

# Hebrews

Many Jewish believers, having stepped out of Judaism into Christianity, wanted to reverse their course in order to escape persecution by their countrymen. The writer of Hebrews exhorts them to “press on” to maturity in Christ. His appeal is based on the superiority of Christ over the Judaic system. Christ is better than the angels, for they worship Him. He is better than Moses, for Moses was created by Him. He is better than the Aaronic priesthood, for His sacrifice was once for all time. He is better than the law, for He mediates a better covenant. In short, there is more to be gained by suffering for Christ than by reverting to Judaism. Pressing on to maturity produces tested faith, self-discipline, and a visible love seen in good works.

## INTRODUCTION

This epistle was written to exhort Jewish believers to become mature in Christ and put away their spiritual lifelessness. Hebrews places heavy stress on doctrine, concentrating on Christology (the person, nature, and role of Christ) and Soteriology (salvation).

The basic theme of Hebrews is found in the use of the word “better” 13 times. The words “perfect” and “heavenly” are also prominent in describing the superiority of Christ in His person and work. Jesus Christ offers a better revelation, position, priesthood, covenant, sacrifice, and power. The writer develops this theme to prevent the readers from abandoning Christianity and retreating into the old Judaic system.

## AUTHOR

Paul (?). In spite of the fact that the Pauline authorship cannot be confirmed in a dogmatic fashion, there is abundant evidence that Paul was the author. Both internal and external evidence support the authorship of Paul. The writer had been in bonds (Hebrews 10:34), he wrote from Italy (Hebrews 13:24), and his companion was Timothy (Hebrews 13:23). The writing is Pauline in nature and many believe, Peter identifies Paul as the writer (2 Peter 3:15, 16).

Although the King James Version uses the title “The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews,” there is no early manuscript evidence to support it. The oldest and most reliable title is simply *Pros Ebraious*, “To Hebrews.”

## DATE & SETTING

The original recipients of this letter were Jewish Christians. The writer frequently uses the Old Testament as an unquestioned authority, assumes knowledge of the sacrificial ritual, and draws many contrasts between Christianity and Judaism. The letter is designed to prevent the readers from lapsing into Judaism.

Many places have been suggested for the locality of the readers, but this letter’s destination cannot be determined with any certainty. The majority view is that the recipients of Hebrews probably lived in Rome. The statement “Those from Italy greet you” seems to suggest that Italians away from Italy are sending their greetings home (Hebrew 13:24).

The place of writing is unknown, but a reasonable estimate of the date can be made. Hebrews 10: 11 reveals that it was written before the destruction of the temple by Titus in A.D. 70. Timothy was still alive (Hebrews 13:23) and the old Jewish system was about to be removed (Hebrews 12:26-27). All this suggests a date between A.D. 64 and 68.