the middle of the fourth century," when it "began to change" (Milligan 10). Jerome "doubtless contributed to this result" and "the Epistle retained its place in the canon as one of St. Paul's without dispute, till the question was again raised in the sixteenth century" (Spence vi-viii).

However, Cook observed:

... that the Epistle which had been recognized as authoritative at Rome in the first century, came at a later period to be treated by many as of only secondary value. The reason which they alleged for this was, that the Epistle was "not St. Paul's"—clearly implying, that as many as held it to be canonical did believe it to be St. Paul's; and consequently, that the Roman Church of the first century had done so.

The question, then, is: Shall the positive testimony of men, who, knowing St. Paul intimately, were qualified to give witness on such a point, be outweighed by the doubts of those who lived some hundred years later, and therefore were not so qualified. To allow this would be to violate a fundamental rule of evidence (Cook 5).

Coffman states that "There is, of course, no way to prove these objections groundless; and yet without belaboring the point, it appears after careful reflection that these objections are not all that convincing." He continues:

The early repudiation of Pauline authorship by Rome is offset by their later acceptance of it, an acceptance that demanded the infallible rejection of a prior infallible judgment, under the circumstances, a reversal that must be hailed as exceedingly significant, and which could hardly have happened at all except under the compulsion of overwhelming evidence. The absence of Hebrews from early lists of Paul's epistles is easily explained by the influence of the Roman position or the matter during those times (2).

Other objections sometimes given are easily answered, such as the argument that priestly functions and sacrifices are found more in Hebrews than in Paul's other epistles (Nicoll 226). However, would not that be exactly expected when there is a different audience addressed (the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem) and a different purpose (of warning them not to forsake the Christ for mere shadows of the ultimate sacrifice and priesthood of Christ)? Further, would not one expect the apostle to "move on different lines and in a different atmosphere from those with which the apostle to the Gentiles makes us familiar" (Nicoll 225)? Even further, it is argued that "it was written by one who belonged to the Pauline Circle" (Nicoll 228); "... is it not possible to believe with Origin that the thoughts are those of the Apostle" (Nicoll 225)? When this argument is made, the writer thinks of 1 Corinthians 2:13, "... combining spiritual things with spiritual words"—verbal inspiration. Spence and Exell suggest that if another wrote the letter, "Paul must have written from ch.xiii.18 to the end, in which the first person is for the first time used, and which remind us peculiarly of St. Paul...the final 'grace' being, as in other cases, his authenticating autograph" (xii). A question: If it was one of Paul's acquaintances, why not Paul himself? Other even weaker objections are sometimes given.

IF NOT PAUL, WHO?

A very appropriate question, if Paul did not write Hebrews, is, "Who did write this epistle?" Nicoll states, "A single authorship is unquestionably demanded by certain expressions in the

epistle"; he cites Hebrews 11:32; 13:19; 13:22-23. In fact, he states that a double authorship has "grave difficulties," (i.e., Priscilla and Aquila) (228-29). Carter affirms that numerous candidates have been advocated by various writers:

However, no one of these candidates has ever been able to secure a sufficient majority of the scholarly votes for final election. From earliest times to the present, Paul has been put forth by various scholars as the author of Hebrews (10).

Who are the ones who have been suggested as the possible writer (other than Paul)?

First, Conybeare and Howson state that there were "only two persons whose claim to the **independent authorship** of the Epistle was maintained in the Primitive Church, viz. St. Barnabas and St. Paul." They list as qualifications his being a Levite, the supposition that being from Cyprus he received his "theological education" at Alexandria (thus fitting the "Alexandrian character of the argumentation of this Epistle"), the ancient tradition connecting Barnabas with Alexandria, his friendship with Timothy, and his being gifted at exhortation (852-53). Archer held this theory to be "beset with difficulties" (5). Nicoll stated that "This solution cannot be said to have ever been prevalent in the early church." Citing the tradition that his nephew Mark "introduced the Gospel into Alexandria," "This however, tells also against his authorship, for it is unaccountable that Barnabas' name should have been lost in the church where his nephew resided" (Nicoll 227). Phillips stated "there is no real evidence that he wrote Hebrews" (33).

Second, Luke has been proposed, for "The style of Greek in the book is quite similar to that of Luke's account of the gospel" (Stancliff 11). However, Spence and Exell call this opinion "conjecture only" (xii). Some have suggested that Luke was translating Paul's thoughts, but Nicoll states, "Evidently the suggestion that Luke was on this occasion Paul's interpreter is quite insufficient to satisfy the conditions" (227). Phillips stated, "Luke, it seems, was a Gentile and, unless he wrote under Paul's tutorship, seems a most unlikely candidate. It has been suggested, of course, that the thoughts were Paul's but the language Luke's" (33). This idea is beset with many problems.

Third, Martin Luther suggested that Apollos wrote Hebrews—an Alexandrian Jew and having "ability and culture."

"This, plainly, does not prove that Apollos was the author, but it lends plausibility to the hypothesis," Nicoll said (229-30). Spence and Exell point out that this theory has "this very serious objection to it being that none of the ancients seem to have thought of him at all." This "remains a serious objection to the supposition," they stated (xiv). Saphir concludes, "But there is no historical foundation for it (16).

Fourth, some have suggested that Clement of Rome may have written the epistle. Hughes said, though, that "it does not require an expert to see that as a stylist and theologian Clement is not to be compared with the writer of Hebrews" (19). "... the style of Clement certainly does not really suggest him as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. All that appears is that he was acquainted with it, and cited it, and introduced some of its thoughts and language" (Spence xiii). "Clement of Rome can hardly have been the author, because the Roman church rejected Hebrews as a canonical for a long time" (Phillips 33). Barnes stated, "It is wholly incredible that a foreigner should be so familiar with the Jewish opinions, laws, institutions, and history, as the author of this epistle manifestly was" (x). Those rejecting the authorship of Paul should come with the evidence which points to another as the author of Hebrews and a legitimate reason why he would omit his name from the book. The afore mentioned persons have been suggested as possible authors, but the "evidence" is less than convincing.

EVIDENCES PAUL WROTE HEBREWS

Many evidences and arguments have been set forth that Paul actually wrote Hebrews. **One**, there is no doubt that the writer "was extremely well acquainted with Jewish ceremonies and thought ... the priesthood and the sacrifices ... prophecies" (Stancliff 7). Paul not only met that qualification superbly, but he also "cherished an affection for his brethren which finds its equal only in the devotion of Moses, and was surpassed only by the Lord." "It was no doubt a trial to him that Christian Hebrews regarded him with something like suspicion. Much as he desired to confirm and comfort them, he could not write to them as an apostle" (Saphir 15).

Two, "The level of Greek which is used in the book is that which would be typical of a very well educated individual ... God makes use of the styles of the various inspired men" (Stancliff 7-

8). "It was written by one who appears on familiar grounds with the law, and that could well fit Paul, a Hebrew, and one educated in the best of Jewish teaching (Acts 22:3, 5:34)" (Welch 11). No doubt Paul had the finest training not only in Grecian culture and language but also in the Law of Moses—as well as being inspired, of course.

Three, "It was written by a friend of Timothy from Italy and evidently by one who was a prisoner" (DeHoff 220).³ "The writer is one who expects to travel with Timothy to see them, and Paul had particularly made Timothy a traveling companion (Hebrews 13:23; Acts 16:1-3)" (Welch 11-12).⁴ "... the remark [13:23] seems to favor the Pauline authorship" (Milligan 18). Archer says, "The mention of Timothy in 13:23 proves the writer to have been of the Pauline circle of acquaintance" (5). The author asks, "Why not Paul?" Boatman holds this evidences Pauline authorship (11). Briney holds this to be a strong argument for Paul as author (346), as does Coffman (11).

Four, Saphir states that "the epistle was Pauline in thought, design, and argument, but not Pauline in its actual form" (16). However, Barnes shows the similarities between Hebrews and the other epistles of Paul; "There is the same preference for Christianity over Judaism in this epistle which is shown by Paul in his other epistles and exhibited in the **same form** [emphasis CAC]" (x). Milligan wrote:

There is certainly much in the style, phraseology, and logical structure of the Epistle, which very much resembles the other writings of Paul. That the style is somewhat more elevated and rhetorical than that of his other Epistles, is of course conceded ... But ... the logical structure of the Epistle ... is essentially Pauline (17-18).

Milligan proceeds to give more evidence of style and expressions pointing to Paul. The serious student of the authorship of Hebrews is pointed to the excellent analysis and comparison of the Hebrews letter with the other epistles and speeches of Paul as relates to style, structure, form, phraseology by F.C. Cook, which comparisons cause him strongly to affirm Paul as the author of Hebrews (7-21). "... there are many points of similarity between its phraseology and diction and those of Paul" (Conybeare 553), and any language scholar realizes that Paul could speak very intellectually to **any** audience and adjust his style and

substance to the level and needs appropriate to the audience. For example, examine his various speeches in the book of Acts.

Five, "The tradition of the Church in the East, where the Epistle was first received, is unanimous in asserting the authorship of the apostle Paul" (Saphir 18). "Indeed, it was very generally so regarded from the beginning in the Egyptian, Coptic, and Syrian churches" (Milligan 10).⁵ Very significant is the statement of Eusebius that "There are fourteen epistles of Paul, manifest and well known." Though he had heard that Rome had rejected Paul's authorship, he nonetheless accepted it as undoubtedly written by Paul. The churches in the East "were unanimous in the opinion that this epistle was written by Paul, and their united testimony should settle the question" (Barnes viii-ix). Cook observed that when Christians "escaped to Pella before the Siege of Jerusalem," and being unable to return to Jerusalem but settled elsewhere, the epistle was "more precious to them than ever. Their statements as to the authorship would, of course, be accepted everywhere" (5). Having given much powerful argumentation, he stated, "The testimony of the *Eastern Church*, then, is consistent and clear" (Cook 5).

Six, in Alexandria, from the time of Pantaenus, the consensus was that Paul was the author. Pantaenus was "the chief of the catechetical school in *Alexandria* about the middle of the second century" (Alford 3). Alford said there can be no doubt that "Pantaenus believed the Epistle to be the work of Paul" (4), as verified by Clement of Alexandria (Saphir 15). Pantaenus said that Paul did not use his name "out of reverence for the Lord, and because he wrote of his abundance to the Hebrews, as a herald and Apostle to the Gentiles" (Milligan 6). "This distinct early tradition is plainly of great importance in the argument as to authorship" (Spence iv). "Pantaenus lived near Palestine ... his testimony must be regarded as proof that the epistle was regarded as Paul's by the churches in that region" (Barnes vii). "This tradition takes us nearly up to the apostolic age" (Cook 4).

Seven, "That Paul did write an epistle to the Hebrews is evident from 2 Peter 3:15" (Phillips 33). "This refers to a particular letter sent to the same persons addressed by Peter. This is conclusive proof that Paul wrote a letter to the Hebrews" (DeHoff 220).

Eight, "The benediction with which Hebrews closes is found in the other thirteen epistles of Paul and is found in the New

Testament epistles of no other. Paul invokes **grace** upon those whom he bids farewell" (DeHoff 220).

The final chapter, except for the omitted signature, is so universally hailed as Paul's thought, that they go so far as to suggest that he personally added that chapter. Who but Paul, in all that ancient world, could have commanded the attendance of Timothy upon some projected journey?

Know ye that our brother Timothy hath been set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you (13:23) (Coffman 7).

Many other evidences could be cited for the Pauline authorship, such as its having been written during Paul's lifetime, the purpose of the letter, the writings of Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, Augustine, and others, the Council of Antioch, his having written from Italy, his audience, the motives behind the writing, etc.

CONCLUSION

Without the book of Hebrews, as is true with any other of the sixty-six books of the Holy Scriptures, God's written revelation would be incomplete. Hebrews has challenged in-depth thinking, study, and discussion for nearly two thousand years. Written specifically to Jewish Christians who were tempted by the glamour of the physical "things" visible about them and who were in imminent danger of apostatizing from "the faith," its lessons to us are very real and infinitely valuable. We are inspired by the descriptions of our Lord and His superior blessings to grow in faith and to maintain our hope in the eternal reward, the "Sabbath rest" in heaven.

Although one cannot know with **absolute** certainty that Paul wrote the book of Hebrews, the evidence seems to this author to be very strong. Many have denied strongly the Pauline authorship but have struggled unsuccessfully to tell who **did** write the letter. Brother DeHoff sums up very well the sentiment of the writer: "The author of Hebrews did not need to put his name in the letter. He was well known of those addressed. He asked for their prayers. He prayed for them. He spoke of visiting with Timothy and closed with the usual Paul like farewell benediction" (220).

Cook summarizes thus: "We see, then, that the things which have been urged against the hypothesis of the Pauline authorship of this Epistle, are, on the contrary, in perfect harmony with it; some of them, indeed, supplying confirmatory proofs of it" (21). Brother Briney concluded, I do not pretend to pose as a 'higher critic,' but I do claim to have some common sense, and that, in view of the foregoing premises, tells me that Paul wrote Hebrews" (346).

ENDNOTES

¹ All Scripture references are from the American Standard Version (1901) unless otherwise noted.

² "Alford ... argues at considerable length ... in favor of the Epistle having been addressed to Rome; but his reasoning is by no means convincing" (Conybeare xviii).

³ See also Phillips, p. 33.

⁴ See also Barnes, pp. ix, xiii.

⁵ See also Spence and Exell, p. ix, Stancliff, p. 9.

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