

Pause Groups – Introduction to Hebrews

At first glance, Hebrews appears to be one of the most difficult NT books to understand and relate to our modern world. There are numerous OT quotations and allusions and many details about Israel's priesthood and sacrificial systems are included in the book. We are distanced from such systems by time and culture. There is much treasure included in the book to help enrich our understanding of God.

What Kind of Literature is this? While it reads like a letter in some parts (it certainly ends like many NT letters), Hebrews is an orderly and systematic treatment of the person and work of Christ. Hebrews seems to be written by a preacher with great pastoral sensitivity with the hope that their insights would address the needs of a particular group of Christians the author was writing to.

Who Wrote it? We do not know who wrote the book of Hebrews. There are theories about who wrote it, from Paul, or Barnabas, or Apollos. Hebrews itself indicates that the human authorship of scripture is of secondary importance.

When was it Written? Perhaps several decades had elapsed since the beginning of the Christian movement when Hebrews was written. The earliest mention in Christian literature is from around AD 96. Evidence suggests that it was actually written in the decade prior to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The destruction of the temple occurred in AD 70. Given the author's focus on the priesthood and sacrificial system that centered on the temple, one would think that the author would have mentioned the destruction of the temple to strengthen their argument that the first covenant is now "obsolete and ageing."

To Whom was it Written? We wish we knew who was the original audience. It seems that someone early on attached the name Hebrews to the text, but whoever did that most likely didn't know who the intended audience was any more than we do today. While we are not certain, we can surmise that it was written to a Jewish audience, most likely of the diaspora (those Jews who live in areas away from Israel), rather than Jews from Israel. It is possible that the original audience was a Jewish section of the Christian community in Rome.