





About the Author

Traditionally the author of Hebrews was thought to be the apostle Paul, largely because of the reference to Timothy in 13.23. Scholars are now largely agreed that the language, style and theology is so very different from the rest of the Pauline letters, that it is highly unlikely to have been written by Paul.

There are no other clues to the identity of the writer and so the author of Hebrews remains unknown.



About the times

Hebrews is thought to have been written between about ad 60 and 80, shortly after the community had experienced a time of persecution and suffering. The key question for dating the book is whether you think the Jerusalem temple still existed or not. If the temple was still there (i.e. before ad 70) then Hebrews is laying out a claim about worship that competed with that of the temple. If it had been destroyed by the time Hebrews was written then the author, like many Jews of his day, were trying to make sense of their faith in God without a place to worship him.

Hebrews reads very differently depending on the date you think it was written.

What were people feeling?

Whatever the date, the recipients of Hebrews were clearly discouraged and disheartened in their faith and needed the message of encouragement that you can find in the book.



What kind of Book is it?

Although often called an epistle it is more like a sermon, designed to encourage its hearers to continued faithfulness.

You will notice that it does not open as most New Testament letters do with any introduction or reference to personal connection with the audience and its greetings at the end are cursory in the extreme. But, at the end (13.22), the author does say 'I have written to you briefly'. This implies a letter – maybe it is halfway between a sermon and a letter?



How is it structured?

Because of the complex nature of the book, there are many different structures offered for it.

One possible one is to focus entirely on Christ like this:

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| 1.1-2.18 | Christ is superior to the angels |
| 3.1-4.16 | Christ is superior to Moses |
| 5.1-7.28 | Christ is superior to Aaron |
| 8.1-10.39 | Christ is superior to the old covenant |
| 11.1-12.29 | Christ is superior to old covenant believers |
| 13.1-25 | Some final encouragements |



Look out for...

One of the key strands that runs all the way through this book is the theme of atonement



What could this mean for me?

The key message of Hebrews is that, although it may not feel as though the world is different so that suffering still happens, Jesus' sacrifice has changed the world for ever. Think about this as you read.