



A Course

In

**HEBREWS,
STUDIES IN**

Prepared by the
Committee on Religious Education
of the
American Bible College

Pineland, Florida 33945

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The compiler of this course study uses the book by Dr. Hershel H. Hobbs as the basis of this work. We wish to thank the former Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention for its permission to reprint and use their material. This course study will consist mainly of this text book with the inclusion of additional notes from other sources, unless otherwise noted. The scripture texts are altered to conform with the King James Version except where the authors are using their own rendering. It is our desire that this study will be enlightening and spiritually rewarding as you understand Christ's New covenant as based on the Old Testament covenant.

Respectfully your servant in Christ Jesus,

Dr. Marvin W. Royse

INTRODUCTION

As you study the Scriptures you will find that it is of the greatest importance to approach the Bible in a reverent attitude of mind, looking upon it as the inspired Word of God, and not just an ordinary piece of literature. If the Bible is studied in the same manner as one studies Shakespeare, Milton or some historical work, it may be found interesting and profitable. But by this approach, the Bible student, persistent though he may be, will never find its rich treasures. The Apostle Paul says: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (I Cor. 2:14) For the profitable study of the Word of God, the right spiritual attitude is indispensable.

The Scriptures should be studied as eagerly as a hungry person seeks for food. The formal reading of a portion of the Bible may have some worth as a religious exercise, but in order that the complete benefit may be obtained from its truths, they must be appropriated to personal needs. A milkman may deliver thousands of quarts of milk each day and yet go home thirsty. The Bible student may read large portions of the Bible with little benefit, unless he makes it his own by personal appropriation and feeds upon it.

In your studies of the Bible will you appropriate the riches thereof to your own personal use, or will you read as you would read a book of fiction, a mystery, etc? In order to make full use of the pearls of wisdom

surface; they must be dug up and be brought into the light by toil and effort.

There are various methods of Bible study, such as the topical method, the study of books, the study by chapters, the study of important passages, and the biographical method. In our approach we are following the expository method which basically is a selected verse by verse interpretation. In this way the Bible student will be able to grasp the entire context in relation to an understanding of its individual verses.

Although the American Bible College believes the King James Version is the preserved Word of God, this method of study allows the writer to occasionally condense a passage in his own paraphrase. This should not be construed to imply that A. B. C. is correcting God's Word.

During this course the student is required to read through the entire Book of Hebrews ten times.

The scripture **references to be memorized for this course are:** Hebrews 1:3; 2:3; 4:12, 16; 7:25; 9:22, 27; 11:1, 6, 31; 13:20-21; and I Pet 2:9. A good way to memorize these verses for your tests is to place them on a 3"X 5" card with the reference on the reverse side and to read them often each day until memorized.

contained in the Bible readings, it is suggested you reread them. Go into its wonderful fields of truth; go down into its valleys; climb its mountain peaks of vision; follow its streams of inspiration; enter its halls of learning. Many Bible truths do not appear on the

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CHAPTER I

HEBREWS' BACKGROUND

I. THE PROBLEMS OF TITLE AND STYLE

II. THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORSHIP

III. THE PROBLEM OF DATE

IV. THE PROBLEM OF DESTINATION

V. THE PROBLEM OF PURPOSE

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The Book: Its Writer and Problems

IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS we stand at the watershed of the religious experience of the human race. From that vantage point the writer enables us to catch a panoramic view of God's eternal purpose of redemption. Looking back through the Old Testament, we catch a glimpse of the tiny rill of God's purpose as it bursts forth from the fountain of God's redemptive love. Gradually it broadens and deepens into a mighty river winding its life-giving way through the pages of ancient history only to lose itself in the dry desert sands of a disobedient people. Presently in Christ we see it emerge as a fountain of living water, springing up into eternal life and causing the desert of unredeemed souls to blossom as a rose. Looking forward in the New Testament and beyond, we see it as "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. 22: 1), coursing its redemptive way through all ages and to all peoples. Into its swelling current we are urged to launch our ships of faith, that through our witness, the knowledge of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

Against this background let us turn to an examination of the Epistle to the Hebrews. There is no other book in the New Testament which presents more unsettled problems. We cannot be certain as to its title. We do not know the name of the writer. We cannot be dogmatic as to its date. Its place of origin is disputed as vehemently as its destination and recipients. There is a widespread difference of opinion among scholars as to its purpose. Why, then, do we propose to study it at all? In the first place, these very problems challenge and intrigue us. They are vital in our understanding of the epistle. In the second place, the epistle is of infinite value as a religious document. It presents to us the most exalted picture of Christ to be found anywhere in the holy Scriptures. Furthermore, it involves for every Christian a timeless goal and challenge as to the meaning of his spiritual experience. While modern scholars may differ as to the questions raised above, they are united in the conviction that the writing is

inspired Scripture and deserves its place in the sacred canon.

I. THE PROBLEM OF TITLE AND STYLE

The title most familiar to the average reader is that given by the King James Version as "the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews."

However, many in modern scholarship have challenged this traditional title. According to the most ancient manuscripts the title was simply "To Hebrews." While some modern scholars question its originality, the weight of literary evidence seems to tip the scales in its favor.

The style of the epistle is important for our understanding of its message. Someone has aptly said that it begins like a treatise, proceeds like a sermon, and ends like a letter. Despite the claims of some to the contrary, the epistle gives every evidence of being a unit. It shows evidence of a studied rhetoric, without "the impetuous eloquence of Paul." Dr. Adolf Deissmann suggests that Hebrews marks an epoch in the history of the Christian religion, indicating that it has begun "to lay hands on the instruments of culture; the literary and theological period has begun."

II. THE PROBLEM OF PENMANSHIP

The Holy Spirit is the accepted author of the Book of Hebrews; however, Hebrews being unsigned presents the difficulty ascribing the human writer. Who wrote the epistle? (Throughout his book Dr. Hobbs refers to the human writer as the "author." This has been changed to "writer.") Eusebius quotes Origen as replying, "God only knows." Someone has fittingly added that God has not chosen to speak regarding it. Certainly the epistle itself, like the Fourth Gospel, is silent on the subject. But if silence has reigned in these areas, it has certainly been dethroned elsewhere. To mention a few names, the epistle has variously been assigned to Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Peter, Luke, Priscilla and Aquila, Silas, Philip the Deacon, Aristion, and Clement of Rome. The most ancient and persistent theories as to the authorship of Hebrews center about Paul and Barnabas. Martin Luther attributed it to Apollos, and Dr. A. T. Robertson offers the "guess" that he was most likely correct. Many scholars since Luther's day have followed his position. Space forbids a thorough discussion of this problem. If Pauline penmanship, the *King James Version Bible Commentary* writes,

Paul. The strongest argument for Pauline authorship of the epistle involves the ancient historical tradition of

the church. As early as the second century, Paul was regarded in the East as the writer; during the third century the eastern churches commonly accepted his authorship. In the West, where the epistle was known from earliest times, Pauline authorship was rejected and did not gain general acceptance until the fourth century (Gardiner, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. XIV, p. 341). Even in the East, Clement of Alexandria had difficulty reconciling the literary character of Hebrews with Paul's style and thus proposed that "it was written by Paul for Hebrews in the Hebrew language, but that Luke translated it and published it for the Greeks; thus he endeavored to account for the similarity in style between Hebrews and the Lucan writings." (F. F. Bruce, p. XXXVI). Though the literary style of Hebrews in no way allows it to be a translation, the proposal by Clement does reveal the disparity some early Greek-speaking scholars saw between Paul's style and that of the Epistle to the Hebrews.¹

However, by the fourth century, the church largely agreed to include Hebrews as the fourteenth letter of Paul. Church Fathers such as Jerome and Augustine of Hippo affirmed Paul's authorship, and the Church continued this affirmation of Paul's authorship until the Reformation.

If neither Barnabas nor Apollos wrote Hebrews under the guidance of Paul, it must have been someone like them. A good case can be made for either.

III. THE PROBLEM OF DATE

Again we find wide disagreement among the scholars. Dates all the way from A.D. 50 to A.D. 96 have been suggested. However, at least six factors may be considered in determining a probable date.

First, we know that Hebrews could not have been written later than A.D. 95, for about that time Clement of Rome made use of it in his letter to Corinth. Second, some have suggested a later date within this period on the basis that its readers were those who had been converted by the Lord's personal disciples. However, we are not required to suppose any great length of time for this to have taken place. Third, it has been pointed out that the doctrinal development calls for a time somewhere between the later Pauline epistles. for

¹ Jerry Falwell, executive editor; Edward E. Hinson and Michael Kroll Woodrow, general editors, *KJV Bible commentary [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1994.

example, Colossians (about A.D. 63), and the Johannine writings (A.D.80-95). Paul was martyred in A.D. 68; John wrote from about A.D. 80 onward; Hebrews could have followed closely upon the former event and some time before the latter period.

Fourth, the epistle makes mention of the fact that its readers have endured persecution and continue to do so (10:33ff.; 12:4). If we suppose the ordeal to be widespread, we might fasten on to the persecution under Nero, A.D. 64-68, or the one under Domitian after A.D. 81. A better case can be made in favor of the earlier date. Fifth, the mention of Timothy's liberation from prison (13:23) throws some light upon the problem. Paul urged Timothy to come to Rome shortly before his death in A.D. 68 (2 Tim. 4:11-13, 21). We may suppose that he came and was imprisoned. Some time after the death of Nero on June 8, A.D. 68 he may well have been released. This could have happened in the latter part of that year or the early part of the next. This would put us somewhere near A.D. 69. Sixth, many scholars regard the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as a pivotal point in fixing the date. The writer does not mention this catastrophe. He does seem to indicate that the Temple and its sacrificial system are still in existence (10: 1 ff.), but that they are "ready to vanish away" (8: 13). This would seem to indicate a time before the end of the Jewish War in A.D.70. W. A. Criswell writes, "The most likely date, in view of the evidence, would be prior to the destruction of the temple, hence c. A.D. 65."²

Summarizing the evidence, we find that we are confined to a date somewhere between A.D. 50 and A.D. 95. The religious development of the readers does not require a date more than thirty or forty years beyond Pentecost, which would leave us somewhere in the period from A.D. 60 to A.D. 70. The doctrinal content of the epistle would fit this period. Such a period would bring us into the atmosphere of the Neronian persecution of A.D. 64-68. Timothy's liberation from prison could well fall into the A.D. 68-69 period, probably the latter year. The Jerusalem temple is still standing but is ready to vanish away. It actually was destroyed in A.D. 70. The year prior to that cataclysmic event would fit the writer's statement. Therefore we may set A.D. 69 as a possible date of writing for Hebrews.

² W.A. Criswell, *Believer's Study Bible [computer file], electronic ed. , Logos Library System,* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1991 by the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies.

IV. THE PROBLEM OF DESTINATION

Here again we are confronted with an insoluble problem. Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, Colosse, Ephesus, Berea, even Ravenna, and others have been suggested. Until the nineteenth century Palestine, or Jerusalem, was generally accepted as the destination. Since then Alexandria in Egypt has been offered as the recipient of the epistle. More recently Rome has come in for consideration.

The truth of the matter is—we do not know. The individual's own judgment will have the final word. About all that we can say with certainty is that Hebrews was written to a congregation of Hebrew Christians, large or small, somewhere. The value of the epistle does not depend upon our knowledge of its destination. This uncertainty may even add to the universal application of its timeless truths. It gives to us the advantage of regarding the epistle as personal—as written to your church and to mine.

V. THE PROBLEM OF PURPOSE

[To this compiler, the main problem in interpreting Hebrews is the issue of whether Paul is primarily concerned with the subject of truth *revelation* or spiritual *salvation*. Although both are dealt with, revelation of Jesus through the New Covenant seems to dominate as a foundation for the salvation of these Jews. Hence, in dealing with this new revelation of Christ being the fulfillment of the Old Testament Covenant, Paul has in mind all Hebrews who have recently understood God's plan for spiritual salvation through Christ – both saved and unsaved.

Hebrews has two major terms that aid in defining the purpose of this book: "better" and "covenant."

The first term, "better" is a descriptive term. [The intermingled use of the word "better", Greek *kreisson*, in 1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 34, 35, 40; and 12:24 is a key word for understanding the Holy Spirit's purpose in writing this Book. Liddell and Scott define *kreisson* as "stronger, mightier; better, braver, and superior to (compiler's emphasis)."] Throughout the book of Hebrews, Jesus is presented as better (superior to) than the Old Testament Levitical (Jewish) system. Thus, the overall purpose of Hebrews seems to be an apologetic and warning for those early Christians not to allow the Judaizers to apostatize them back into Judaism.

W. E. Vine follows this purpose in his "ANALYSIS":

- (1) Christ's superiority to the *prophets* ...1:1-3
- (2) Christ's superiority to the *angels*...1:4-14; 2:5-18
First series of admonitions...2:1-4
- (3) Christ's superiority to *Moses*...3:1-6
Second series of admonitions...3:7-4:7
- (4) Christ's superiority to *Joshua*...4:8-10
Third series of admonitions...4:11-13
- (5) Christ's superiority *as a High Priest*...4:14 to 10:18
 - (a) The superiority of *His Priesthood*...4:14 to 5:10; 6:13 to 7:28
Fourth series of admonitions...5:11 to 6:12
 - (b) The superiority of *His Sanctuarity*...8:1-5; 9:1-11
 - (c) The superiority of *God's Covenant*...8:6-13; 9:15-20; 10:16-18
 - (d) The superiority of *His Sacrifice*...9:12-14; 9:21-28; 10:1-15
Fifth series of admonitions...10:19 to 12:2
- (6) Christ's superiority *in faith*...12:2
Sixth series of admonitions...12:3-13:19
- (7) Christ's superiority *as a shepherd*...13:20, 21
Seventh series of admonitions...13:22-25³

The second Greek term, *diathēhē*, translated "covenant" and "testament" is a theological term. In Hebrews *diathēhē* is translated "covenant" twenty times and "testament" six times. An understanding of covenant/testament is of paramount importance. It affects our comprehension of Hebrew's teaching of the doctrines of salvation, eternal security and Christian service. Also, Liddell and Scott define *diathēkē* as "a disposition of property by will; a will and testament: also a covenant." The basic concept behind "covenant" is that of *relationship*. The meaning of the Greek word, *diathēhē*, has its basis in its O.T. Hebrew counterpart, *berīth*, "to bind." "There are two shades of meaning, somewhat distinct, of the Heb word: one in which it is properly a covenant, i.e. a solemn mutual agreement, the other in which it is more a command, i.e. instead of an obligation imposed by a superior upon an inferior."⁴ The later is the meaning behind the N.T. usage of *kresson*. Our Lord has commanded this *relationship* (covenant) of a believer to Himself.

Also, the Bible presents two basic types of covenants: conditional and unconditional. That found

in Hebrews is conditional; that is, God says He will fulfill His promised blessing to the Hebrew, if the Hebrew fulfills his Godly required obligations to the Lord. Chapters 8-10 explain this expected covenant relationship between believers and our Lord Jesus Christ.

What was the writer's purpose in writing Hebrews? Some have entertained the idea that it was written as a warning to those who had not yet become Christians and who were on the verge of turning back without believing. However, the historical position to which the majority of Bible scholars both past and present adhere is that the epistle was written to Hebrew Christians who had had a genuine experience of grace, but who were faced with the temptation of forsaking Christianity to return to Judaism. From the context, it is obvious that Paul deals with both parties.

Among this second group there is a wide difference of opinion as to the cause of this tendency. It is quite clear from the text itself that they were enduring heavy persecution, from Judaism or perhaps from the Roman government.]

Beyond this evident fact there is a multiplicity of positions. Some find the temptation rooted in the impending destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem with its attendant doubts to which immature Hebrew Christians would be susceptible. Others detect evidence of disappointment on the part of these young Christians over the low moral standards and gross spiritual ignorance on the part of Gentile Christians. Still others find the cause in the readers' disappointment over the postponement of our Lord's promised return. More recently there comes the suggestion that their danger was not of a relapse into Judaism but a loss of the significance of their Christian profession due to their continuing to live under the shadow of Jewish legalism.

In at least five places throughout the epistle (2:1 ff.; 3:7 ff.; 6:1 ff.; 10:19 ff.; 12:1 ff.) Paul turns aside from presenting his evidence in order to exhort his readers to act in the light of it. Believers are exhorted to continue in their service of Christ by evangelism. While those enlightened, but not yet saved Jews, are encouraged to repent to Jesus as their true sacrifice for sins and yield to Him as "Lord"—(Greek *kurios* is found 16 times in Hebrews); Greek *kurios* is the N.T. counterpart of the O.T. Hebrew word for God, *adonai* likewise translated "Lord."

Suffice it to say that the purpose of the writer in writing this wonderful epistle is to issue a clarion call to Hebrews of every age to go on in the fulfilment of their part in God's redemptive purpose. The sum and

³ W. E. Vine, *Hebrews* (London: Oliphants Limited) 1952, p. 9.

⁴ James Orr, *THE INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BIBLE ENCYCLOPAEDIA*, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.) 1960, p.727)

substance of the message of the epistle is that in every age God has redeemed a people through whom to declare his message to a lost world. Failure on the part of a people, both individually and collectively, to fit into God's plan results in their rejection in favor of another. The consequence of Israel's failure in the light of her privilege foretells a greater consequence in the event of failure on the part of Christian people in the light of their great privilege.⁵

We shall see that the original readers of the epistle were suffering from a state of arrested development in their divine calling. They were content simply to be redeemed from sin, with no concern for the will of God for them or for the plight of others who know not God in Christ. They were overlooking the fact that a full salvation includes redemption—plus a continuing growth in grace and service which ultimately evolves into a Christian character made in the image of God. The writer thus issues to them his challenge both negatively and positively; negatively, as he exhorts them to avoid the failure of Israel and, positively, as he presents to them the glorious person and power of Christ, our ally or "partner" in God's redemptive plan.

It is this very fact which makes Hebrews so vital to us today. If the message of the epistle is a call to a world mission, then it is as fresh as though the first ink on the original was yet undried. It is in this light that we approach the study of this wonderful epistle. In it is the most tremendous message for our age—and for every age.]

END OF SAMPLE

⁵ Note that W. H. Griffith Thomas' *Let Us Go On* (Zondervan) deals with "the secret of Christian progress in the Epistle to the Hebrews."