Hebrews

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Nature of the Book

From the earliest days of Christian history, the epistle to the Hebrews has been shrouded in obscurity. It is the only truly anonymous letter in the New Testament. With regard to authorship, most modern scholars share the view expressed by Origen’s dictum: “As to who wrote the epistle, truly only God knows.” Complicating the problem of authorship is the uncertainty regarding other background issues such as date, recipients, and place of writing. There is no clear and unequivocal internal evidence for any of these issues. Consequently, Hebrews is probably the most enigmatic book in the New Testament in terms of provenance. The epistle’s title “To the Hebrews” is generally viewed as not originally part of the letter’s composition, but was an addition during the

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second century. Most think the title was deduced from the letter’s content. In and of itself, the title is virtually no help in identifying the recipients of the epistle.4

Certainly much of the book’s content is unique. It does not fit readily into the scheme of the Pauline, Johannine, or Petrine writings, yet it constitutes one of the most majestic presentations of Christology in the entire New Testament.5 Its genre is mixed, sometimes being epistolary in nature, while at other times having a sermonic6 character. Other terms used to describe its literary character are “essay,” “treatise,” “oration,” “biblical exposition,” and “exhortation.”7 The latter is especially appropriate because in

5 Indeed, B. Lindars ranked the author of Hebrews with Paul and John as one of the three great theologians of the NT (The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews [Cambridge: University Press, 1991], 1).
7 See B. Hunt (“The ‘Epistle to the Hebrews’: an Anti-Judaic Treatise?” Studia Evangelica, ed. F. L. Cross [Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964], 2:408) for the suggestion that Hebrews may be a combination treatise and epistle. He envisioned that Paul may have taken a treatise by another author and sent it to one of his churches after adding the exhortations and greetings of chap. 13. This would account for its dual nature as well as the supposed change in style at chap. 13. However, F. Filson (“Yesterday: ‘A Study of Hebrews in the Light of Chapter 13,’ vol. 4 in Studies in Biblical Theology, eds. C. F. D. Moule, P. Ackroyd, F. Filson and G. E. Wright (London: SCM Press, 1967 [pages?]) has conclusively shown that chap. 13 is a part of the original document and was not added by a later writer. First John can be compared to Hebrews in that it has no epistolary beginning and it alternates between theological and parenetic (exhortatory) sections.
13:22 the author himself speaks of his work as a “word of exhortation.” It is clear from
the postscript in 13:22–25 that Hebrews is an epistle, yet it does not have the usual
formulaic prescript. In fact, it begins like a sermon, reads like a sermon, but concludes
like an epistle. The identical phrase “word of exhortation” occurs in Acts 13:15 where
Paul and Barnabas were invited to speak in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. Lane
rightly concluded this “word of exhortation” “appears to be an idiomatic, fixed
expression for a sermon in Jewish-Hellenistic and early Christian circles.”

It is now generally recognized that Hebrews is indeed a written sermon. The frequent and well-
placed imperatives and hortatory subjunctives coupled with the interweaving of
exposition and exhortation support its sermonic nature. From a linguistic perspective it is
best to describe Hebrews as an example of hortatory discourse with large sections of
embedded expository discourse.

Laansma described the epistle’s exhortation as the

8 Lane, Hebrews 1–8, lxx.
9 R. Martin rightly noted, against E. Dinkler (“The Letter to the Hebrews,” in IDB, 2:572,
that the epistle could hardly be a collection of sermons brought together in a single
treatise since its argument is so tightly woven. See Martin, New Testament Foundations:
10 R. Longacre (The Grammar of Discourse, [New York: Plenum, 1983], 39) defined
hortatory discourse as an attempt to convince or persuade hearers/readers to a certain
course of action or to dissuade them from a course of conduct in which they have either
already engaged in or are about to engage in. This is an accurate description of what takes
place in Hebrews. See also L. L. Neely, who has shown through discourse analysis that
Hebrews is primarily hortatory discourse with embedded sections of expository discourse
(“A Discourse Analysis of Hebrews.” OPTAT 3–4 [1987]: 1–146.). See also G. Guthrie’s
The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis in Biblical Studies Library (Grand
Rapids: Baker, 1994) for an excellent analysis of several discourse features in the epistle.
The most recent and thorough analysis of the discourse structure of Hebrews is C.
Westfall, A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship Between
Form and Meaning, in Library of New Testament Studies 297, ed. by M. Goodacre
(London: T&T Clark, 2006).
“goal” and the exposition as the “means to the goal.” Lane rightly called the author a “gifted preacher” and noted,

Hebrews is a sermon prepared to be read aloud to a group of auditors who will receive its message not primarily through reading and leisured reflection but orally. Reading the document aloud entails oral performance, providing oral clues to those who listen to the public reading of the sermon. . . . Hebrews was crafted to communicate its points as much aurally as logically. In point of fact, aural considerations, in the event of communication, often prove to be the decisive ones.

Lane’s point is vital to grasp in the interpretation of the epistle. Much of the oral impact is lost in the translation from Greek to English. Lane’s use of the word “crafted” is well chosen. The author is writing for the ear, not the eye. Logos and pathos blend in masterful ways to make Hebrews an extraordinary sermon.

Hebrews is unique in the New Testament in that it possesses no specific salutation but it does have a conclusion. Several suggestions have been offered to explain this. Some claim that the original introduction was lost accidentally. Yet this is not a likely solution since there are thousands of extant letters from the ancient world, many of which are autographs, and not one single autograph lacks the usual introduction. There is no

12 Lane, Hebrews 1–8, lxxv.
record at all of the prescript alone becoming lost from any papyrus roll. Some have suggested the prescript was omitted for canonical reasons. If Hebrews were written by someone other than an apostle, such as Barnabas or Apollos, it was supposed such would hinder canonical acceptance. However, as Moffatt pointed out, if such had been the case some trace of the original would probably have survived. Zahn and Riggenbach conjecture that the one who delivered the letter orally supplied the missing introduction. Again, this is an unnecessary conjecture.

Others say that the introduction was deliberately omitted by the author. This is also very doubtful, for those who suggest that Paul omitted any reference to his name because he was the apostle to the Gentiles and was now writing a letter to Jewish Christians overlook the fact that the letter itself makes it clear that the readers knew the author’s identity. Furthermore, an alteration of the introduction by adding the name of Paul (for purposes of achieving canonicity) would seem more likely than a total excision. The current consensus is that there never was a salutation or introduction. The beautifully balanced and classical sentence with which Hebrews begins has all the earmarks of the original introduction to the work.

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16 Against Gräber, who argued that the author wanted to remain anonymous because he was a second generation Christian as implied in Hebrews 2:3 (*Heb* 1–6, vol. 1 in *An die Hebräer Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, ed. N. Brox et al., no. 17 [Zürich: Benziger, 1990], 22).
Overbeck’s elaborate scheme for seeing the ending of the epistle as a part of the later church’s effort to legitimate the letter in the canonization process by means of an attribution of Pauline authorship is totally unnecessary.17 Wrede argued that the author of Hebrews decided midstream his letter to append a postscript in Pauline style in an attempt to make Hebrews appear to be a Pauline prison letter.18 Today, Wrede’s theory is seldom affirmed. Another minority view is that the postscript was not penned by the author, but was a later interpolation to provide grounds for the authority of the text. Rothschild has argued that the postscript (Heb 13:20-25 in her view) “not only exhibits literary reliance on Paul’s undisputed corpus, but also, as an aspect of this reliance, appropriates Paul’s identity as the author of Hebrews’s own.”19 Rothschild argued that the author of Hebrews composed the postscript as a deliberate forgery in Pauline style with the goal that Hebrews would be seen as Pauline and “published as part of an existing corpus Paulinum.”20 Amazingly, Rothschild argued that such identity falsification “is not only consistent with the personality behind Hebrews, but is its necessary correlative and that Hebrews’s reception history attests the overwhelming success of this deception up until the Reformation.”21 E. J. Goodspeed likewise suggested that Hebrews may have been

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 5.
originally pseudonymously attributed to Paul rather than being anonymous. But D. Guthrie countered that had the letter originally borne any ascription to Paul, “it is impossible to envisage any situation in which it would lose its ascription and still continue to be regarded with some favor. There are no parallels to this kind of thing among the pseudepigrapha.”

Neither can the theory of a Greek translation from a Hebrew or Aramaic original as suggested by Clement of Alexandria be sustained in light of the evidence. The many examples of Greek paranomasia (play on words, as in Heb 5:8) and other stylistic devices make it clear that Hebrews is not a translation of a Hebrew original. The same conclusion is reached after examining Hebrews’ use of the LXX, as can be seen in the fact that the Greek word *hupotassō* in Heb 2:8 does not occur in the Hebrew of Ps 8:6[7] that the author quoted, and yet the author’s argument is built on this Greek word.

The diverse proposals regarding the literary and conceptual background of Hebrews include Gnosticism, Jewish mysticism, Qumran, Philonism, and Christian

The overall rhetorical structure of Hebrews is likewise debated. Koester is correct in his assessment that we cannot categorize Hebrews as either deliberative (exhortatory) or epideictic (praise or blame) examples of rhetoric since the two forms are not to be reproduced copyright B & H Publishing, forthcoming]


27 According to C. Spicq, Grotius in the seventeenth century was the first to suggest the author of Hebrews had read Philo (L´épitire aux Hebreux, 1:39). More recently, L. T. Johnson reflects an open stance to the influence of Philo on the author of Hebrews, but he stopped short of saying the author had read Philo. His concluding comment sums up his position: “The Platonism of Hebrews is real—and critical to understanding its argument—but it is a Platonism that is stretched and reshaped by engagement with Scripture, and above all, by the experience of a historical human savior whose death and resurrection affected all human bodies and earthly existence as a whole” (L. T. Johnson, Hebrews: A Commentary [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006], 21).

28 See Koester (Hebrews, 54–58) for similarities with the Synoptic Gospels, John, Paul, Peter, and Stephen.

so closely related and often occur in the same speech. What is not debated is the author’s use of several rhetorical devices such as alliteration, assonance, inclusion, and a host of others. Löhr analyzed the use of rhetorical terminology in Hebrews and concluded, “The phrases and expressions . . . can certainly be understood without any reference to the language of rhetoric. But taken together they might provoke—and indeed they did provoke for me—the impression that our author could have used them consciously, being well aware of their rhetorical background.” As Lane so aptly put it, “In Hebrews the voice of the writer is the voice of the speaker.” In light of the overall evidence, it seems somewhat moot to argue over whether Hebrews is an epistle or a sermon. It is both. The epistolary elements in Heb 13 “could well have been original and intentional, for the ‘sermon’ could well have been delivered (read aloud) as a ‘letter.’”

Many have conjectured, some have conjured, but very few have been convinced in the search for the author of Hebrews.

30 Deliberative rhetoric seeks to persuade people to follow a future course of action; epideictic rhetoric reinforces listener values through commendation and condemnation. See Koester, Hebrews, 82. Lane (Hebrews 1–8, lxxix) and D. deSilva (Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 48, 57).
31 C. Spicq provides an extensive list in L’Épître aux Hébreux, 1:351–78. See D. A. Black (“The Problem of the Literary Structure of Hebrews,” GTJ 7 [1986]: 163–77) and A. T. Lincoln (Hebrews: A Guide, 19–21) for accessible listings in English. C. F. Evans (The Theology of Rhetoric: The Epistle to the Hebrews [London: Friends of Dr. Williams’s Library, 1988], 3–19) is particularly helpful on the author of Hebrews’ use of synkrisis (formal pairing of two persons for comparison or contrast). Evans took up interest in this specific rhetorical device in Hebrews upon reading G. Zuntz’s comment (in his The Text of the Epistles) that it was the author’s “excessive use” of synkrisis that caused him to regard Hebrews as originally a homily (Evans, Theology, 5).
33 Lane, Hebrews 1–8, lxxvi.
2. Historical Circumstances

(1) Authorship

Most commentaries on Hebrews of recent vintage do not spend a great deal of time discussing matters of authorship and recipients. This is understandable in light of the multitude of theories available. Three observations emerge. First, it is obvious there have been numerous theories as to the authorship of the book. Second, the suggestions made by the patristic, Medieval, and Reformation scholars almost always involved persons who were well-known apostles or who were associated with the apostles in some close fashion such as Luke, Apollos, Barnabas, and Clement of Rome. Canonicity may have played a role in the theories of authorship among the Church Fathers, but it is still significant that names suggested for possible authorship always involved those of the apostolic band. Third, not only is there no agreement as to authorship, but all other matters of background (such as provenance and recipients) have also been open to speculation from the Church Fathers until the present.

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34 L. T. Johnson, Hebrews, 11.
36 On the question of the canonicity of Hebrews, particularly as it relates to authorship, see Thayer, “Authorship and Canonicity of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” BSac 24 (1867): 681–722; and Spicq, L’Épître aux Hébreux, 1:169–96.
HISTORICAL TESTIMONY. The historical testimony regarding the authorship of Hebrews begins with Clement of Rome’s clear use of the epistle in his letter to the Corinthians. If Clement’s epistle to the Corinthians can be successfully dated near the end of the first century as has been the traditional view, then the historical testimony concerning the authorship of Hebrews pre-dates the second century. Clement’s silence as to the authorship of Hebrews may indicate that he himself did not consider Paul to be the author. Yet as always, the argument from silence is weak and too much should not be made of it. Nor should much be made of the view that Clement of Rome could have been the author of Hebrews since chronological, not to mention stylistic, considerations would militate against it. Since Hebrews was known early in Rome as is evidenced by Clement’s use, how is one to explain the silence of the Roman church as to Clement’s authorship if he indeed were or could have been considered the author?

Pantaenus, head of the Alexandrian school of catechetes, ascribed Hebrews to the apostle Paul. But he observed that, contrary to Paul’s custom in his other epistles, there is no salutation identifying him as the author. At the end of the second century, Clement of Alexandria, student of Pantaenus, was quoted by Eusebius as saying that Paul wrote Hebrews originally in Hebrew and that Luke translated it into Greek for a Hellenistic Jewish audience. Clement stated that it was this fact (Luke’s translation) that accounted

37 Helpful surveys include Lincoln, Hebrews: A Guide, 2–8; P. E. Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 19–30; and Koester, Hebrews, 19–63. Koester, in addition to questions of authorship, provided the most comprehensive survey of the history of interpretation of the epistle.

38 J. Conder (A Literary History of the New Testament [London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1845], 443) argued that the difference between the canonical epistles and the earliest patristic writings warrants the conclusion that Hebrews could not have been
for the stylistic similarities between Hebrews and Luke-Acts. He conjectured that Paul did not prefix his name to the epistle since the Jews were prejudiced and suspicious of him.\textsuperscript{39}

The oldest extant text of Hebrews is found in \textsuperscript{p46} (c. AD 200) where it occurs immediately following Romans (most likely due to its length) in a fourteen-letter Pauline collection.\textsuperscript{40} By the middle of the third century, Origen allowed for Pauline influence on the thoughts of the epistle, but he ascribed the style and actual writing to someone else.

That the verbal style of the epistle entitled ‘To the Hebrews’, is not rude like the language of the apostle, who acknowledged himself rude in speech,’ that is, in expression; but that its diction is purer Greek, any one who has the power to discern differences of phraseology will acknowledge. Moreover, that the thoughts of the epistle are admirable, and not inferior to the acknowledged apostolic writings, any one who carefully examines the apostolic text will admit . . . If I gave my opinion, I should say that the thoughts are those of the apostle, but the diction and phraseology are those of someone who remembered the apostolic teachings, and wrote them down at his leisure what had been said by his teacher.

Therefore, if any church holds that this epistle is by Paul, let it be commended for

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written by Clement, Barnabas (assuming Barnabas is the possible author of the \textit{Epistle of Barnabas}), or Polycarp.

\textsuperscript{39} Eusebius (\textit{Ecclesiastical History} 6.14) quoting Clement of Alexandria’s \textit{Hypotyposes}.  
this . . . But who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows. The statement of some who have gone before us is that Clement, bishop of the Romans, wrote the epistle, and of others that Luke, the author of the Gospel and the Acts, wrote it.  

Bleek interpreted Origen’s remarks to mean “in its matter it is not inferior to the acknowledged apostolical writings, being in his opinion indebted for its argument to Paul, but for its style and finish to some disciple who jotted down his master’s ideas, and then drew them out still further, and wove them together into a sort of commentary.”

The fact that Paul used an amanuensis for most if not all of his letters coupled with the fact that the use of an amanuensis did not appreciably affect his style (with the exception of the Pastorals if their Pauline authorship is admitted) argues against Origen’s hypothesis as well as those who advocate similar hypotheses.

Second, writers such as J. Hug, S. Davidson, and D. Black—who argued that Origen’s statement “as to who wrote the epistle” referred to the one who wrote it down for Paul, that is, who functioned as his amanuensis or translator—find themselves swimming upstream against the context and usage of the Greek ho grapsas. Both Hug and Black render the participle in Greek as “who wrote down” in an effort to maintain Pauline authorship, and they asserted that the context justifies such a translation. In fact,

41 Eusebius (Ecclesiastical History 6.25) quoting Origen.
43 I consider all 13 epistles as genuinely Pauline.
the opposite is the case. In the sentence immediately following, Origen refers to “Luke, who wrote (ho grapsas) the Gospel,” clearly meaning authorship and not “who wrote down” the gospel as an amanuensis or translator. The critique of this interpretation by Bleek and Thayer is, in my view, difficult if not impossible to overcome. Mitchell noted the many places in Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History* where the Greek verb *graphō* ("to write") “refers both to authorship and to actual penning” and thus concluded “Black’s distinction between author and amanuensis cannot be maintained in light of this evidence.”

Origen was the first to suggest the theory that the thoughts were from Paul, but the composition was from someone else. In this way he sought to reconcile the two disparate views that came down to him, namely, some said Paul was the author and others that another Christian teacher wrote it. Thus, when Origen says that the tradition handed down to him included the possibility of Lukan authorship, it is clear that he means independent Lukan authorship—and not as a translator or an amanuensis or a collector of Paul’s thoughts. When Origen says “but who wrote it, only God knows,” he meant to indicate uncertainty as to which of Paul’s disciples it was who developed his ideas and was thus the actual author.

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45 P. Maier’s translation of Eusebius supports the traditional understanding of *oJ graya*; see Maier, *Eusebius: The Church History, A New Translation with Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 227.

The Alexandrian tradition regarding authorship continued to grow with the result that by the fourth century Paul was regarded as the author (either directly or indirectly) of the epistle. However, from the very beginning of this tradition, Hebrews was attributed to Paul usually in a tentative, indirect fashion.\(^\text{48}\)

Turning to the Western Church, apparently no tradition regarding Pauline authorship existed. Rather, in the late second and early third centuries, Tertullian made reference to the epistle as having been written by Barnabas.\(^\text{49}\) In the Roman Church, there was likewise no tradition of Pauline authorship until very late. Clement of Rome made the first reference to the epistle in his letters to the Corinthians, but he does not posit Pauline authorship. The Muratorian Canon (c. 170-210) referred to the 13 epistles of Paul but did not list Hebrews, thus giving evidence that the Roman church did not regard Paul as the author. The Shepherd of Hermas, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Gaius of Rome and Hippolytus all made use of Hebrews, but none ascribe its authorship to Paul. It was only toward the end of the fourth century that Pauline authorship began to be accepted in the Western Church and Hebrews gained a canonical position. What brought this about we do not know.\(^\text{50}\)

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\(^{48}\) S. Davidson (An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament, 216) noted, “If it be said that the very difficulties of style, phraseology, etc., presented by the epistle increase the force of the external testimony, since nothing but a thoroughly authentic tradition could have maintained itself against these difficulties, we reply, that the difficulties changed the tradition by compelling the writers who followed it to resort to an indirect Pauline authorship. So far from enhancing, they weaken the strength of the external evidence by the hypothesis that the thoughts are Paul’s, the composition and language another’s.”

\(^{49}\) Tertullian, *On Modesty*, 20.

In the fourth century Eusebius informed us that there were fourteen well-known and undisputed Pauline epistles (including Hebrews), but he also pointed out that some did indeed reject Hebrews as canonical on the grounds that the Roman church disputed its Pauline authorship.\(^{51}\) Athanasius likewise included Hebrews among the Pauline letters, placing it after the letters addressed to churches but before letters addressed to individuals. Hebrews is found in this position in Codexes Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus, all of which appear in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Towards the close of the fourth century, Jerome tied together several strands of information that had come down to him. First, Hebrews was disputed as Pauline on stylistic grounds. Second, Tertullian considered Barnabas as the author. Third, others had suggested Luke or Clement of Rome as the author, or perhaps as an arranger of Paul’s ideas, or even as the translator of Paul’s Hebrew original into the polished Greek of the epistle. Fourth, Paul may have omitted his name since he was in disrepute with the readers.\(^{52}\)

Jerome in the Latin Vulgate identified Hebrews as Pauline, as did Augustine, although both did so only tentatively.\(^{53}\) Hebrews was firmly embedded in the list of canonical books by the time of the Synods of Hippo (AD 393) and Carthage (AD 397 and 419), where it was located at the end of the 13 Pauline epistles—a fact which testifies to the uncertainty over Pauline authorship. This tradition prevailed throughout the Middle

\(^{51}\) Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.3.5; 6.20.3. For a complete presentation of the patristic evidence on authorship, see F. Bleek, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Berlin: Dümmler, 1828), 1:81.


Ages. For example, Aquinas in the prologue to his commentary on Hebrews clearly accepted Pauline authorship along with the theory of a Hebrew original that was then translated into Greek by Luke.\(^54\)

With the dawn of the Reformation came a reversion to the skepticism of the patristic era concerning Pauline authorship. In the sixteenth century, Luther championed Apollos while Calvin preferred Luke or Clement of Rome. In the seventeenth century, H. Grotius suggested Lukan authorship of Hebrews and became the first to put forth linguistic evidence comparing Luke and Hebrews. In a very brief fashion Grotius showed similarities among just ten words and phrases.\(^55\) The seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries witnessed a tug-of-war over Pauline authorship, but the twentieth century, even after W. Leonard’s 1939 masterpiece in favor of Paul (see below), registered increasing skepticism regarding the Pauline theory and witnessed a flurry of theories regarding authorship. Oddly enough, the twentieth century dawned with the suggestion by Harnack\(^56\) that Priscilla was the author, and in 1976 J. M. Ford proposed the last theory of the century, that Mary the mother of Jesus, assisted by Luke and John, wrote it.\(^57\) These are the only two women who have been proposed as potential authors.

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\(^{57}\) J. M. Ford, “The Mother of Jesus and the Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *TBT* 82 (1976): 683–94. She actually suggested a tripartite authorship with Mary, John, and Luke. She had earlier suggested the author of Hebrews was a “Paulinist” who was responding to the activity of Apollos in Corinth (“The First Epistle to the Corinthians or the First Epistle to the Hebrews?” *CBQ* 28 [1966]: 402–16.)
THE ARGUMENT FOR PAUL. A growing consensus against Pauline authorship developed in the twentieth century.\(^5^8\) However, the patristic evidence for Paul, though inconclusive, should not be so easily dismissed as is often the case today. As shown above, of the three major traditions of authorship that circulated in the first four centuries, the Alexandrian tradition regarded Hebrews at least in some sense to be the work of Paul.

Although the majority of twentieth-century scholars rejected it, the Pauline authorship of Hebrews is most ably defended by the Catholic scholar William Leonard.\(^5^9\) Roman Catholic scholars seem to be the largest single group who still support the Pauline hypothesis, although usually indirectly, and departure from the traditional position of the Roman Church has increased in recent years. Several articles have appeared recently, however, attempting to revive the Pauline hypothesis. Christos Sp. Voulgaris argued for it on the basis of what he called “new evidence,” namely, the connection between Heb 13:23, Phil 2:19–24, and Phlm 22.\(^6^0\) His entire schema is plausible, but quite speculative. However, some plausibility can be given to the suggestion that Hebrews was written to Jerusalem after the death of James to quell uncertainty in the face of renewed persecution. On this dating, Hebrews would be placed only a few short years prior to the beginning of the Jewish War in AD 66.

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\(^5^8\) One exception is T. W. L. Davies (Pauline Readjustments [London: Williams and Norgate, 1927]), who argued that the entire epistle was written by Paul, addressed to the church at Corinth, and that it was actually the “previous letter” referred to in 1 Cor. 5:9.


E. Linnemann wrote a three-part article that appeared in 2000 and was translated into English in 2002. The strength of this article is its demonstration that commentators have often overstated the case against Paul.\(^{61}\) Linnemann sought to bolster the Pauline case by the linguistic argument of lexical, stylistic, and literary comparison. Reviving the excellent work of C. Forster, she offered no new evidence as far as this writer can discern, but her article serves to highlight the fact that Paul was not unaccustomed to using literary niceties and the lexical similarities that can be found between the Paulines and Hebrews.\(^{62}\) She raised once again the banner of C. Forster, M. Stuart, and W. Leonard by making a good case for Pauline authorship. Her article is divided into six sections: manuscript evidence, the testimony of the early church, style, vocabulary, particularities of Hebrews used against Paul, and the line of argument in Hebrews.

In evaluating the style of Hebrews, Linnemann criticized those who make “wholesale assertions” about Paul’s inferior style. In fact, she subtitled a part of this section “Defamation” and castigates D. Guthrie, who “would presume to dress down the apostle Paul . . . as one would an ignorant grammar school pupil.”\(^{63}\) At this point, in spite of her strident language, this writer is in partial agreement with her. It appears to me that many times authors, especially modern authors, exaggerate the stylistic differences


\(^{62}\) Linnemann is often injudicious in her statements. For example, her statement, “up until the year AD 200, the Epistle to the Hebrews was generally considered to be a Pauline epistle,” will come as some surprise to scholars. Who were those in the second century who considered it to be Pauline? The only name which can be produced is Pantaenus, whom Clement of Alexandria mentioned as saying Hebrews was written by Paul. This hardly justifies the use of “generally considered to be a Pauline epistle.”
between Paul and Hebrews to the point of concluding the “impossibility” of Pauline authorship. Although the stylistic argument against Paul is formidable—perhaps the most devastating argument—it does not render the view “impossible,” merely highly unlikely, as judicious scholars note.

It is here in the section on style that Linnemann’s case is more substantial. She engaged H. Attridge point by point in the “Literary Characteristics of Hebrews: Language and Style” section of his commentary. Linnemann succeeded in countering virtually all of Attridge’s examples of Hebrews’ so called “better Greek” with similar examples from the Pauline epistles, especially Romans. She considered 14 figures of speech ranging from alliteration to paronomasia and finds Pauline examples for all of them. She admitted the range of vocabulary is higher in Hebrews than in the Pauline epistles of comparable length. But she concluded that none of the characteristics of elevated Greek in Hebrews is absent from the Pauline Epistles, and thus Attridge’s claim of “better Greek” in Hebrews is invalid. However, merely showing that such literary characteristics are not absent in Paul should not be turned into evidence for Paul in light of other differences in style that she did not address. All things considered, her “retrial” in the case of the Pauline authorship of Hebrews ultimately results in a mistrial.

D. A. Black’s two-part recent article is a helpful summary of the evidence presented by Leonard in his classic defense of Pauline authorship in 1939. Black attempted to further the Pauline case by retracing the patristic evidence and showing that

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63 Ibid., 27
64 Ibid., 28–35; H. Attridge, Hebrews, 13–21.
many during that era of the history of the church considered Pauline authorship possible. He misinterpreted Origen’s *ho grapsas* by taking it to mean “served as Paul’s amanuensis,” and thus he concluded that Origen affirmed Pauline authorship. In the other half of the article, Black provided us with the most comprehensive linguistic and theological argument for Paul since Leonard.

At this point the three main arguments for Pauline authorship need to be considered: (1) similar vocabulary, (2) some similar theology, and (3) the historical testimony from the church fathers. It is striking that not one commentator on the Book of Hebrews actually engages W. Leonard’s arguments in favor of Pauline authorship. Leonard provided a considerable amount of evidence to support his claim, though many of his parallels were not unique to Paul and Hebrews and hence can have only limited value in questions of authorship identification. A critical reading of his evidence reveals that Leonard has made use of some evidence for similarity that could also be argued for other New Testament writers, especially Luke.

An overall evaluation of Leonard’s arguments for the Pauline authorship of Hebrews leads to the following five conclusions. First, without a doubt this is the most comprehensive compilation of evidence for the Pauline hypothesis. When one couples the massive work of Leonard with those of M. Stuart and C. Forster in the eighteenth century, who devoted almost 800 pages between them to the defense of Pauline

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authorship, it becomes clear to anyone open to the evidence that the Pauline hypothesis cannot be set aside with such ease as it is often done in modern works. Paul’s name must remain in the upper echelon of those who are possible candidates for authorship.

Second, Leonard gave too much weight to the testimony of the church fathers in favor of Pauline authorship. Third, some of his evidence suffers from non-exclusivity—such as lexical, stylistic, or conceptual evidence—that is not wholly unique to the Paulines and Hebrews but also occur in other New Testament writers. This does not mean that this evidence is totally inadmissible, only that it cannot be given as much weight as Leonard seemed to give it along with evidence that is found exclusively in Hebrews and one or more of the Paulines.

Fourth, Leonard considered material from the Pauline speeches in Acts to be valid evidence for Pauline usage without emphasizing the Lukan composition of Acts as well as Luke’s selectivity of speech material from Paul that fit his theological purpose. Thus, he used both the Pauline Epistles and Paul’s speeches in Acts to compare to Hebrews. Although I consider the speeches in Acts to be genuine as to their reported speakers, due

66 M. Stuart, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, 4th ed., rev. R. D. C. Robbins (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1876), especially 117–56; and C. Forster, The Apostolical Authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews (London: James Duncan, 1838). Stuart’s work was the premier nineteenth century argument for Pauline authorship. Yet, as J. Conder noted, in Stuart’s zeal to argue for Paul, he labored to prove, “in opposition to every critic ancient and modern, that Hebrews abounds in Hebraisms” (The Literary History of the New Testament, 448). But Stuart noted that the style of Luke is nearer Hebrews than the style of Barnabas (in the pseudo-epistle) to which Tertullian ascribes the authorship. Forster’s work is the most complete tabulation of vocabulary similarities between Paul and Hebrews presented in chart form, including a harmony of the parallel passages in vocabulary, style, and content. E. Linnemann drew heavily on Forster’s work for her recent articles cited above.

67 This is also a problem with D. A. Black’s suggestion of Paul in “Who Wrote Hebrews?”
allowance must be made for the editing hand of Luke in their employment in the overall discourse of Acts. As a result, some of his evidence may just as easily apply to Luke as to Paul. New Testament scholars would consider Leonard’s methodology here to be somewhat flawed.68

Fifth, the argument for Paul made by Leonard is often only an attempt to show that there is no essential contradiction between Paul and Hebrews. In the context of Leonard’s overall discourse, conclusions drawn on the basis of a lack of conflict can only serve to strengthen the valid parallels that he did make, but they can never offer additional evidence in and of themselves in favor of his position. He tended to minimize the different conceptual emphases in the Paulines and Hebrews to the point that they do not furnish evidence against the un-Pauline nature of its vocabulary, style, or content.

One final argument in favor of Pauline authorship was proposed by John Owen and has been put forth by many since.69 Owen made note of the possible connection between Peter’s statement in 2 Pet 3:15–16 and Hebrews: “Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, wrote unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; wherein are some things hard to be understood.” Since Peter wrote to Jewish Christians of the dispersion, the question arises, Which Pauline epistle is in view here? Many have suggested that it is Hebrews. Peter’s statement that some of Paul’s writings are “hard to be understood” is said to parallel Heb

68 C. Forster, Apostolical Authority, 61–63, made the same mistake when he noted Paul’s use of ἐμμετρέω in Acts 22:5; 26:11 compared with Heb 10:29. He saw this as evidence for Paul’s authorship, but it can just as easily be evidence for Luke’s authorship. 69 Owen (Hebrews, 1:83–87) has the best discussion of this suggestion, but his conclusion is excessive: “I have insisted the longer upon this testimony, because, in my judgment, it is sufficient of itself to determine this controversy.”
5:11. F. F. Bruce countered this suggestion by pointing out that 2 Peter was not written specifically to Hebrew Christians and that the reference in 2 Pet 3:15 is, in his words, “surely to Rom 2:4.” It is doubtful to say the least that 2 Pet 3:15–16 applies to Hebrews at all.

In summary, the following problems provide the greatest evidence against the Pauline hypothesis. First, Paul’s name does not appear in the prologue (or anywhere else) as is the custom with his 13 other epistles in the New Testament. In fact, in all of the 13 epistles of Paul his name is the first word in the text; yet in Hebrews Paul’s name appears nowhere, in spite of the fact that the readers knew who the author was.

Second, Hebrews lacks the characteristic salutation that begins each of the Pauline letters. After identifying himself, it was Paul’s custom to state the location of the recipients of his letter, as in Rom 1:7, “to all in Rome.” Then, typically a Pauline greeting would follow: “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” But Hebrews lacks all three of these salutary characteristics that mark the Pauline Epistles. This has caused many scholars to deny Pauline authorship to Hebrews.

Third, from a stylistic perspective, Hebrews is certainly divergent in many ways from the 13 letters of Paul. This fact has been noted from earliest times in the history of the church. As stated above, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Eusebius all mentioned the difference in style between the known writings of Paul and the epistle to the Hebrews. Godet wrote:

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70 C. Forster, *Apostolical Authority*, 38–39 thought 2 Pet 3:15–16 alluded to Heb. 5:11; 6:12; 9:26,28; 10:39. He concluded that Peter either unconsciously or consciously “imitated” Paul, and this proves that Peter had previously studied all the Pauline epistles, including Hebrews.
It is strange indeed that [Paul] should have written in polished Greek to
the Hebrews, while all his life he had been writing to the Hellenes in a
style abounding with rugged and barbarous Hebraisms.²²

A certain similarity of style between chap. 13 and the writings of Paul has led
some scholars to make the unlikely suggestion that Paul may have added this chapter to
the letter.²³ Others have suggested that it is a fragment from an otherwise unknown
Pauline epistle. However, chapter 13 gives no hint of having been added to Hebrews by
Paul or anyone else. F. Filson has conclusively shown it to be an integral part of the
text.²⁴

It should be recognized, however, that stylistic comparisons by themselves are
inconclusive. It can be demonstrated that an author may change his style deliberately to
accommodate his subject matter. Furthermore, over the period of an author’s life, his
style may alter to such a degree that one could speak of an author’s “early” writings and
his “late” writings not only in terms of a change in thought patterns and content, but also
in terms of style. Therefore, it would be overstating the case to suggest on the basis of
stylistic comparisons that Paul could not have written Hebrews.

But literary studies have shown that stylistic comparisons can establish a degree
of probability regarding authorship. So, although I agree that the Pauline Epistles do
betray certain stylistic features that tend to corroborate Pauline authorship of that corpus,

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Cusin, 2 vols. in one (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1887), 320.
the epistle to the Hebrews is stylistically so unlike Paul’s Epistles that we can say that Paul probably did not write Hebrews. F. D. V. Narborough stated, “I Peter is more Pauline than Hebrews, and yet no one would dream of assigning I Peter to St. Paul.” And deSilva pointedly remarked, “To suggest that Paul was simply writing in a different style, as if preaching in a synagogue, is a desperate attempt to hold on to Pauline authorship.”

Fourth, Paul’s theological focus is often different from the author of Hebrews. As has been noted by many, there is a marked absence of characteristic Pauline thought, themes, and motifs. Delitzsch, in his two-volume commentary on Hebrews, stated, “It is, and must remain, surprising that as we dissect the Epistle we nowhere meet with those ideas which are, so to speak, the very arteries of Paul’s spiritual system.”

Paul and the author of Hebrews are not in conflict, but there is clearly a different “feel” to Hebrews when compared to the Pauline Epistles. For example, Paul’s Letters

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74 Filson, ‘Yesterday,’ 15–16.
75 R. Brown noted that the Greek style of Hebrews is “very different from Paul’s” and that when parallels in phrasing and theology are cited, differences exist in most of them (New Testament Introduction [New York: Doubleday, 1997], 694).
77 D. deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 24.
80 N. T. Wright’s statement makes the point colorfully: “Entering the world of the letter to the Hebrews after a close study of Paul is a bit like listening to Monteverdi after
never refer to Jesus as a priest, though he did make use of concepts from the law of Moses such as Passover, the mercy seat, and Jesus as an offering to God. Paul placed more emphasis on the method of Christ’s sacrifice, whereas the author of Hebrews focused more on the result. Some find it difficult to conceive of Paul writing Heb 2:17 because his theology of the cross eliminated the need for a high priest, the temple, and the Day of Atonement. The way Paul thought about “the seed of Abraham” in his epistles and the approach taken by Hebrews and Luke in Luke-Acts are distinctly different. D’Angelo noted Paul’s stress on the discontinuity between the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant, whereas the author of Hebrews viewed the law as stressing more of the continuity between the two covenants. Hauck pointed out that Paul never used the verb *hupomenein* (“persevere”) for the sufferings of Christ as does the author of Hebrews. Again, such examples should not be used to argue that Paul could not have written Hebrews, but that it is unlikely.


85 Hauck, “*uJpomev nw,*” *TDNT*, 4:588.
Fifth, the writer of Hebrews seemed to identify himself with second generation Christians, something that Paul would probably never have done: “How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.” (2:3). Elsewhere in his epistles Paul identified himself as an “apostle,” the prerequisite of which was to have been an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ. In Acts 9, Luke recounts the experience of Paul on the road to Damascus when he met Jesus Christ and became a Christian. Paul referred later to this experience of salvation in the context of his apostleship when he said that he was “one born out of due time” (1 Cor 15:8, KJV). Nowhere in the 13 epistles does Paul ever refer to himself as the writer of Hebrews does in 2:3. Thus, it is unlikely that Paul would have written such a statement (see Gal 1:11-12).

Sixth, the unusual apology in Heb 13:22 (“Bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter”) does not fit well with the length of the thirteen Pauline letters. As a matter of fact, Hebrews is longer than eleven of the thirteen Pauline Epistles (only Romans and 1 Corinthians are longer) and more than twice as long as the average length of a Pauline epistle. Unless Paul had addressed other epistles of considerably greater length to this same readership, it does not seem likely that he would have written such a statement.

Seventh, Paul’s treatment of the Old Testament differs from what we find in Hebrews. As an example, consider the quotation of Ps 8:6[7] in 1 Cor 15:27, Eph. 1:22, and Heb 2:7. The Pauline quotations correspond with each other. Both have the same reading and the same comparison with that of the LXX. Both quote Ps 8:6b[7b], starting and ending at the same place. The author of Hebrews, however, showed three major
differences here. First, he started the quotation much earlier (Ps 8:4[5]) but ends with the quotation in the same place. This longer version is probably an indication that he independently reworked Ps 8:6[7] from the early Christian tradition from which he received it. Second, the reading of the section from Ps 8:6b[7b] in Heb 2:8 corresponds closely with the reading of the LXX against Paul’s wording in 1 Cor. 15:27 and Eph 1:22. Third, Hebrews lacks the section from Ps 8:6a[7a] in the LXX, which is present in the MT.

Another interesting example is Paul’s quotation of Hab 2:4 in Romans and Galatians as compared to the same quotation in Heb 10:37–38. In Romans and Galatians, Paul omitted the pronoun *emou* from the LXX text of the quotation. However, the textual tradition of Heb 10:37–38 is strongly in favor of the use of the pronoun by the author of Hebrews. In fact, Manson commended the author of Hebrews for the fact that he did not succumb to what he called the pressure of the Pauline textual tradition in quoting Hab 2:4. Significantly, in quoting the Old Testament, the author of Hebrews never used the quote formula “it is written,” which is thoroughly, although not exclusively, Pauline.

While there is some historical and internal evidence that Paul could have written Hebrews, the many examples of dissimilarity, coupled with the weak historical testimony

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to Pauline authorship, indicate that it is probable that Paul did not write Hebrews. New Testament scholarship has been reluctant to distance the epistle to the Hebrews completely from Pauline influence, although it has also been reluctant to identify the epistle as Paul’s. It would seem that the best solution to the evidence of the epistle itself would be to deny Pauline authorship, but to acknowledge that it is likely that the writer was considerably influenced by Paul or associated with the Pauline circle. It is interesting that of the names suggested for the authorship of Hebrews by the early church fathers, they all possessed the distinction of having at one time or another been a part of the Pauline circle.

B. Witherington, on the basis of his comparison of Galatians with Hebrews, denied Pauline authorship, but suggested it is “likely” that the author of Hebrews reflects Pauline influence, particularly from Galatians, at key points in the argument. He

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89 See Bleek (*Introduction*, 2:101) on differences between Hebrews and Paul in the use of quote formulae.
90 R. Brown (*An Introduction to the New Testament* [New York: Doubleday, 1997], 694) stated that the evidence against Paul having written Hebrews is “overwhelming.”
91 For example, H. Windisch (*Der Hebräerbbrief*, 2nd ed., HNT 14, ed. H. Lietzmann [Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1931], 128–29) considered the author of Hebrews to be nearer to Pauline thought and themes than any other NT writer, but he rejected Pauline authorship.
92 In recent years, discussion about whether the author belonged to the Pauline circle or not has continued. Primitive Christian tradition furnished Schröger with the basis for similarity between Paul and Hebrews (“Der Hebräerbbrief—paulinisch?” in *Kontinuität und Einheit*, ed. by P. G. Müller and W. Stenger [Freiburg/ Basel/ Vienna: Herder, 1981], 211–22). In the same year, A. Strobel (*Der Brief an die Hebräer*, 13th ed. [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991]:13–14) suggested that the author might have belonged to the circle of people involved in the later Pauline missionary work. J. W. Thompson (“The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Pauline Legacy,” *ResQ* 47.4 [2005]: 206) concluded that the relationship between Hebrews and the Pauline tradition was “minimal.”
considered it also likely that the author of Hebrews was a part of the larger Pauline circle.\textsuperscript{93}

B. Childs noted the important indirect link between Paul and Hebrews that the early church recognized but misinterpreted when it sought to solve the issue historically. Because the writer was a co-worker with Timothy, Hebrews should not be assigned to a late stage in the development of the post-apostolic church. It “functions canonically as distinct and yet complementary to the Pauline corpus.” He went on to note that historically, Manson may be right in his connection of the letter with Stephen, but canonically the letter’s major function is in relation to the Pauline corpus.\textsuperscript{94} This connection with Paul actually aids the arguments for Luke, Barnabas, and Apollos, since they all are a part of the Pauline circle. But, of course, none was so consistently associated with Paul as was Luke. Furthermore, the connection with Stephen would be further evidence for Luke. For Schnelle, the whole issue comes down to the relationship of Hebrews to the Pauline school, with two possibilities. Either the author belonged to the Pauline circle, or Hebrews was composed from the beginning as an anonymous writing with no intent of it being linked to Paul.\textsuperscript{95}

We conclude that the best reading of the evidence suggests that Paul is not the author of Hebrews. As S. Davidson so cogently put it concerning Pauline authorship: “It is the diversity amid the similarity [with Paul’s writings] which makes a different writer

probable.” Delitzsch noted: “It breaths Paul’s spirit, but it does not speak Paul’s words.” It would seem that the present state of affairs on the subject of Pauline authorship can best be summed up by H. MacNeill and D. Guthrie, the former writing in the early twentieth century and the other in the latter half of the twentieth century:

In the course of this study numerous instances of contact with Pauline thought have appeared. But in every case the similarity has been somewhat superficial. The point of view and the method of presentation have been quite different. It would be exaggerating to say that the writer of this epistle was not influenced by Paul and his letters. But it is clear that this influence has been greatly exaggerated.

It should be noted that differences from Paul do not amount to disagreements with Paul . . . . Nor must it be supposed that these doctrinal differences necessarily exclude Pauline authorship. Yet, if they do not require its rejection, it must be admitted that they appear to suggest it.

THE ARGUMENT FOR BARNABAS. One name having the support of scholars ancient and modern is Barnabas. Tertullian presented this hypothesis and wrote in such a fashion as to imply that he had no doubts about it:

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For there is extant withal an Epistle to the Hebrews under the name of Barnabas—a man sufficiently accredited by God, as being one whom Paul has stationed next to himself in the uninterrupted observance of abstinence: Or else, I alone and Barnabas, have not we the power of working? And, of course, the Epistle of Barnabas is more generally received among the Churches than that apocryphal Shepherd of adulterers.\(^\text{101}\)

Additional support for Barnabas is found in the fourth century *Tractatus Origenis* by Gregory of Elvira who wrote, “The most holy Barnabas says, ‘Through him we offer to God the sacrifice of lips that acknowledge his name.’”\(^\text{102}\) This is an allusion to Hebrews 13:15, so Gregory was attributing Hebrews to Barnabas. The fourth-century bishop of Brescia in northern Italy, Filaster, also mentioned Hebrews as having been written by Barnabas.\(^\text{103}\) Jerome (c. 345–419) pointed out that Hebrews was received as Paul’s, yet many considered it to be the work of Barnabas, Luke, or Clement.\(^\text{104}\) The sixth-century Codex Claromantus lists “the Epistle of Barnabas” among the canonical books. The stichommetric figures for this epistle are very close to Hebrews, and hence Westcott suggested that it is likely they are one and the same.\(^\text{105}\)

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\(^{101}\) Tertullian, *On Modesty*, 20.

\(^{102}\) Cited in Hughes, *Hebrews*, 25.

\(^{103}\) Filaster, *Haeresibus*, 89.


\(^{105}\) Westcott, *Hebrews*, xxviii–xxix. “Stichometry” is the term applied to the measurement of ancient texts into lines of fixed length.
While certainly not significant or conclusive, there is patristic evidence to suggest Barnabas could be the author. This evidence is definitely identified with the Western (Latin) tradition, and it was in the West that the Pauline authorship met with its strongest denial.

Scholars offer several strands of evidence to support Barnabas as author, and these are the main ones. (1) He was a Levite of Cyprus (Acts 4:36) and hence his interest in the Old Testament ritual and sacrificial system (as is found in Hebrews) would be natural. (2) Barnabas was a member of the Pauline circle and would probably have contact with Timothy since Timothy came from the area evangelized by both Barnabas and Paul (see Acts 16:1). (3) The Hellenistic outlook reflected in Hebrews is considered by some to suggest Barnabas as the author. When the Antiochene Hellenists were evangelized, it was Barnabas who was sent by the church at Jerusalem to coordinate this new thrust of the gospel (Acts 11:19–26). (4) Barnabas is called the “son of exhortation” (Acts 4:36), and the epistle to the Hebrews is called by its author a “word of exhortation” (Heb 13:22). (5) The Pauline flavor of the epistle could be accounted for on the supposition that Barnabas, as a traveling companion with Paul on his first missionary journey, would likely share the same outlook and conceptual framework as Paul.

Thiersche argued that Hebrews was jointly authored by Paul and Barnabas with Barnabas as the primary author. Thus, Barnabas consented to the conclusion by Paul who in this

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106 J. Owen, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 1:70, puts a question mark beside this evidence, noting Timothy was the companion of the writer and was unknown to Barnabas, since he joined Paul after Paul and Barnabas separated.
way adopted the whole document. Based in part on the repeated use of “we” and “us” in the book, especially in 6:11 and 13:18, Dan Wallace has suggested Hebrews was co-authored by Barnabas and Apollos, with Barnabas as the main author and Apollos serving as his assistant.

The high visibility of Barnabas in Acts coupled with his Levitical background makes him an obvious candidate for Hebrews, especially if it were written to the Jerusalem church. However, we have no extant writings of Barnabas to compare with Hebrews since the so-called Epistle of Barnabas is considered spurious. Bleek called Tertullian’s view “an accidental oversight on Tertullian’s part” arising from his confusion of Hebrews with the Epistle of Barnabas. Of course, this does not mean that it is impossible that Barnabas wrote it, merely that we have no way to do any comparative studies.

D. Guthrie, following McNeile-Williams, argued against Barnabas on the basis that if it had been known that he was the author, how is one to explain the rise of the Pauline hypothesis? The suggestion that Paul’s name would have been appended to the epistle in order to gain canonicity is not, according to Guthrie, “conceivable.”

Another argument against Barnabas may be the way in which the author of Hebrews has treated Levi and the tithe in Hebrews 7. The historical debates that existed

in the first century between the priests and the Levites on this subject cannot be dealt with here, but it is clear that a Levite would hardly have treated the subject in so priestly a fashion as appears to be the case with Hebrews.

Bargil Pixner has recently argued for Barnabas as the author with the recipients being Qumranian priests whom he identified with those converted to Christianity in Acts 6:7 (“a large number of priests became obedient to the faith”). Spicq and others championed this view of the recipients. Since Barnabas was a Levite, he would have reason and ability to write to such a group a letter like Hebrews.

THE ARGUMENT FOR APOLLOS. The popular theory that Apollos wrote Hebrews was first suggested by Luther. It is interesting that none of the patristics opted

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112 B. Pixner, “The Jerusalem Essenes, Barnabas and the Letter to the Hebrews,” in *Qumranica Mogilansia*, ed. Z. J. Kapera [Krakow: Enigma Press, 1992], 6:167–78. He noted that Qumran’s opposition to the temple was directed against the Hasmonean high priests, whom they detested as illegitimate.


114 See Koester, *Hebrews*, 35, n. 53, for detailed information on Luther’s proposal. Koester noted that Luther’s proposal actually first appeared in a sermon on Hebrews 1:1–4 which was published in 1522 (*Sermons* 7.167). See also Luther’s *Commentary on Genesis* (1545). Luther attributed Hebrews to Apollos on the basis of the supposed
for him, not even the Alexandrian school that claimed Apollos as its prime leader. This writer finds it strange that his name would not be suggested as a possible author if the early church fathers had any reason to think that he could have written Hebrews. The fact that he was not mentioned in connection with Hebrews weakens Luther’s suggestion.

Those who argue for Apollos do so on the basis of his description given by Luke in Acts and by Paul in the letter of First Corinthians. He was apparently a great orator and had “a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24), two characteristics that appear to be true of the author of Hebrews. He was a member of the Pauline circle and was closely associated with Timothy (1 Cor 16:10–12) as was the author of Hebrews (Heb 13:23).

Apollos’s connection with Alexandria would seem to explain the so-called Alexandrian coloring of the book. However, scholars have increasingly called this point into question. R. Williamson brought the most serious challenge against the alleged Platonism of the author of Hebrews, as well as the alleged influence of Philo. He showed that the Old Testament Levitical cultus and typological milieu furnish a better explanation for the background of the thought of the author than Alexandrian influence. He further catalogued a host of differences between Alexandrian thought and Hebrews. Consequently, what was once considered a strong argument in favor of Apollos has been severely weakened.

Alexandrian influence on the book. The fact that this has been shown to be vastly overrated in recent years weakens the theory for Apollos significantly.


Two major problems, then, seem to preclude Apollos as having been the author. First, the lack of any support from early church tradition; and second, the fact that there are no extant works of Apollos with which we may compare Hebrews.¹¹⁷

THE ARGUMENT FOR LUKE. Two Alternative Theories of Lukan Involvement. As already mentioned, the patristic evidence includes the suggestion that Luke was in some way a candidate for the authorship of Hebrews. The reason for this appears to be the noted resemblance of style between the Lukan writings and Hebrews. The history of scholarship concerning Luke’s possible involvement in the production of Hebrews reveals three hypotheses. First, Luke translated into Greek a Hebrew or Aramaic original written by Paul (Clement of Alexandria and others). Second, Luke was the co-author of Hebrews with Paul as the mind behind the epistle. Luke wrote down his thoughts, but there are varying views on how much freedom he possessed in the process and the tithe might suggest a ‘marginal consideration’ in favor of a Palestinian rather than an Alexandrian authorship” (68). The same could be said for the recipients as well.¹¹⁷ Harnack’s theory of Priscilla’s authorship is intertwined with the role that Priscilla and Aquila played in Apollos’s Christian instruction in Acts. See F. Schiele, “Harnack’s ‘Probabilia’ Concerning the Address and the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” AJT, 9.1 (1905): 290–308. Schiele attempted to further Harnack’s hypothesis by arguing, as Harnack did, that the epistle was written to a Roman audience. See the excellent critique of Harnack’s position in C. C. Torrey, “The Authorship and Character of the So-Called ‘Epistle to the Hebrews,’” JBL 30 (1911): 137–56. R. Hoppin (Priscilla: Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews [New York: Exposition Press, 1969]) provided the most elaborate and best argument available for Priscilla as the author. Hoppin wrongly translated Heb 13:22 as “only to a slight extent have I given you orders” and interpreted the verse as Priscilla’s apologetic from one who is hesitant to claim spiritual authority in the church (22). See her more recent attempt in “The Epistle to the Hebrews is Priscilla’s Letter,” A Feminist Companion to the Catholic Epistles and Hebrews, ed. A. J. Levine with M. Robbins, Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings 8 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 147–70. See the discussion on this issue by C. B. Kittredge, “Hebrews,” in Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary, ed. E. S. Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 2:430–34. There is nothing beyond very limited circumstantial evidence to link Priscilla with Hebrews.
(Hug,\textsuperscript{118} Ebrard,\textsuperscript{119} etc.). Third, Luke was the independent author of Hebrews (Delitzsch\textsuperscript{120} and Eager\textsuperscript{121}).

Few, if any, modern scholars would argue for a Greek translation of a Hebrew or Aramaic original for the epistle. The view that Luke could have participated in the production of Hebrews with Paul was somewhat popular in the nineteenth century, but it fell into disrepute in the twentieth century due to the increasing weight of the anti-Pauline hypothesis and the combination of two converging positions: (1) that Luke-Acts was written late in the first century and not necessarily by Luke the traveling companion of Paul; (2) that Hebrews is likewise to be dated post-AD 70.\textsuperscript{122}

Evidence of Heb 13:23–24 and the Pastorals. Hebrews 13:23-24 contains at least six clues concerning the background of the letter. First, the author and readers were associated with Timothy, since he is referred to as “our brother.” Second, both the author and Timothy were away from the location of the readers and plan to travel to the readers’ location shortly. Third, Timothy had apparently been imprisoned or at least detained in

\textsuperscript{120} F. Delitzsch, \textit{Hebrews}, 2:412–16.
\textsuperscript{122} Among the commentaries on Hebrews produced in the past few years, there is no evidence of any interest in investigating further the possibility of Lukan authorship of Hebrews. Ellingworth was little impressed with the linguistic similarities noted by Spicq and others (\textit{Hebrews}, 13–14). Attridge briefly mentioned the patristic statements regarding Luke as a possible translator of Paul’s Hebrew original, but then he was inexplicably silent on the history of scholarship regarding the independent Lukan authorship view (\textit{Hebrews}, xlix). Lane (\textit{Hebrews I–8}) devoted less than three pages to the issue of authorship.
some form of custody and then released. Fourth, the author was apparently in the same
locale as Timothy, but was himself apparently not imprisoned. Fifth, the recipients are
exhorted to greet their leaders, implying a locale of considerable population with enough
people to have a church with multiple leaders. It may be that this is evidence that the
writer was not addressing an entire church, but rather a smaller group within the church.
Sixth, whether writing from Italy, or away from Italy, the writer sent greetings from
Italian Christians who are either—along with the writer—somewhere in Italy or Italian
expatriates.

The groundwork is now laid for a historical reconstruction of the circumstances
surrounding the writing of Hebrews. This writer proposes that Luke wrote Hebrews from
Rome after the death of Paul and before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Scriptural
evidence for this thesis can be adduced upon a correlation of the statements made in the
Pastoral Epistles with the text of Hebrews. While imprisoned in Rome, Paul penned 2
Timothy around AD 66 or 67, in which he hinted at his coming execution. Addressing
Timothy, Paul said, “Do your best to come to me quickly” (2 Tim 4:9). Either before
Timothy arrived or shortly thereafter, Paul was beheaded and then Timothy was probably
imprisoned. Hebrews 13:23 says Timothy had been “set free,” most naturally implying an
imprisonment. The description of Timothy as “our brother” in this verse is reminiscent of
Paul and links both Timothy and our author with the Pauline circle. In 2 Tim 4:11 Paul
stated, “Only Luke is with me,” thus placing Luke in Paul’s company at or near the time
of his death in Rome, probably AD 67 but no later than June 9 of AD 68, the date of
Nero’s suicide and the \textit{terminus ad quem} for Paul’s death.
Stylistic Evidence. An examination of the New Testament literature reveals that the writings of Luke and Hebrews alone approach the standard of Classical Greek style.\textsuperscript{123} The similarity in vocabulary and style was noted as early as the second century. Hebrews shares 53 words that occur elsewhere in the NT only in Luke-Acts, a significant number. In fact, two-thirds of the total vocabulary of Hebrews occur in the Lukan writings. C. P. M. Jones examined the lexical similarities between Luke-Acts and Hebrews and with balanced judgment explained their significance:

But when all deductions have been made, the verbal correspondences are so numerous [between Luke-Acts and Hebrews] that a substantial area of common phraseology remains . . . which may well be indicative of a closer kinship in the presence of other corroborating factors.\textsuperscript{124}

Westcott pointed out that “no impartial student can fail to be struck by the frequent use [in Hebrews] of words characteristic of St. Luke among writers of the New Testament.”\textsuperscript{125} He also wrote concerning the stylistic resemblance between the Lukan corpus and Hebrews,

It has been already seen that the earliest scholars who speak of the Epistle notice its likeness in style to the writings of St. Luke; and when every allowance has been made for coincidences which consist in forms of

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{123} See N. Turner, Style, in J. H. Moulton, A Grammar of New Testament Greek (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976), 4:106–13. S. Davidson (An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament, 209) noted: “We do not maintain that the language of Hebrews is free from Hebraisms, but that the diction is purer than Paul’s. In respect to purity, it stands on a level with the latter half of the Acts.”
\item \textsuperscript{125} B. F. Westcott, The Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955 reprint), xlviii.
\end{itemize}
expression which are found also in the LXX, or in other writers of the NT, or in late Greek generally, the likeness is unquestionably remarkable.  

Twenty-five years before Hobart’s *Medical Language of Saint Luke* (1882), Delitzsch, in an appendix at the conclusion of his two-volume commentary on Hebrews, suggested that the medical terminology found therein might serve as evidence for Lukan authorship. Believing Luke to have been the independent author, although having written at Paul’s behest and having composed Hebrews from Pauline statements, Delitzsch argued that Luke’s vocation as a physician harmonized well with the form of Hebrews in that the letter contains passages on anatomy (4:12), diet (5:12–14), and therapy (12:12–13).

While it is true that in 1912 Cadbury challenged Hobart’s evidence and conclusion, not everyone accepted Cadbury’s conclusion. A. T. Robertson argued that the weight of evidence was more in favor of Hobart. Robertson’s critique of Cadbury has been left unanswered in much of the literature since his day. J. M. Creed, N. Geldenhuys, and W. Hendricksen have written commentaries on Luke’s gospel and agree with Robertson’s assessment. Likewise, C. Hemer has argued that Cadbury’s critique of Hobart “does not amount to disproof of its essential contention.”

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It has long been recognized that the style of the Pastoral Epistles has much in common with Luke-Acts. The probability that Luke was Paul’s amanuensis for the Pastoral Epistles has been adjudged to be quite strong by a number of scholars.\(^{133}\) The significance of this for the theory of Lukan authorship of Hebrews lies in the long-standing observation that, while Hebrews diverges significantly from the Pauline Epistles especially in matters of style, it nevertheless shares a certain similarity with them. W. H. Simcox made the observation that [Hebrews] has several words and phrases in common, not with St. Paul’s writings generally, but with the isolated and peculiar group of the Pastoral Epistles. If this

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\(^{133}\) See C. F. D. Moule, “The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles: A Reappraisal,” *BJRL* 47 (1965): 430–52; and R. Riesner, “Once More: Luke-Acts and the Pastoral Epistles,” in *History and Exegesis: New Testament Essays in Honor of Dr. E. Earle Ellis for His 80th Birthday*, ed. S. Son (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 239–58. On Paul’s use of an amanuensis, see E. R. Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1991); and Michael Prior, *Paul the Letter Writer and the Second Letter to Timothy*, JSNTSup 23 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 156. Richards argued cogently that Paul’s references to others in the salutation and benediction of his letters was more than a literary nicety; instead, these references indicated that they had some subordinate role in the writing of the letter. This is supported by E. Ellis (*Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993]); C. K. Barrett (*A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1968]); and H. A. W. Meyer (*Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians* [New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884], 154, n. 113, 114, 115). See the discussion in M. Prior (*Paul the Letter Writer and the Second Letter to Timothy* [Sheffield: JSOT, 1989], 45), who considered Timothy a co-author with Paul of 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and with Paul and Silas in 1 and 2 Thessalonians; thus his role in some of the Pauline letters was “quite significant.” Prior proposed the possibility that the differences between the Pastoral and the other Pauline letters could be explained by the fact that Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles alone with no secretarial assistance. A better possibility, which explains the similarity to Lukan style, is that Luke was the amanuensis, contributor, or possibly even a co-author with Paul.
stood alone, it might at most serve so far to narrow speculation as to the
authorship of our Ep., as to suggest that it is by a man whose intercourse with St.
Paul had been chiefly towards the close of the latter’s life.\textsuperscript{134}

Simcox noted that we are led a step further in this matter when we observe that
a number of words and phrases are common to the Pastoral Epp. and
Hebrews with St. John, or to Heb. and St. Luke only. Our first thought
might be, that Origen was right—that St. Luke was the author of Heb. with
or without suggestions from St. Paul, and that he may have been (in view
of 2 Tim.iv.11 no one else could be) the amanuensis, or something more,
of the Pastoral Epp.\textsuperscript{135}

Although Simcox himself rejected Lukan authorship of Hebrews, he clearly indicated that
Luke’s vocabulary has more in common with Hebrews than with any other canonical
writer and that the Pastoral Epistles come next in degree of similarity.\textsuperscript{136}

The upshot of all this is that the stylistic evidence is that the Pastoral Epistles are
most like the Lukan writings and Hebrews in the New Testament. A possible correlation

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 52–53. See especially his appendix (pp. 116–53) where he compares the
vocabulary of Luke with the later Pauline and Catholic epistles as well as Hebrews. See
also A. Feuillet, (“La doctrine des Epitres Pastorales et leurs affinites avec l’oeuvre
lucanienne,” \textit{RThom} 78 [1978]: 163–74): who made this comparison and discussed it at
length, concluding that the Pastorals were redacted by Luke. Also id., “Le dialogue avec
le monde non-chretien dans les epitres pastorales et l’epitre aux Hebreux. Premiere partie:
non-chretien dansles epitres pastorales et l’epitre aux Hebreux. Deuxieme partie: l’epitre aux
Hebreux,” \textit{Esprit et Vie} 98 (1988): 152–59, where he continued the argument for Lukan
redaction of the Pastorals as well as the similar Hellenistic background for the Pastorals
and Hebrews.
of this evidence would be to suggest that Luke is the independent author of Luke-Acts and Hebrews and that he was the amanuensis of the Pastorals as well.

A. Eager suggested that the arguments used in favor of the Pauline hypothesis of the authorship of Hebrews are equally as strong in favor of Luke. Furthermore, the objections that make the Pauline hypothesis unlikely (such as anonymity and stylistic considerations) do not apply to the Lukan hypothesis. His concluded that all such arguments for the Pauline authorship of an Epistle as may also be applied to S. Luke become arguments for the Lucan authorship, since they are not affected, in his case, by the objections that make it impossible to apply them to S. Paul.  

He went on to argue that where Paul would be most likely influenced by Luke, he would demonstrate the strongest traces of Lukan peculiarities. Where Luke was not working with documents—or at least with documents that were not written in Greek—the individuality of his style would be most marked. From evidence in the New Testament Eager argued that Luke had some stylistic influence on Paul at the time of the writing of Colossians, 2 Corinthians, and the Pastorals due to their being together. He noted that in the sections of Luke-Acts where we might expect the individuality of Luke’s style to be the strongest there is a large number of active verbals. Likewise, where Paul is said to have had Luke in his company at the time of writing, there is a higher percentage of active verbals in these Pauline Epistles. He concluded that the use of active verbals in the Paulines “was probably due to the influence of S. Luke; and, as words of this class are

\footnote{Eager, “Authorship,” 74–80; 110–23.}
more numerous in Hebrews than in any Pauline document, this deduction is obviously of some value in determining the authorship of our Epistle.”

There is a certain “academic” training that Luke evinces in his two-volume work. It is well recognized that the author of Hebrews likewise possessed an academic background. M. Hengel made this correlation at one point in discussing the way the Synoptic writers handled their quotations of Ps 110:1. He pointed out that neither Matthew nor Mark used the last line of Ps 110:1 but rather changed it under the influence of Ps 8:6[7] (Mark 12:36; Matt 22:44), and he then explained that only Luke corrects this change (Luke 20:42–43) as does the Byzantine text and the Old Latin version of Mark and Luke. He then remarked, “As with the author of Hebrews the higher—one could say also the ‘academic’ training of the author Luke—is evidenced in such philological-historical ‘minutia.’” Likewise, Trotter concluded that Hebrews “seems to have been written by someone trained in classical rhetoric and who used Greek with the ease of a native-born speaker and writer.” Krodel noted how Luke “never says everything at once, but expands and unfolds earlier themes as he moves step by step from one episode to another.” This is also the style of the author of Hebrews.

Lukan Influence on Paul. Traditionally scholars have focused on the influence of Paul upon Luke. Perhaps in light of the shift of opinion in recent years regarding Luke as an accomplished theologian in his own right (see further below), and if the theory of

138 Ibid., 78.
140 A. Trotter, Interpreting the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 184.
the Lukan authorship of Hebrews is correct, then the time has come for the consideration of some Lukan influence on Paul. In this vein D. Seccombe stated,

Luke and Paul do appear to be at one in seeing a connection between the turning of the nation Israel to Christ and the Parousia. (Acts 3:19f; Rom 11:12,15) Reading Acts and Romans 11 side by side, one is struck by many suggestive similarities. The interesting thing is that Acts appears the more primitive, setting out the grist from which Paul has milled his extraordinary theology of the destiny of Jew and Gentile.\(^{142}\)

J. A. T. Robinson described the author of Hebrews by saying,

The mantle of the Apostle [Paul] has in part fallen upon the writer himself. He can address his readers with a pastoral authority superior to that of their own leaders and with a conscience clear of local involvement (Heb. 13:17f.), and yet with no personal claim to apostolic aegis [i.e., authority]. There cannot have been too many of such men around.\(^{143}\)

Luke was certainly one of the few men who could be accurately described by these words. Already the author of a Gospel and the only history of the Christian church from its inception through Paul’s arrest in Rome (Acts), Luke was known and loved by the many churches to which he had traveled with Paul. Also, it is probably a safe assumption that the author was to some extent acquainted with the Pauline Epistles, given the lexical similarity noted above. Who more than Luke would have such knowledge of them?

Theory of Lukan Authorship. The above references can be converged into a theory of Lukan authorship of Hebrews in the following way. Luke was still in Rome at the time of Paul’s death. Timothy arrived, was imprisoned, and sometime later was


released. Both were known to the Christians at Antioch, the proposed destination for the epistle. Finally, Heb 13:24 says, “Those from Italy send you their greetings.” This verse is more naturally understood to mean that the Christians now in Italy send greetings to a group living elsewhere. Although it is true that “those from Italy” could refer to Italian expatriates, it seems more natural to understand it otherwise. The phrase in Greek may be translated in any of three ways: “they who are in Italy,” “they who are from Italy,” or “they who are away from Italy.” There is a similar use of the preposition apo in Acts 17:13. There we read “those who are from (apo) Thessalonica.” The reference in context is clearly to people living in Thessalonica. In light of this usage in Acts 17:13, we have good textual evidence for translating the Hebrews phrase as “those who are in Italy.”

R. Hoppin pointed out the problem that develops when we accept the translation “they who are away from Italy.” Why should the author, in writing to Rome, send greetings only from expatriate Italian Christians, and not from all Christians in his company or in his city at the time of writing? One possible answer is that the reference is to Jewish Christians who were expelled from Rome under the Claudian persecution around AD 49 but who have regrouped in the location of the author. However, many Jews returned to Rome upon the death of Claudius in AD 54. It seems a bit odd for the author to bypass other Christians in his city and mention only this group if he were indeed writing to Rome from a locale outside Italy.

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144 A. Nairne, The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, CGTSC (London: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 433. He translated 13:24 as “Those who are in Italy and send their greetings with mine from Italy.”

145 Hoppin, Priscilla, 103. It is interesting to note that the patristics uniformly interpreted 13:24 to place the author in Italy at the time of writing. Those who argue for Rome as the place of composition include H. Braun, An die Hebräer, HNT 14 (Tübingen: ...
When one collates the material in Hebrews that has a bearing on authorship (i.e., style of writing, the theological depth, tightness, and intricacies of the argument) and the lexical, stylistic and theological similarities between Luke-Acts and Hebrews, it becomes apparent that someone like Luke must have been the author.

The works of Lukan scholars worldwide through the Society of Biblical Literature and other groups and individuals have produced over the past 30 years indisputable evidence that the author of Luke-Acts was an individual of remarkable literary and rhetorical skill. This writer has benefited greatly from their published results. Although it was true in the past that scholars often minimized the literary complexity of Luke-Acts, the twenty-first century is witness to a new day where the author of Luke-Acts is universally viewed as a writer of immense ability and gifts. It is no longer possible to maintain that the author of Luke-Acts is somehow “inferior” or “incapable” of having written a work such as Hebrews.

**Arguments against Lukan Authorship.** Three major arguments have been lodged against the Lukan authorship of Hebrews. Perhaps the most significant has been the supposition that Luke was a Gentile by background while the author of Hebrews was obviously Jewish. Actually, neither of these suppositions can be maintained with airtight certainty, although it does appear quite likely that the author of Hebrews was a

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Mohr/Siebeck, 1984), 2; Bruce, *Hebrews*, 14; E. Gräber, “Der Hebräerbrief 1938-1963,” 138–236; Strobel, Der Brief an die Hebräer, 13; and P. Vielhauer, Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur, 2nd ed. (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1978), 251. See Attridge (*Hebrews*, 410, n. 79) for a list of places where the expression is used idiomatically to indicate place of origin rather than separation.

Jew. In the nineteenth century, it was considered virtually certain that Luke was a Gentile, and this supposition became the reason many dismissed Luke as a possible author of Hebrews. For example, Henry Alford made this interesting admission with respect to Lukan authorship of Hebrews and the supposition of Luke’s Gentile background:

Could we explain away the inference apparently unavoidable from Col. iv. 14, such a supposition [Luke’s authorship of Hebrews] would seem to have some support from the epistle itself. The students of the following commentary will very frequently be struck by the verbal and idiomatic coincidences with the style of St. Luke. The argument, as resting on them, has been continually taken up and pushed forward by Delitzsch, and comes on his reader frequently with a force which at the time it is not easy to withstand.¹⁴⁸

But the notion that Luke was a Gentile is far from settled in Lukan studies today. At the beginning of the twentieth century, many were beginning to make mention of “the familiarity with Jewish affairs” that Luke “assumes on the part of his readers.”¹⁴⁹ In recent years, the increasing awareness of the intensely Jewish aspects of Luke’s writings

¹⁴⁸ H. Alford, Alford’s Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary, vol. 4, part 1, Prolegomena and Hebrews, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Guardian, 1976 reprint), 53. Alford refers to Paul’s mention of “our dear friend Luke, the doctor” in Col 4:14 after seemingly identifying Aristarchus, Mark, and “Jesus, who is called Justus” as “the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God” (NIV) in 4:10–11. Many scholars have noted it is not at all obvious from Col 4:10–14 that Luke was a Gentile. See especially J. Wenham, “The Identification of Luke,” EQ 63 (1991), 3–44, and E. Earle Ellis, “‘Those of the Circumcision’ and the Early Christian Mission,” Studia Evangelica IV (1968), 390-99. The train of thought in Col 4:10-14 has been broken by the intervening two verses dedicated to Epaphras. Additionally, the use of the aorist tense “became” in v. 11 may very well refer to some specific critical situation in the past where the three men “of the circumcision” stood with Paul. Paul is surely not complaining that only three Jewish Christians labored with him. Finally, first century Judaism was not homogenous, hence these three men mentioned may have been of a stricter Jewish mindset over against more moderate Hellenistic Jews.
has prompted a reevaluation of their theology and readership. The prevailing paradigm of Luke’s supposed Gentile orientation began to be seriously challenged in the early 1970’s by J. Jervell and E. Franklin, both of whom argued that the traditional understanding of Luke’s background and purpose was in error. Lukan scholars have probed this subject now for 40 years, with the result that both the books of Luke and Acts are now viewed by many against a Jewish background.

This is perhaps no more clearly demonstrated than in the conclusion R. Denova reached in her work on Luke-Acts. She agreed with others cited above that Luke’s use of Hellenistic literary devices does not provide evidence that he was a Gentile. However,

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her reasons differ from those normally given and are based upon her narrative-critical reading of Luke-Acts. Her point is that the arguments used by Luke and the way in which they are applied in the construction of the text do not support the identification of Luke as a Gentile. Jewish arguments (both structure and content) are integrated into the narrative, but there is no integration of Gentile arguments, a fact that points away from the traditional understanding of Luke’s recipients being non-Jewish. “When a particular interpretation from Scripture is offered as an argument, Luke anticipates a response by other Jews, not Gentiles.”

The point of view expressed by Luke in his two-volume work is consistently that of the Jewish Scriptures. Denova stated, “In my view, this type of argument strongly suggests that the ethnic background of the author of Luke-Acts is Jewish, and that he presented arguments that were of some importance to Jews.” Although Hengel accepted Luke’s Gentile background, he could also assert that Luke had by far the best knowledge of Judaism, the temple cultus, synagogues, customs and sects, and he reports them in an accurate way. Schreckenberg likewise affirmed that “Luke shows a certain

154 M. Hengel, *Geschichtsschreibung* 59 (ET), 64.
interest in, almost an inner connection with, the Jewish background to the New Testament events.”


R. Martin rightly noted the haste with which many concluded from Col 4:14 that Luke was a Gentile: “There is considerable evidence to argue the case that he was a Hellenistic Jew.” D. Pao’s recent extensive study of Luke’s use of Isaiah in Luke-Acts led him to conclude that “Luke is most likely a god-fearer if not himself a Jew.” A. C. Clarke, in reference to Plummer’s comment about Luke’s being the “versatile Gentile,” supported strongly the opposite idea that Luke must have been a Jew if he is to be considered the author of Luke-Acts.

I find this theory of the versatile Gentile very unconvincing. Greek was the literary language of the East and known to all Jews with any claim to


culture. It is easy to see that a Jew when writing Greek would from time to
time use native idioms and constructions. It is difficult to conceive the
case of a Greek who became so saturated with Hebraic idioms as to use
them when writing in his own tongue. If, therefore, the meaning of Col. iv.
10–14 is that Loukas was a Greek, it is hard to suppose that he wrote either
of the works attributed to him.\textsuperscript{159}

J. Jervell came to a similar conclusion:

That Luke was able to write Greek in a good style does not show that he
was a Gentile—many Jews did so. In spite of his ability to write decent
Greek, he does so only seldom and sporadically. Most of his work he
presents in what may be called biblical Greek, clearly influenced by the
stylistic home was the synagogue. He was a Jewish Christian.\textsuperscript{160}

At the very least, Eric Franklin is right:

Whether Luke was himself a Jew must remain an open question. At any
rate, however, he must have been one who was influenced supremely by
the Jewish faith, one who loved our nation, who was moved by its law and
captivated by its Scriptures, one who was led to see in Jesus a fulfillment
of its hopes and a widening of its promises.\textsuperscript{161}

There is a significant amount of evidence pointing to the Jewishness of Luke-
Acts. If Luke were not Jewish, he produced a two-volume work that in terms of content,

\begin{footnotes}
Macmillan, 1901], xxi) commented, “Luke was a Jew and there is no ground for the other
supposition.” Many argue, like Goulder (\textit{Luke: A New Paradigm} [Sheffield: JSOT Press,
1994], 115), that the Semitisms in Luke 1–2 are not due to a Hebrew or Aramaic source
but are in fact Luke’s own Septuagintal style.
\item[161] Franklin, \textit{Christ the Lord}, 79. Among others arguing for Luke’s Jewish background
(e.g., Reicke, Schlatter, Ellis, Wenham), see most recently G. Harvey, \textit{The True Israel:}
language, and emphasis betrays knowledge of and interest in matters Jewish. Given this, a significant barrier against Lukan authorship of Hebrews is removed.

A second argument against Lukan authorship has been the notion that Luke has no high priestly Christology. While it is true that none of the Gospel writers overtly portray Jesus as high priest, it can be demonstrated that Luke viewed him as such. This can be seen in the account of Jesus’ ascension in Luke 24:50–51, where it is stated that Jesus lifted up his hands and blessed the disciples. While he was engaged in this act, he was “carried up into heaven.” Talbert’s words express the meaning of this act:

This act of blessing is like that of the high priest, Simon, in Sir 50:19–20. With a priestly act the risen Jesus puts his disciples under the protection of God before he leaves them . . . Just as the gospel began with the ministry of the priest Zechariah, so it ends with Jesus acting as priest for his flock (cf. Heb 2:17; 3:1; 6:19–20).

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Talbert even cites texts from Hebrews that theologically describe this act and the resultant position of the ascended Lord in heaven. Of the four Gospel writers, it is only Luke who recounts the ascension of Jesus. It is, in fact, the focal point of his two-volumes. Douglas Farrow also saw in Luke’s account of the ascension “weighty evidence” for a priestly Christology. “Are we not invited throughout (another uniquely Lukan story, about the boy Jesus in his Father’s house, deserves mention here) to see in Jesus something of Samuel as well as David, and of the priestly as well as the kingly?”

Do we not see the same priestly and kingly roles combined in Hebrews? Mekkattukunnel has recently demonstrated that Luke’s apparent disinterest in the priesthood of Jesus vanishes in the light of a closer reading of Luke. Strelan provocatively entitled his recent volume Luke the Priest, in which he argued that Luke’s clearly demonstrable interest in matters related to the priesthood coupled with his authority to interpret the traditions of Israel indicated that Luke was himself a priest. While this carries the evidence too far in my opinion, Strelan’s volume illustrates the changing paradigm in Lukan studies.


164 D. Farrow, Ascension and Ecclesia (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 25.
165 Mekkattukunnel, Priestly Blessing, 176–77.
The third major argument against Lukan authorship of Hebrews is the assumption that Luke had no theology of the cross. Luke had his own way of highlighting the sacrificial aspect of Jesus’ death. Mekkattukunnel made the point that “Luke omits not only Jesus’ saying in Mark 10:45, but the whole Marcan pericope (Mark 10:35–45) in which it occurs. However, Luke takes up much of this Marcan material in the Last Supper context (cf. 22:24–27).” He further noted that Luke sets Jesus’ death in the Passover time-frame, which points to the sacrificial character of his death (Luke 22:1,7,8,11,13,15; Exod 12:14,25,27). Mekkattukunnel thus demonstrated Luke indeed does have a theology of the cross.

Furthermore, as Carprinelli demonstrated, Jesus’ words over the bread and cup at the Last Supper clearly express the sacrificial nature of his death. There is an allusion to Jer 31:31–34 and the “new covenant” in the Lukan account of the Last Supper, an allusion that is not found in the other Gospels but that is clearly a significant theme in Hebrews.

Mekkattukunnel said Luke views Jesus’ death on the cross as fulfilling and surpassing the Old Testament temple and priesthood. For Luke, Jesus is the supreme high

168 Ibid., 177.
169 Ibid. “The emphatic way in which Luke presents Jesus as the ‘firstborn’ (2:7,23) reminds us of the Passover lamb which was the ranso[m] for the deliverance of the Israelites’ first-born children.”
171 Jer 31:31–34 is a foundational OT passage for Hebrews 8–9.
priest and perfect mediator between God and humanity.\textsuperscript{172} Carpinelli came to the same conclusion:

As Jesus ascends, Luke depicts him giving Aaron’s blessing as the high priest would after sacrifice on the Feast of Atonement. The sacrificial and expiatory interpretation of the cup connects with the Lucan running allusion to Sirach 50, where the glory and function of the high priest in the liturgy of the Day of Atonement are magnified . . . In Luke 22:14–23 and 24:50–53 Jesus is thus depicted functioning as a priest. The bread as memorial and the cup as the token of the covenant in Jesus’ blood lay the narrative base for depicting the ascending Jesus completing the liturgy of the Day of Atonement. Jesus’ giving the cup as new covenant in his blood and imparting Aaron’s blessing bring narratively to full view Luke’s image of Jesus’ relation to the temple.\textsuperscript{173}

Thus, the three arguments that have traditionally been used against Luke as the author of Hebrews lose their potency in the light of careful investigation of Luke-Acts. C. P. M. Jones’ thesis that there is a “family likeness” in Christology and eschatology between Luke-Acts and Hebrews in comparison to the rest of the New Testament writers\textsuperscript{174} was confirmed by John Drury, who noted with regard to them that “Luke and Hebrews are fundamentally at one.”\textsuperscript{175} Likewise, L. Goppelt in his Theology of the New Testament placed his treatment of Luke and Hebrews in the same chapter because of the similarity he suggested exists between these works when compared to the rest of the New Testament.

\textsuperscript{172} Mekkattukunnel, Priestly Blessing, 180–81.
\textsuperscript{173} Carpinelli, 90.
Testament. In every respect Hebrews offers an interpretation of the gospel that is independent of Paul and John. Its interpretation was written for the community on a long journey, a community that was growing tired under the pressure of faith in the context of a hostile society. Goppelt also saw a “whole series of particulars” of agreement between Luke and Hebrews. He cited the “linguistic proximity” of the books, including “characteristic technical terms of community parlance,” such as Christ as archēgos, church leaders as hēgoumenoi, and Jesus having been perfected (teteleiōtai). In addition, both Luke and Hebrews address a church situation “in a similar direction.” The farewell address of Jesus (Luke 22) and the farewell address of Paul to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20) remind one of Hebrews 13:7–21. Goppelt’s conclusion was that the above points of contact “suggest that the theology of Hebrews and that of Luke should be considered together.” In this way, Hebrews exhibits the greatest affinity with Luke-Acts in the New Testament.

When one considers the lexical, stylistic, and theological similarities between Luke-Acts and Hebrews coupled with the way in which a theory of Lukan authorship can be historically reconstructed from the texts themselves, there is impressive evidence that points to the Lukan authorship of Hebrews. No longer should it be said that “the points of connection between Luke and Hebrews are too slight to support a theory of common authorship.” At any rate, whoever the author was, he must be classed among the upper

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177 Ibid., 266.
echelon of New Testament writers in terms of stylistic ability and theological prowess, as has been continually noted throughout church history.\(^{179}\)

Many additional arguments can be marshaled in favor of Lukan authorship.\(^{180}\) The combined evidence should evoke among New Testament scholars a closer look at Luke as the author of Hebrews.

(2) **Recipients**

The question of the recipients of Hebrews, like the other matters of provenance, has engendered considerable discussion.\(^{181}\) The internal evidence of the epistle itself nowhere locates the readers, and thus the best that one can do is to sift the evidence and see where it leads. Three major views have been advocated as to ethnic background of the

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\(^{179}\) E.g., Gheorghita, *Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews*, 2: “His knowledge and appropriation of the Scriptures as well as their crucial importance in the development of his theological argument are second to none among the NT writers. . . . It was the Greek text of the Jewish Scriptures that he used for his quotations with much more uniformity and precision than most of the other NT writers.” Also Thiselton, “Hebrews,” in *Eerdmans, Commentary on the Bible*, ed. J. D. G. Dunn and J. W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1453: “Hebrews is the work of a theologian who is also a pastor and a fine expository preacher.”


recipients. The traditional view is that the readers were Jewish Christians.\(^{182}\) The superscription “To the Hebrews” prefixed to the epistle in the late second century is indicative of its contents. The Old Testament quotations—which focus on the tabernacle, the priesthood, the sacrificial system, Moses, Melchizedek, and Abraham (Heb 3; 7; 11)—indicate a Jewish audience. In the nineteenth century, a second view developed which argued that the recipients were Gentile Christians.\(^{183}\) The argument of Hebrews can easily be applied to Gentiles, and in fact this has been done by most interpreters of the epistle. But it is significant to note, as C. Anderson trenchantly pointed out, that “the author himself does not do so, and such an extension requires considerable readjustment of his tightly woven logic and scriptural interpretation.”\(^{184}\) A third viewpoint suggests that the readers were a mixed congregation of Jewish and Gentile Christians.\(^{185}\) The traditional view accounts for the evidence in the epistle itself.

Were the recipients Christians at large, similar to the readers of 1 and 2 Peter, or were they a definite congregation or a group within a specific congregation of Christians? The latter seems the better option based on the internal evidence of the epistle.\(^{186}\) Three


\(^{183}\) Moffatt (*Hebrews*, xxiv–xxvi) offered one of the best presentations of this theory in the twentieth century, which deSilva (*Perseverance in Gratitude*, 2–7) did for the twenty-first century. This view has not garnered much support since the internal evidence of the epistle is so strongly against it.


\(^{186}\) B. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction*, 242: “Most agree with Manson that there are enough concrete features within the letter to indicate a definite group rather than Christians at large.”
major theories regarding the location of the recipients have been suggested. The
traditional view locates the recipients in or near Jerusalem. The title of the epistle
combined with the theology of the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the sacrifices could be
argued to point in this direction. The description of the persecution that the readers had
endured likewise makes a Jerusalem destination possible. This view has been recently
argued in a dissertation by Mosser.\(^\text{187}\) He revisited the evidence for Jerusalem and noticed
that this was the dominant viewpoint until the nineteenth century. He also marshaled
strong evidence in favor of Jerusalem from Heb 13:13 where the author speaks of going
“outside the camp.” Mosser demonstrated the fact that this phrase always refers to
Jerusalem or something within it during the Second Temple period. When the author of
Hebrews calls on his readers to go “outside the camp,” he is calling them to leave
Jerusalem.\(^\text{188}\)

A second possible destination is Rome. This view arose during the eighteenth
century and is probably the dominant viewpoint at this time.\(^\text{189}\) Lane has made a good
case for a house church setting in Rome as the destination of the epistle.\(^\text{190}\) R. Brown’s
defense of the Roman destination is given a substantive critique by M. Isaacs.\(^\text{191}\) The
Roman hypothesis has received its most trenchant critique recently from Mosser, who

\(^{187}\) C. Mosser, “No Lasting City: Rome, Jerusalem and the Place of Hebrews in the
History of Earliest ‘Christianity,’” (Ph.D. dissertation, St. Mary’s College, University of
\(^{188}\) Ibid., 294–350.
\(^{189}\) Advocates include W. Manson, The Epistle to the Hebrews (London: Hodder &
Stoughton, 1951), 162; R. Brown, Antioch and Rome, 142–51; F. F. Bruce, Hebrews, 13–
14; S. J. Kistemaker, Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, (Grand Rapids: Baker,
1984), 17–18; Ellingworth, Hebrews, 29; Weiss, Hebräerbrief, 76; Salevao, Legitimation
\(^{190}\) Lane, Hebrews 1–8, Iviii–Ix.
traced the rise of the Roman destination theory and then critically examined the evidence for it. His thorough analysis of the phrase “they of Italy greet you” in Heb 13:24, a linchpin in the Roman argument, broke new ground. Mosser examined first century manuscripts employing the preposition *apo* followed by a place name, as in Heb 13:24, and concluded “they consistently interpret the phrase to indicate the place from which the epistle was written.”\(^{192}\) An additional argument against the Roman hypothesis, not usually mentioned, is the reference to Timothy’s release in Heb 13:23, which would not have been necessary if the epistle were written to Rome.\(^{193}\) Of course, it could be argued that Timothy was imprisoned somewhere other than Rome, but given the information from the Pastoral Epistles, Rome is the most likely location of Timothy’s imprisonment.

A third view posits Antioch in Syria as the destination of the epistle.\(^{194}\) This view will be argued as viable in the discussion below.

Some have attempted to show that the author wrote to a mixed audience of believers and unbelievers.\(^{195}\) This theory will be addressed throughout the commentary as we explain how the author addresses his audience. There are two ways this issue has been approached by those who advocate the mixed audience viewpoint. F. F. Bruce and P. E. Hughes argued that the author addressed professing Christians without distinguishing in

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\(^{192}\) Mosser, “No Lasting City,” 157.

\(^{193}\) This point was noted by J. M’Clintock and J. Strong, “Hebrews, Epistle to,” in *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981 reprint), 4:147.


his writing whether some were actually unsaved, though that was probably the case. Thus, when the author of Hebrews used the term “brothers” in 3:12, he did not necessarily refer to one who was truly saved but to those who were in the church—presumably Christians but some not necessarily so. In one sense this approach would be affirmed by all as a truism in that there are probably those in each local church congregation who are not genuine believers. The issue is not, however, whether this is true, but whether the author assumes his audience to be composed of both believers and unbelievers. A more extreme approach is taken by MacArthur who argued that the expository sections of the epistle were written to both groups, believers and unbelievers, but that the warning passages were addressed to unbelievers only. MacArthur divided the recipients of Heberws into three groups: (1) Jewish Christians, (2) Jewish non-believers who were intellectually convinced of Christianity’s truthfulness, but remained unconverted, and (3) Jewish non-Christians who remained unconvinced of the truth of Christianity. This approach to the audience of Hebrews is not born out in the actual structure of the epistle, particularly in the author’s use of pronouns and conjunctions. The commentary on Heb 6:4–8 addresses this issue in depth. Suffice it to say at this point that the mixed audience theory is theologically driven as an attempt to explain the rigorism of Hebrews.

196 Bruce, Hebrews, 66; Hughes, Hebrews, 146.
197 MacArthur, Hebrews, x–xv. On p. xi he stated, “If, for example, as some have said, it was written exclusively to Christians, extreme problems arise in interpreting a number of passages which could hardly apply to believers. And because it so frequently addresses believers, it could not have been written primarily to unbelievers either. So it must have been written to include both.” Macarthur’s statement is based on his interpretation of the warning passages in Hebrews. The weakness of this suggestion in light of the evidence in the epistle itself will be demonstrated in the course of this commentary.
Returning to the identity of the recipients, a promising solution to the question was first offered in 1923 by J. V. Brown when he suggested that the readers were a group of the former Jewish priests who had become Christians, mentioned in Acts 6:7. This theory was later argued by Spicq in his work on Hebrews.\(^{198}\) With the exception of Spicq and P. E. Hughes, this suggestion has not been given the consideration that it deserves in New Testament circles.\(^{199}\)

Brown not only argued for priests as the recipients of Hebrews, but he also attributed part of the writing to Luke as a collaborator with Paul. He suggested that Paul was the “chief framer, planner and compiler” of the epistle, but that Luke edited it.\(^{200}\) As a result, Brown’s theory concerning the authorship and recipients of Hebrews is the nearest to my own view.

Brown was followed in his suggestion regarding the recipients as former Jewish priests by Bornhauser in 1932, Clarkson in 1947, Ketter in 1950, Spicq in 1952, Braun


\(^{199}\) Hughes, *Hebrews*, 10–15. Lindars calls it a speculative reconstruction that “strains credulity” (*Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, 4). R. Brown and J. P. Meier’s critique of Spicq’s proposal is primarily based on Spicq’s suggestion that the converted priests remained in Jerusalem (*Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity* [New York: Paulist Press, 1983]: 143). The appeal to the LXX rather than Hebrew and the author’s focus on the tabernacle rather than the temple as arguments against former priests being the recipients are not serious hurdles. D. Guthrie was more optimistic when he said that this view must remain a conjecture, although a conjecture that deserves “careful consideration” (*New Testament Introduction*, 691).

and Sandegren in 1955, Rissi in 1987 and P. Grelot in 2003. Spicq revised his theory in 1958-59 when he suggested that the priests had been influenced by the Qumranian community. Spicq also followed Brown in noting a certain likeness between Hebrews and Stephen’s speech in Acts 7. He saw portions of Hebrews as countering Qumranian speculations and concluded that Hebrews was written to Jewish priests who were Essene-Christians, and within this group former members of the Qumran community were also present.

Both J. Danielou and Y. Yadin elaborated on this theory of Qumranian influence on the recipients of Hebrews in 1958. Danielou suggested that converted priests furnished the best explanation for the recipients of Hebrews. Believing John the Baptist to have been influenced by Essene tendencies, and accepting O. Cullman’s belief that Stephen’s speech contains several points similar to the Essene manuscript called the Damascus Document, Danielou posited that the Hellenists of Acts 6 were actually converted Essenes.

Yadin argued that Hebrews was written to a group of Jews who had originally belonged to the Qumranian sect and who upon their conversion to Christianity continued to maintain some of their previous views. Hughes favored the view that the recipients

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201 P. Grelot (lecture de l’épître aux Hébreux, Lire la Bible 132 [Paris: Cerf, 2003], 190–91) argued that the recipients were converted Jewish priests who were now refugees in a city where nationalist Jews brought increasing pressure and hostility on them around AD 66. These priests lived on the margin of the church, which he located as most likely in Antioch.
202 Spicq later altered his view (“L’Épître aux Hebreux,” 365–90) to suggest the priests were members of Qumran.
203 Danielou, The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity. 18–22.
204 Y. Yadin, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in Scripta Hierosolymitana, vol. 4, Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls (Jerusalem: magnes Press,
were former priests, but he found it unnecessary to postulate that the recipients had been
former members of Qumran. The Qumran connection has been exaggerated, so all that
needs to be said is that the readers, if they were former priests, may have been influenced
by some of the views of this sect of Judaism. However, in this writer’s opinion a careful
reading of the epistle does not appear to indicate much influence. Hughes called this
view (that the recipients were former Jewish priests) the “best theory yet advanced to
explain the occasion . . . of Hebrews.”

The suggestion that the recipients were former priests minus the Qumran
connection has plenty of evidence to support it and merits its revival as one of the better
possible solutions to the overall question. Given all the evidence, it seems to have greater
explanatory power than any other theory. Josephus mentioned that there were some
20,000 priests, and according to J. Jeremias there were some 7,200 priests attached to the
temple in Jerusalem alone. Luke records in Acts 6:7 that a significant number of the
priests became followers of Jesus. With the persecution recorded in Acts 8:1 raging in
Jerusalem at the time of Stephen’s martyrdom, some of these converted Jewish priests
would no doubt have been forced out of Jerusalem along with other Christians. The
question is, where would they have gone? Luke did not tell us what became of these
former priests mentioned in Acts 6:7, probably out of concern for their safety. If his

Hebrew University, 1965), 36-55. Cp. H. Braun, Qumran und das Neue Testament I

205 See the excellent discussion on the history of research on Hebrews and Qumran in P.
Scholarship on Hebrews,” Christianity, Judaism and other Graeco-Roman Cults, ed. J.

206 Hughes, Hebrews, 14.

volume had fallen into the wrong hands, it could have easily furnished a clue to their location. Perhaps this is why the recipients of Hebrews are never identified in the letter, though it is clear that the author knew their exact circumstances. The fact that Jewish-Roman relations were strained to the point of war would be ample reason to protect former priests likely to be viewed by the Roman government as potential leaders in the Jewish cause.208

Assuming Acts to have been written around AD 63, the events narrated in Acts 6:7 would have begun approximately thirty years earlier. Where might those converted priests have gone? One of the most likely and one of the safest places would be Antioch in Syria.209 There may have been a steady stream of converted Jewish priests leaving Jerusalem under persecution, and most likely some would flee to Antioch. In Acts 6:7 all three main verbs appear in the imperfect tense, emphasizing continuous action in past time ("So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" [emphasis added]).

C. B. Williams translates this verse in the following way to bring out the force of the

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208 This fact coupled with the evidence that Hebrews was not written to an entire church, but to a smaller group within a particular local church, contributes significantly to the reason why there is no salutation and why the issue of authorship as well as recipients would become obscured in a relatively short time.

209 Although I find it unlikely that exiled Jewish priests would relocate to Rome, R. Brown and J. P. Meier (Antioch and Rome, 154) suggested as much when they pointed out the possibility that in the Christian community in Rome there may have been "elements of that levitical heritage" referenced in Acts 6:7. Brown critiqued Spicq’s theory on the supposition that the converted priests were located in Jerusalem. However, Spicq did not argue that the converted priests remained in Jerusalem, but rather were forced by persecution to relocate to some other place such as Caesarea, Antioch, or Ephesus (L’epître aux Hebreux, 2:227). Brown was obviously more open to this theory if the priests are located somewhere other than Jerusalem, such as Rome. A Roman
imperfects: “So God’s message continued to spread, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem continued to grow rapidly; a large number even of priests continued to surrender to the faith.” The Greek translated “large number” makes it probable that several hundred and possibly even several thousand priests are referred to here. As Spicq pointed out, Hebrews addressed itself to priestly thoughts, attitudes, and points of view.

One of the important themes of Hebrews, the high priesthood of Christ, is discussed in detail in the epistle. Would not such a theme be of great interest to former priests? On one occasion the readers were exhorted (in a figurative way) to continue their priestly duties: in Heb 10:19,22 the readers were told to “enter the Most Holy Place” with their “hearts sprinkled to cleanse [them] from a guilty conscience” and “having [their] bodies washed with pure water.” Such priestly language would have been immediately understood and appreciated by former priests but would have been less so to the laity.

Apparently the recipients were not the entire church, but rather a section of the church as may be gleaned from Heb 5:12. Furthermore, they were addressed separately from their leaders as may be inferred from Heb 13:24. Downey pointed out in his exhaustive work on Antioch that it is very likely that several different groups of Christians existed in Antioch and that these probably met in different locations. One may presume that, at least on some occasions, the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians met separately. Some Christian Jews probably still observed the law in the matter of destination for Hebrews works just as well for the theory of Lukan authorship whether the recipients were former priests or not.

eating with Gentiles. A hint of this kind of thing is recorded in Gal 2:11-12 where Peter was willing to eat with Gentile Christians until a delegation from James and the Jerusalem church arrived in Antioch. Paul denounced Peter for separating himself from the Gentile Christians for fear of the Jerusalem delegation. Downey further suggested that the subsequent history of the Antiochene Christians made it probable that there were a number of different congregations and that they followed different lines of teaching and practice.212

Given this background and the statements in Hebrews itself, it is easy to conceive of former priests, now a part of the church at Antioch, who may have found reasons to stand aloof from the church.213 Such an attitude could have sparked the exhortation in 10:25: “Let us not give up meeting together.” Lindars inferred from 13:17 that there was a rift between the leaders of the church and the group whom the author of Hebrews addressed.

211 Spicq, L’Epître aux Hebreux, 2:226.
213 Why the group addressed in Hebrews was failing to meet regularly with the church we are not told. We know that historically, in the two centuries preceding the Maccabean revolt, many of the priests, especially those of the upper echelon, became open to Hellenistic influences in an attempt to attain Hellenistic citizenship for themselves in Jerusalem. See the discussion in N. Walter, “Hellenistic Jews of the Diaspora at the Cradle of Primitive Christianity,” in The New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism, ed. P Borgen and S. Giversen (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 41. By the time of the early church, the Sadducean high priestly families were much more hellenistically oriented than their Pharisee counterparts. If the recipients of Hebrews were former priests who had relocated to Antioch, perhaps there was some form of group conflict with others in the Antiochian church. If the leadership of the Antioch church had become predominately Gentile, as is likely, this could be a plausible factor.
If the leaders had to give an account “sadly” (v.17), “the implication is that the situation is extremely serious, and the leaders are at their wits end to know how to cope with it.”

Following up on this last statement, Lindars suggested that the reason the author of Hebrews was involved in the first place is because he was himself a loved and respected member. It is possible that the author was a member of the congregation, but Lindars depends too heavily on chap. 13 for his supposition. He conjectured that the leaders had written to the author urging him to intervene. Since the author could not come in person, though he hoped to later, he responded with the letter of Hebrews. This accounts for its rhetorical character since the writer wanted to make the greatest impact. His intervention is the last resort. This aspect of Lindar’s proposal is certainly possible.

Of those who have argued for former priests as the recipients of Hebrews, C. Spicq has presented the most effective case in his 1952-53 two-volume commentary. Spicq is often referenced by commentators as having argued for priests as the recipients of Hebrews, but interaction with his evidence is rare. An exception is Ellingworth who discussed six of Spicq’s 12 arguments for priests and offers a brief rebuttal. Given that Spicq’s work was done over 50 years ago and that it has yet to be translated from the original French, it seems prudent to present his case again and couple it with additional arguments that can be marshaled in favor of former priests being the recipients of Hebrews.

Spicq began by noting that the depth of discussion in Hebrews demands all the more that the listener be interested in and able to understand it. He overstated the case

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when he said that “only the priests had enough intelligence” to comprehend the
discussion, but his point that the letter addresses itself to priestly thoughts, attitudes, and
points of view is indeed true. Spicq then proceeded to list twelve arguments in favor of
his view. First, they were converted by the earliest disciples of the Lord (Heb 2:3).
Second, they could have known the Roman Jews living in Jerusalem at the time of
Pentecost who were converted (Acts 2:10) and who, after returning to Rome, would have
added their greetings to those of the author of Hebrews (13:24). Third, they were
strengthened in the faith by the Holy Spirit through the work of Stephen (Heb 2:4; see
Acts 6:8). Fourth, they should have been teachers (Heb 5:12), and this is commensurate
with the teaching role that the priests had for the people as revealed in the Old Testament
(Hag 2:11; Zech 7:8; Mal 2:7) as well as the New Testament.

Fifth, the present participle anistatai (“arising,” NIV “appears”) in Heb 7:15 is reminiscent of Acts 20:17,18,28, and could have a hierarchical connotation. Such
language would scarcely be applied to ordinary Christians, but would be consistent with
priests having the authority required for giving counsel and making effective
intervention. Sixth, the priests in Jerusalem had been used to the splendor of temple

\[216\] See Spicq (L’epître aux Hebreux, 1:226–31) for his arguments.
\[217\] Ibid., 226. See J. H. Wray, Rest as a Theological Metaphor in the Epistle to the
Hebrews and the Gospel of Truth: Early Christian Homiletics of Rest, SBL Dissertation
Series 166 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 74: “I am convinced that the text of Hebrews
implies a sophisticated and probably well-educated audience.” See the comments by
deSilva, who noted that the stylish and difficult Greek combined with the extensive
vocabulary of the epistle “suggests an audience capable of attending meaningfully to such
language and syntax” (deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 8).
\[218\] Ibid., 227. Spicq did not believe the recipients were located in Rome.
\[219\] Ibid., 228. The priests played a significant role in Israel as intermediaries through
whom God revealed his will in the form of torah, whose root idea means “to teach.” It is
worship. Now, as Christians, they had lost their material and spiritual privileges as sons
of Levi. They had been separated from the temple and had been forced to give up their
ministry. They were reduced to the condition of ordinary people and persecuted as
members of a hated sect. Discouraged (Heb 12:12–13; 13:5–6), they were tempted to
return to Judaism (Heb 3:12–14; 6:4–6; 10:39). Thus, the writer of Hebrews attempted to
transpose the material and visual aspect of temple worship into the domain of the
conscience by highlighting the spiritual and inner nature of Christianity. Seventh, Jewish
priests were permitted by Mosaic law to eat a portion of the sacrifice that had been
offered. Now, as Christians separated from the temple worship, they no longer had that
right. But they did have a superior privilege: spiritual participation in the sacrificed
Christ, from which their former brother priests are excluded (Heb 13:10).

Eighth, Heb 10:18, as the conclusion of the doctrinal section Heb 7:1–10:18,
affirms in absolute wording the elimination of the need for any sacrificial ritual. Ninth,
because he is addressing priestly descendents of Levi, the author takes “psychological
precautions” and uses doctrinal “circumlocutions” in order to denounce the foolishness of
their attempted continuation of their priesthood. In an effort to show consideration for
their feelings, the writer did not directly attack the priesthood in order to validate the
priesthood of Jesus. Rather, he approached the matter from the priesthood of
Melchizedek as a priestly order that preceded and superceded the Levitical order, and

used specially of the authoritative instruction given by the priests in Deut 17:9–11; 33:10,
and many other places in the OT.
which in fact also typifies the priesthood of Christ. This is the gist of the argument in chap. 7.  

Tenth, the vivid description of Heb 6:6 and 10:29 is understood better against the backdrop of readers who had taken part in the death of Jesus. The Gospels make it clear that the priests and especially the chief priests were involved in masterminding the death of Jesus. The idea of “crucifying Jesus again” and putting him to open shame was used by the author to motivate these now converted priests to remain faithful to Jesus. 

Eleventh, the recipients of Hebrews had been victims of some persecution, including the loss of possessions (Heb 10:34). According to Spicq, they appear to be “rich” since they had enough to show generous hospitality (13:1–2), were tempted by greed (13:5–6), and were called upon to multiply their acts of kindness (13:16). Twelfth, the traditional title given to the book, “To the Hebrews,” implies a body of men closely united, a homogeneous group, like the name for the Jewish community known as the Pharisees found on the Hasmonean coins (ḥabarīm). The recipients of Hebrews were a group of people in misfortune living together and sharing trials, much like the “band of priests” who were victims of plunder in Hos 6:9.

Childs’ comment that the title construes the epistle as addressing the problem of the two covenants would certainly support Spicq’s theory since this issue would be of paramount importance to former priests. Child’s pointed out that Hebrews offers a programmatic statement of the theological relationship of the two covenants that receives its content not from the historical setting in the first century, but rather from Scripture. If the author were writing before AD 70, or even during the Jewish War (AD 66-70), the

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220 Ibid., 230.
best way of proceeding would not be the historical approach but the Scriptural approach, which is exactly what the author of Hebrews did.\footnote{221}{Ibid., 231; Childs, New Testament as Canon, 415.}

Certainly each of these twelve arguments does not carry the same weight. Some are more circumstantial than others. But given the content and tone of Hebrews, one must admit that the theory of converted priests can account for a significant amount of the evidence from the text.\footnote{222}{Jerome indicated Philo was from a priestly family (Lives of Illustrious Men, 11). M. Barker ("Beyond the Veil of the Temple: The High Priestly Origins of the Apocalypses," SJT 51 [1998]: 6) has conjectured that perhaps Philo’s treatment of the creation stories, “the creation of the invisible world beyond the veil of the temple and then the visible world as its copy, is not an example of the Platonizing of Hellenistic Judaism but rather a glimpse of the priestly world even of his time” Likewise, perhaps the author’s approach shares some similarity to Philo given his readership.}

Scholer has shown how the author’s use of temple language in Hebrews (proserchesthai, eiserchesthai, teleioun) is applied to the readers to characterize them as priests, including the incumbent obligation to function as priests in bringing sacrifices acceptable for worship (12:28; 13:15).\footnote{223}{J. M. Scholer, Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews, JSNTSup 49 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 204–5.}

(3) **Location of the Recipients**

The epistle nowhere specifically locates the recipients, hence suggestions are numerous. Early on in church history, a Jerusalem or Palestinian destination held sway.\footnote{224}{E.g., Chrysostom in his homilies on Hebrews suggested a Jerusalem destination.}

This viewpoint dominated the scene until the mid-eighteenth century.\footnote{225}{Examples of adherents to this view include Delitzsch, Hebrews, 1:21; Westcott, Hebrews, xxxix–xli; Spicq, L’Epître aux Hébreux, 1:247–250; Buchanan, Hebrews, 256–260; and Hughes, Hebrews, 15–19.} Its most recent proponent is Mosser, whose work is a formidable critique of the Roman destination and a
cogent argument for Jerusalem as the location of the recipients. A. Nairne commented, “It is certain that the epistle would have been quite unsuited to the Church of Jerusalem as a whole,” but this is a gross overstatement. The usual appeal that an author would not use Greek or quote exclusively from the LXX in addressing Palestinians can no longer be sustained in light of the evidence that perhaps as much as 20 percent of Jerusalem used Greek as their mother tongue, and the LXX was very much in use in Jerusalem in the first century AD.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed the development of the Roman destination for the epistle. First propounded by Wetstein in the mid-eighteenth century, the Roman destination is the majority view today. Those who argue for a Roman destination depend heavily on Heb 13:24: “Those from Italy send you their greetings.” This phrase is interpreted to mean that the readers were located somewhere in Italy and probably in Rome. However, the phrase can just as easily be interpreted to mean the epistle was written from Rome to some destination outside of Italy. Clement of Rome’s citation of Hebrews in his epistle to the Corinthians is interpreted as evidence that the recipients were in Rome. The past trials the readers experienced (see Heb 10:32–34) are, according to this view, identified with the expulsion of Jewish Christians from Rome following the edict of Claudius in AD 49. Lane ably defends the theory that the recipients composed one of the house churches in Rome.

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227 A. Nairne, Epistle to the Hebrews, #
229 See Bruce, Hebrews, xxxi–xxxv; and Lane, Hebrews 1–8, lviii–lx.
230 Lane, Hebrews 1–8, li–lx.
Other destinations have been proposed, including Ephesus, Corinth, and western Asia Minor. If the recipients of Hebrews were converted priests, then one logical suggestion that may also be supported with some biblical evidence—especially if the author of Hebrews is indeed Luke—is Antioch in Syria. We know from Josephus that Jews were numerous in the city of Antioch, enjoying equal rights as citizens. Furthermore, with a few exceptions, there was not the level of persecution of Jews in Antioch as in other cities.

Hebrews 6:10 mentions the fact that the recipients had ministered to the saints, so the Jerusalem offering given by the Antiochene church (Acts 11:27–30) may have been the referent of that verse. Of historical interest is Josephus’ mention of the refusal by Antiochus to permit the observance of the Sabbath rest in Antioch after about AD 67-69. Hebrews 4:1–10 speaks of the Sabbath rest to come, a subject that would have appealed to Antiochene Jews at this time. Another interesting point is the statement in Heb 13:12–14 that “we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.” How appropriate this statement would have been to exiled Jewish priests living in Antioch, many of whom no doubt longed for Jerusalem and who needed to be reminded of the fact that the beloved city was not to be sought after.

The admonition of Heb 6:1–6 may have been given to counter pressure on those Jewish priests to return to Judaism and defend their nation against the eminent peril from

232 *Wars* 7.43. This was due to the proximity of Syria to Judea. On the relationship of Jews and Christians in Antioch from the first to the fourth centuries, see W. Meeks and R. Wilkin, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), 13–36.
the Romans. The crisis of the Jewish war, like a powerful vortex, drew in sectarians of all sorts to defend their homeland. Thus, even some from the Qumran community—which was a strict, isolationist sect—died at Masada while holding out against the Roman army. The same kind of pressure must have been brought to bear on many Jewish Christians.

The possibility that some of their fellow countrymen would try to coerce them back into Judaism seems only natural under the circumstances of the times. We know from Josephus that violent attacks intensified on all those who refused to show solidarity with the Jewish resistance prior to the war. These factors suggest Antioch as a possible location of the recipients of Hebrews.

If Luke is the author of Hebrews, evidence for Antioch increases since Luke is associated by both Scripture and tradition with Antioch in Syria. The Anti-Marcionite prologue to Luke’s Gospel (dated around the years 160-180) states that Luke was a Syrian from Antioch. Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* speaks of “Luke who was born at Antioch, by profession a physician.” While the accuracy of these traditions cannot be established beyond question, it is reasonable to assume some factual basis for them in light of their early origin. Also of interest is that Antioch housed a medical school where Luke may have received his training as a physician.

Scripture itself provides some verification for these traditions in that Luke is very closely linked with Antioch. He has a more than passing interest in Antioch as can be observed from a consideration of statements found in his Gospel and Acts. For example, in Luke 4:25–27 Jesus reminded his hearers that there were some in Syria who were

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233 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 12.120.
helped by the earliest of Israel’s prophets. In Luke 6:17, Phoenicia is mentioned as the home of some who had come to hear Jesus preach the Sermon on the Mount. E. Franklin has shown that Luke-Acts “reflects what could well have been the life of the Antioch church. It may have arisen within that church. Luke-Acts could have been written to the Antiochene church. Its links with Paul’s letters could suggest a Roman provenance.”

Lundbom, following J. Jeremias, noted that Luke 22:20 most likely depends on 1 Cor 11:25 where Paul’s reference to tradition concerning the Lord’s Supper perhaps reflects usage in the church at Antioch.

M. Dods pointed out in reference to Antioch as the possible location of the recipients that “certainly they required some such exposition as is given in the Epistle, of the relation of Judaism to Christianity.” F. Rendall, among many others, has suggested Antioch as a likely destination for Hebrews, noting that there alone existed flourishing Christian Churches, founded by the earliest missionaries of the Gospel, animated with Jewish sympathies, full of interest in the Mosaic worship, and glorying in the name of Hebrews; who nevertheless spoke the Greek language, used the Greek version of the Scriptures and numbered amongst their members converts who had, like the author, combined the highest advantages of Greek culture with careful study of the Old Testament and especially of the sacrificial Law.

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238 F. Rendall, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Macmillan, 1888), 69. H. MacNeill (*Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 16) said that “there is nothing incongruous in supposing the church at Antioch to be the recipient of the letter.” E. R. Perdelwitz viewed
Acts 11:26 speaks of the disciples being first called “Christians” at Antioch. This disparaging epithet was used by the pagans because it was in Antioch that members of the early Christian church first stood out from Judaism as a distinct sect. Additionally, there is “no mention of hostility from synagogue authorities in Antioch.” W. R. Farmer argued that the decisive break between Jews and Christians in Antioch occurred as a result of the Jewish War (AD 66-70). Even if Farmer’s thesis can be sustained, Jewish influence on the Christian church in Antioch continued until the seventh century. The statements made in Hebrews concerning the circumstances of the readers can be correlated with such a scenario.

Concerning the title that appears at the beginning of the book, “To the Hebrews,” we know it was not a part of the original text but was a later addition. It is usually interpreted to mean that the copyists, either because of content or tradition, considered the epistle to have been addressed to Jewish Christians. The fact that the term in early Christianity referred to “ritually strict Jewish believers . . . with a deep attachment to the ceremonial laws and to the Jerusalem temple” certainly would fit the situation of converted priests. The title has also often been viewed as indicating that recipients were located in or near the land of Israel.

Hebrews as written to Rome and Antioch (“Das literarische Problem des Hebräerbriefes,” ZNW [1910]: 59, 105).

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239 Haenchen, Acts, 312; Meeks and Wilkin, Jews and Christians in Antioch, 16.
240 Meeks and Wilkin, Jews and Christians in Antioch, 18.
242 Meeks and Wilkin, Jews and Christians in Antioch, 18.
244 Ellis (Ibid., 288) believed it was addressed to “various congregations” of strict Jewish Christians in Palestine. In light of recent studies in Hellenistic/Diaspora Judaism and Palestinian Judaism, the case for a Palestinian destination is strengthened.
Whether the author himself was a member of the church being addressed cannot be ascertained with any degree of certainty. Likewise, Lindars’ supposition that the author was a member of the church, detained in another location, who had been asked by church leadership to intervene in a difficult situation involving a smaller group within the larger church, is pure speculation. Nothing in the epistle allows one to draw such a conclusion with any reasonable amount of certainty.

(4) Date of Hebrews

Like everything else surrounding the background of this epistle, the date is also unclear. Neither the internal evidence of the text nor the external historical data provide enough information for a dogmatic commitment to any of the theories that have been propounded. Until recently, the terminus ad quem was said to be AD 96 since Hebrews is quoted by Clement of Rome in his epistle to the Corinthians, which is traditionally dated AD 96. However, both Clement’s use of Hebrews as well as the traditional date for his epistle has been questioned. Attridge is probably correct in his assertion that the wording that appears in 1 Clement is a “sure sign of dependence on Hebrews,” but the traditional date for Clement’s epistle is now considered suspect by many and cannot be used as a firm peg for the terminus ad quem for Hebrews. Given the internal evidence

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245 Lindars, Theology of Hebrews, 8.
246 Attridge, Hebrews, 7.
247 See the discussion in Attridge, Hebrews, 6–9; Lane, Hebrews 1–8, lxii–lxvi; Lane, “Social Perspectives on Roman Christianity during the Formative Years from Nero to Nerva: Romans, Hebrews, 1 Clement,” in Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome, eds. K. P. Donfried and P. Richardson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 196–244; and Ellingworth, Hebrews, 29–33. The question of the dating of 1 Clement was reopened by L. L. Welborn, “On the Date of First Clement,” BR 24 (1984): 34–54.
of Hebrews itself coupled with the external historical data, it can be suggested that the
date of Hebrews fits within a range of AD 60-100.\textsuperscript{248}

There have been three major views relative to the dating of Hebrews: two prior to
the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (pre-64 and 67-69) and the third toward the end of
the reign of Domitian (died AD 96). These views are dependent on five primary matters:
(1) the supposed author (if Paul, then a date after AD 67 is impossible); (2) the location
of the recipients; (3) the interpretation of the internal evidence; (4) the correlation of
these with external historical data (e.g., if a Roman destination is assumed, was the
persecution mentioned in the epistle during the reign of Nero or Domitian?); and (5)
theological factors.\textsuperscript{249}

A recent proposal of the post-AD 70 date by E. B. Aitken conjectures that the
epistle was written in Rome during the aftermath of the temple’s destruction and the

\textsuperscript{248} Ibid., 9. P. Eisenbaum (“Locating Hebrews Within the Literary Landscape of Christian
Hebrews in the early second century AD based on three things: (1) her interpretation of
Heb 2:3 as placing distance between Jesus and the current readers; (2) her suggestion that
the author of Hebrews is aware of other early Christian writings, including one or more
written gospels; and (3) the supposed affinity of Hebrews to second-century writings. Her
statement that “there is virtually no evidence tying Hebrews to the first century” (216) is
certainly over the top.

\textsuperscript{249} There is no need to go into all the arguments pro and con on these various views since
they are amply stated in the relevant literature. In addition to works listed previously in
footnotes above, see also Robinson (\textit{Redating the New Testament}, 200–220) and Guthrie
14 and the Dating of the Epistle,” \textit{TynBul} 45 [1994]: 39–71) is an incisive argument for
the pre-AD 70 date. In that same year, S. Porter’s article (“The Date of the Composition
of Hebrews and Use of Present Tense-Form,” \textit{Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical
Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder}, ed. S. Porter, P. Joyce, and D. Orton
[Leiden: Brill, 1994], 295–313) is from a linguistic perspective on the use and misuse of
the present tense in Hebrews and must be heeded by all who prefer a pre-AD 70 date.
Flavian triumph. This proposal received salient critique by Mitchell, who nonetheless argued for a post-AD 70 date, relying heavily on the epistle’s “christological tradition of the Roman churches as articulated in the Gospel of Mark.” D. Georgi sought to locate Hebrews during the reign of Domitian, “putting behind him [the author] the experience of Jewish and ‘Christian’ martyrdoms, at a time when the question of whether church and synagogue should separate was still undecided.” Those who favor a post-AD 70 date appeal to the supposed second-generation status of the readers coupled with the absence of any reference to the temple, among other arguments.

The evidence for a pre-AD 70 date appears to me to be the stronger. Although all would be well advised to heed the sound counsel of Porter on the use and possible misuse of the present tense in reference to the temple cultus in Hebrews as an argument for a pre-70 date, the single most important argument for an earlier date for Hebrews is the deafening silence in reference to the fall of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70. While related, the use of the present tense and the lack of any reference to the destruction of Jerusalem are two separate matters. Porter may be correct in his thorough analysis of the data regarding the use of the present tense. However, the issue of the author’s silence regarding the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple is another (although related) matter. Those who would date Hebrews after AD 70 face the formidable task of

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251 A. Mitchell, Hebrews, 8–11.
253 Porter, “The Date of the Composition of Hebrews,” 295–313. Porter correctly noted the inappropriateness of equating time and tense as is common in older Greek grammars.
explaining its silence on such a momentous event. How could the author, despite its immediacy, have failed to use the only absolutely irrefutable argument in his attempt to show the passing nature of the temple cultus and the Levitical system? Barton summarized the problem:

If the temple at Jerusalem had been destroyed decades before, as the hypotheses under consideration suppose, the fact would have been well known, and the employment of language which implied that its cult was still going on would have made the Epistle ridiculous in the eyes of its first readers. To refuse to be guided by this, the most tangible and definite of all the clues which exist for determining the date of Hebrews, is to throw away the key to the problem and open the door to fruitless speculation and confusion.  

The author of Hebrews’ reference to the continual offering of the Levitical sacrifices indicates the readers’ inability to deal with the sin problem permanently, and then the author stated, “If it could, would they not have stopped being offered?” (Heb 10:2). Koester perceptively noted that the question expects the readers to agree with the author, which would have been difficult on their part at any point after AD 70 since the temple no longer existed. However, Koester rightly also noted that the lack of a specific reference to the temple in the epistle “makes this argument less than decisive.”

Thus, the use of the present tense alone cannot be used for establishing the date of Hebrews.


255 Koester, _Hebrews_, 53. On Heb 10:2 (along with Heb 8:4) as evidence for a pre-AD 70 date, see the points made by R. Gordon (_Hebrews_, 31–33). With reference to Heb 10:2 he
Robinson is surely right when he pointed out that although the argument from silence proves nothing, it creates in the case of Hebrews a very strong presumption that places the burden of proof on those who argue for a post-70 date.\textsuperscript{256}

P. Walker furnished additional evidence for a pre-AD 70 date. He suggested that such a date is indicated not only by the author’s reference to the temple, but by his treatment of the earthly Jerusalem and its significance. He argued that the key clue for dating the epistle is the issue of the Jerusalem temple. Was it still standing at the time Hebrews was written? The author’s comments in 8:13; 10:37–39; 12:26–27, and 13:14 would seem to indicate so. Walker accepted the use of the present tense verbs at their face value and viewed this as evidence for a pre-70 date, but his article is not a rehashing of the arguments based on the use of the present tense.\textsuperscript{257}

A. Nairne argued for a date shortly before AD 70. With the outbreak of the Jewish war, there may well have been a wave of patriotic nationalism that swept over Palestine and diaspora Judaism. This would have been a temptation to Christian Jews to revert to Judaism and the stability of the Jewish cultus.\textsuperscript{258} Moule agreed with Nairne’s assessment of the date and circumstances of the epistle:

\begin{quote}
noted, “The wording may at the least be considered injudicious if the verse was actually written at the time when the offering of sacrifices in Jerusalem had ceased” (32).
\end{quote}
\textsuperscript{256} Robinson, \textit{Redating}, 205. Also Witherington, \textit{Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians}, 27–28, who supports the pre-70 AD date due to the author’s silence on the fall of Jerusalem: “With a writer as rhetorically astute as this author, the deafening silences are very telling about the date of writing.”
\textsuperscript{258} Nairne, \textit{Epistle to the Hebrews}, lxxv–lxxvii.
At such a time it is not only a fear of persecution and of being called traitors but also the human yearning for the ordered stability of an ancient system, with objective, tangible symbols, that will drive men back from the bold pioneering demanded by the Christian faith to the well-worn paths of the older way. It is to exactly such a temptation that the Epistle speaks, and it is thus, I think, that it becomes clearly intelligible.²⁵⁹

Nairne suggested that a date for Hebrews during the time of the Jewish war explains the language used in the epistle concerning the second coming of Christ. “Like the Gospel of S. Luke this Epistle found in those fearful days an interpretation of the ‘coming.’”²⁶⁰

A further argument in favor of a date in the decade of the 60’s can be adduced from the way Hebrews suggests that the tithe belongs to the priest (7:5). The argument that the tithe belonged to the priests and not to all the sons of Levi (Levites) was apparently hotly debated at this time. Josephus explained that the high-priestly families during the reign of Felix (c. AD 52-60) and Albinus (c. AD 62-64) abused this practice, thus raising the ire of the Levites since their claim to share in the tithes went unnoticed.²⁶¹

In AD 62 the Levites demanded recognition over against the priests in this matter as recorded by Josephus.²⁶² Horbury stated that the method of the author of Hebrews in discussing these matters places this book within the historical debates that occurred during the period of the First Jewish Revolt (AD 66-70) and thus furnishes another argument in favor of a date around AD 67.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Nairne, Epistle to the Hebrews, 30. Grelot (lecture de l'épitre aux Hébreux, 11, 103, 190–91) argued the most probable date of writing was AD 67, written from Italy.
²⁶² Ibid., 20.216–18;
Judaism, one must ask whether what we find in Hebrews suggests a time when the process of separation between the two had become all but complete or whether a time earlier in the process is best indicated. Hebrews is not a polemical attempt to legitimize the separation of Christianity from Judaism. Furthermore, it is clear that the separation certainly did not occur in the first century. Hebrews is keenly interested in the relationship of Christianity to Judaism. In fact, the author is attempting to negotiate the thorny question of how Christianity is rooted in biblical Judaism, while being at the same time distinct from it. Anderson suggested that the “assumptions” concerning the people and the law in Hebrews locate it at an “early stage of the process” of disengagement.

The evidence from the historical circumstances as well as the text itself support a date before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, possibly around AD 67. The reference to Luke in 2 Tim 4:11, the reference to “those from Italy” in Heb 13:24, and the combined references to Timothy both in 2 Timothy and Hebrews 13 can be easily and best explained by such a date.

The theory of Lukan authorship combined with a Roman provenance leads to the conclusion that the date that fits most of the internal and external data is around AD 67-68. As a member of the Pauline circle, it is highly unlikely that Luke could have written as late as the last decade of the first century. If the traditions surrounding his death are

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264 R. Hann, “Judaism and Jewish Christianity in Antioch: Charisma and Conflict in the First Century,” JRH 14 (1987), 348, stated: “The relationship of Christianity to Judaism was an issue throughout the first century. Throughout the conflicts of the period, opposing groups accused each other of being excessively, or insufficiently, attached to the Jewish legal tradition.”
accurate, then he would have died around the middle of the decade of the eighties. This writer accepts the traditional understanding of the scriptural evidence which indicates that Luke was a member of the Pauline circle and a traveling companion with the apostle Paul. Since Luke is mentioned in 2 Timothy near the time of Paul’s death, it is reasonable to assume that he was there when Paul died. Pauline scholarship would not date Paul’s death later than AD 67.

(5) Conclusion: Summary Proposal of Authorship, Recipients, Destination, and Date

Luke served as Paul’s amanuensis for the Pastoral Epistles, which were written from Rome during Paul’s second Roman imprisonment. Due to the nature of Paul’s imprisonment, Luke was given greater latitude in the construction of the epistles, hence the stylistic similarities to Luke-Acts are explained. Luke remained in Rome after Paul’s death where he wrote the epistle to the Hebrews around AD 67-68. Hebrews 13:24 is best interpreted as “those who are with me in Italy.” This interpretation was the unanimous opinion of the patristics, even when Pauline authorship was denied.

The recipients of Hebrews were former priests who had converted to Christianity and had relocated to Syrian Antioch where they were a part of the church. Acts 6:7 informs us that “a great company of the priests became obedient to the faith.” No more is said about them in Acts or the rest of the New Testament. Based on the audience profile of Hebrews, several reasons were given substantiating the claim that these former priests would fit the audience well. Their location in the Antiochene church is a reasonable conjecture given its importance in the early history of the church, Luke and Paul’s

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266 This date was also advocated by Spicq (L’epître aux Hébreux, 1:257–61) and Robinson (Dating, 215) among many others. See Lindars (Theology of Hebrews, 19–21)
connection with it, and what we know about it from Acts. The fact that Antioch was a mixed congregation of Jews and Gentiles and the fact that Antioch had a large and influential Jewish population could create the kind of social/theological matrix that Hebrews addresses.

3. The Purpose of Hebrews

Attempting to answer the question of the author’s purpose in writing has produced several theories. These generally revolve around doctrinal and pastoral poles. Those who suppose a Gentile readership usually argue that the author’s purpose was to assure them of the superiority of Christianity. Relatively, many notice the repetition of the adverb “better,” which occurs several times in the book and contrasts Jesus with some aspect of Judaism. This suggests that the purpose is to establish the superiority of the gospel to Judaism. This approach takes the purpose to be primarily doctrinal in nature.

For example, R. Saucy, writing from a progressive dispensational perspective, suggested that the finality of Christ with respect to the transitory nature of the Levitical system is the key for the author.

Historically, the most common purpose advocated suggests the author is attempting to dissuade his Jewish Christian readers from a relapse into Judaism brought who felt that a date later than AD 65-70 is not warranted by the evidence.

267 These are summarized well by D. Guthrie, Introduction (703–10), R. Johnson (Going Outside the Camp, 18–20), and M. J. Marohl (Faithfulness and the Purpose of Hebrews, 40–56).

268 A. B. Bruce’s The Epistle to the Hebrews: The First Apology for Christianity (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1899) is a classic defense of this position as illustrated by the title. Moffatt (Hebrews, xxiv–xxvi) argued for a Gentile audience as well; cf. Isaacs, Sacred Space, 23.
on by increasing persecution and a desire for the stability of the old faith.\textsuperscript{270} This basic
view, with various modifications, was argued by Spicq, F. F. Bruce, Ellingworth, Dunnill, Lehne, and many others.\textsuperscript{271} A theory that has also garnered significant support is W. Manson’s thesis that has been adopted with certain qualifications by Lane, Lindars, and Hurst.\textsuperscript{272} Manson found parallels between the theology of Hebrews and Stephen’s speech in Acts 7. He conjectured that the recipients were a minority within the church who were living too much on the Jewish side of their faith and neglecting the world mission of Christianity.\textsuperscript{273} Jewett interpreted the epistle to be combating a Gnostic

\textsuperscript{269} R. Saucy, \textit{The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism}, [need full info?] 56.
\textsuperscript{270} This theory has lost significant ground in recent years; see the critique by J. Dahms, “The First Readers of Hebrews,” \textit{JETS} 20 (1977): 365–75.
\textsuperscript{271} For the specific nuances of this view laid out in chart form for easy access, including proposals as to the crisis facing the readers and the author’s response, see R. Johnson, \textit{Going Outside the Camp}, 18–19.
\textsuperscript{272} W. Manson, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Historical and Theological Reconsideration} (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1951). Cf. L. Hurst, \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background and Thought}; and Lindars, \textit{The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews} (Cambridge: University Press, 1991), 8–15. Lindars argued that the key text for identifying the crisis that precipitated the writing of Hebrews is 13:7–16: “The whole point at issue is a felt need on the part of the readers to resort to Jewish customs in order to come to terms with their sense of sin against God and need for atonement” (p. 10). The readers of Hebrews had lost confidence in the continuing efficacy of Christ’s death to deal with their consciousness of sin. They had turned to the Jewish community, which made provision for ongoing sin through the sacrificial system, thus causing friction and division in the church. Lindars’ reconstruction is unlikely, although it would fit the theory that the recipients were former Jewish priests quite well. But the book of Hebrews never draws a contrast between Jews and Gentiles.
\textsuperscript{273} Manson, \textit{Hebrews}, 24, 160. Thiselton’s (“Hebrews,” 1452) comment on Manson’s view revealed the importance of Hebrews for many contemporary churches: “the crisis of the community, which may regularly apply today, is that the Christian group has lost its vision of the universal significance of Jesus Christ for world mission. In place of boldness, pilgrimage, and self-discipline, they have relapsed into a cozy, protective mindset of ‘maintenance’ at the expense of mission. They have tamed and domesticated the gospel into a ‘safe religion.’”
heresy. Schmidt perceived the main problem of the readers to be “moral lethargy,” which the writer challenged in his persistent warnings and exhortations to press on.

Van Unnik identified the purpose of Hebrews to be primarily pastoral, similar to that of Luke-Acts. He explored a number of parallels between the prologues of Luke-Acts, and Heb 2:3–4 and concluded that the Hebrews passage furnishes the clue to understanding the Lukan purpose (at least for Acts).

These words in the second half of this passage of the Epistle to the Hebrews may fittingly be used as a heading of Luke’s second volume. I am firmly convinced that here we have found the scope of Acts, the angle under which we must see it to find the right perspective, or you may say: the hidden thread holding together the string of pearls.

Hebrews 2:3–4 thus becomes an excellent explanation for the link between Luke’s Gospel and Acts. Van Unnik concluded that it was certainly possible for the Lukan purpose to be similar to that of Hebrews: challenge believers to go on to maturity and not to waver in their faith.

Van Unnik’s conclusions as to the similar notion of “witness” in Luke-Acts and Hebrews were confirmed by A. Trites who stated, “The idea of witness appears a number

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274 Jewett conjectured the epistle was written by Epaphras and sent to the churches of the Lycus valley at about the same time as Colossians (Letter to Pilgrims: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews [New York: Pilgrim, 1981], 5-13. On the problem of Gnosticism and Hebrews, Jewett was preceded by F. D. V. Narborough, The Epistle to the Hebrews (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930), and T. W. Manson (“The Problem of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” BJRL 32 [1949-50]: 1–17): who argued for Apollos as the author.

275 T. E. Schmidt, “Moral Lethargy and the Epistle to the Hebrews,” WJT 54.1 (1992): 167–73. This view fails to recognize the reality of persecution and suffering that the readers clearly faced as well as failing to account for passages such as Heb 12:4–11.

of times in the Epistle to the Hebrews, a fact suggested by the use of words drawn from
the vocabulary of witness . . . and the idea of witness is very similar to that which is
unfolded in greater detail in the Book of Acts.”

He then added, “For the writer of
Hebrews, as for Luke, the truth of one kind of testimony required confirmation by
another, in this case, by the testimony of the scriptures.”

After pointing out that
Hebrews speaks of the Jewish law of evidence, signs and wonders functioning as
confirmatory testimony, and the testimony of God himself through the scriptures, Trites
noted that “in all these ways it [Hebrews] deserves to be compared to the Book of Acts,
where the same themes are developed and expanded.”

B. Lindars called attention to the structural emphasis of pastoral concern that is so
prominent in vital sections of Hebrews where the writer seeks to reassure the readers of
the concern of Jesus their High Priest. Such passages suggest, according to Lindars, that
the readers are deeply troubled by their sense of sin.

This apparent self-consciousness
of sin is a key factor in Lindar’s assessment of the theology and purpose of Hebrews.

The key to the crisis, which precipitated the writing, can be found in 13:7–16. The author
warned against “strange teachings” and unprofitable “foods” (v. 9). What is meant has to
be deduced from the substance of the whole letter, and the contrast in v. 10 is helpful:
“we have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.”

Those who serve the tent are clearly the Levitical priests, as described in chap. 9. This

278 Ibid., 218.
279 Ibid., 221.
280 Lindars, Theology, 25.
281 Ibid., 8–15.
suggests that the strange teachings are the details of atonement sacrifice that were established there. If so, the whole point at issue is a felt need on the part of the readers to resort to Jewish customs in order to come to terms with their sense of sin against God and their need for atonement. Thus the central argument of the letter is precisely a compelling case for the complete and abiding efficacy of Jesus’ death as an atoning sacrifice.\(^{282}\)

The readers were neglecting meeting with the church (10:25) and were instead reverting to synagogue worship in order to feel the benefit of the sacrificial system. The reason for this was their own consciousness of sin (9:9,14; 10:2). Since atonement for sin is “constantly attended to in Jewish liturgy, their return to the Jewish community offered a practical way of coping with their need.”\(^{283}\) The purpose of Hebrews was to explain to the readers how Christ’s sacrifice not only dealt with their past life but also their present and future sins. Reversion to the Jewish sacrificial system as a means of dealing with their present consciousness of sin is not the answer according to the author of Hebrews.\(^{284}\)

Lindar’s theory founders on his suggestion that early Christian teaching did not make plain the fact that post-baptismal sins are also covered by Christ’s death. The preaching of Peter and Paul in Acts along with the Pauline Epistles would seem to contradict this aspect of Lindar’s theory. If his assessment of the recipients’ need is accurate, the problem must lie in their spiritual immaturity and thus their failure to receive spiritual truth according to 5:11–6:3 and not in the early church’s lack of theological clarity regarding the application of the atonement to sin in the life of a

\(^{282}\) Ibid., 10.
\(^{283}\) Ibid., 14.
Christian. Yet if the recipients were converted priests, it may have been the case that something like what Lindars suggests played a role as to the need of the recipients of Hebrews. If any group within the early church would have been in danger of what Lindars suggested, certainly converted priests would have to be at the top of the list.

Lindars’ suggestion has the advantage of merging the doctrinal heart of the epistle with the hortatory sections combined with the practical exhortations of chap. 13 into a unified whole.

Whatever the crisis facing the readers, it is clear that the author viewed them as Christians, most likely Jewish Christians, and he alternatively warned and encouraged them to press on to maturity in the faith. A determination of purpose must take into account that the epistle is primarily pastoral in nature and only secondarily doctrinal. The author makes use of exhortations and warnings, with the expositional portions of the epistle serving as the grounds for these exhortation and warnings. It is the hortatory sections of the epistle that should be considered most diagnostic of purpose. Thus, the necessity of pressing on to maturity in the midst of difficulty (6:1–3) by means of drawing near, holding fast, and stirring one another up to love and good works (10:19–25) would appear to serve as a viable statement of purpose. Lane’s assessment would appear to be correct:

So using a number of effective pastoral strategies, he balanced instruction, exhortation, reminder, encouragement, and warning—alternating confrontation

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284 Ibid., 12–14.
285 See the discussion on structure below.
with affirmation—to stabilize the community and to move them beyond a lack of nerve to a fresh commitment to Christ and the gospel. \(^{286}\)

4. The Theology of Hebrews

Space limitations prohibit a thorough discussion of the theology of Hebrews here. In this commentary, I address the theological implications in summary fashion, usually at the end of each section treated. In addition to the many monographs that cover some aspect of the theology of the epistle, the critical commentaries and New Testament theologies provide a good overview of this subject. \(^{287}\) It is now generally recognized that although Hebrews is a profound theological document from the first century, it is not a theological treatise per se. \(^{288}\) Hebrews is a sermon with pastoral intent. Theology is employed in service to the church. Ultimately, for the author of Hebrews, truth is unto holiness.

A. Mitchell, a recent Catholic commentator on Hebrews, spoke to the issue of the Roman church’s attempts from the Council of Trent to Vatican II to base the priesthood

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of bishops and priests on the eternal high priesthood of Christ. He judiciously called attention to the lack of references in the epistle to the eucharist or to any ministerial priesthood.\textsuperscript{289}

On the issue of Hebrews and anti-Semitism or replacement theology,\textsuperscript{290} only a brief word is necessary at this point. It has not been demonstrated that the author of Hebrews is guilty of anti-Semitism. There is no anti-Judaic polemic in the epistle. Hebrews does not address the issue of Jew/Gentile relationships. In fact, as Williamson correctly stated: “‘Anti-Semitism’ has no relevance whatsoever to the historical situation of Hebrews.”\textsuperscript{291} With respect to replacement theology or supersessionism, one will not find in Hebrews any notion that the Jewish people have been replaced by any other group, including the church. However, and this is crucial, it is clear there is a form of supersessionism in Hebrews. It is vital that this notion be defined properly. In Heb 8:13 the old covenant is clearly superseded by the new. However, this point is made by the author in his appeal to the Old Testament Scriptures themselves, namely Jer 31:31–33, which predict this very thing. The author of Hebrews is clearly arguing that Jesus has inaugurated the new covenant in fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy. This point is discussed at greater length in my comments on Heb 8:8–13. The clear teaching of Hebrews on this matter renders the following comment by Williamson inexplicable:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{288} See L. Hurtado, \textit{Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 498.
  \item \textsuperscript{289} A. Mitchell, \textit{Hebrews}, 24–25.
  \item \textsuperscript{290} See the helpful summary of recent work on this subject in C. Williamson, “Anti-Judaism in Hebrews?” \textit{Int} (July 2003): 266–79. Also B. Horner, \textit{Future Israel}, NACSBT (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007).
\end{itemize}
Each covenant has its ongoing dilemmas with God’s love and justice. But it is not as clear today as it was to the author of Hebrews that the new covenant is any less weak than the old in producing perfection or any more gracious in its attitude toward sinners. Nor does Hebrews make, finally, a convincing case that this new covenant, therefore, displaces the old, even if that displacement is limited only to cultic matters.292

5. The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews

One of the most intriguing areas of research on Hebrews concerns the author’s use of the Old Testament.293 In addition to approximately 38 quotations in Hebrews, there are many allusions—perhaps as many as 55—and echoes of Old Testament passages.294 There are 11 quotations from the Pentateuch and only one from the historical books. There is one quotation from Proverbs and seven from the prophetic books, with three

292 Williamson, “Anti-Judaism in Hebrews?” 279. Such a comment illustrates a low view of Biblical authority coupled with a theological agenda driven by political correctness.


294 Scholars differ on the actual number of quotations. See R. Longenecker, Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 164–70; and Lane, Hebrews 1–8, cxvi.
from Jer 31:31–34. Most striking is that the author quotes from the Psalms 18 times. A good case can be made for understanding Ps 110:1,4 as the key text that the author interpreted in the epistle. G. B. Caird’s ground-breaking work identified four key Old Testament passages as the work’s core quotations: Psalms 8; 95; 110; and Jeremiah 31.

Another important point to note is the author’s exclusive use of the LXX over against the Hebrew text. This has often been used in the past to suggest that the author and/or his readers did not know Hebrew, that the recipients were Hellenistic Jews rather than Palestinian Jews, or that the author was writing to a Gentile audience. None of these conclusions is warranted by the author’s exclusive use of the LXX. We now know that the LXX was used regularly even by Palestinian Jews in the first century. The intricate use and play on words from the Old Testament that the author used in his argument coupled with the sustained appeal to the Old Testament Scriptures and sacrificial system of the Old Testament make it highly unlikely that the recipients were non-Jews. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that the author made use of rabbinical exegetical techniques found in the midrashim.

The author’s midrashic approach and his reverence for the Scripture can be seen in his treatment of Ps 110:4 in Heb 7:1–25. Throughout this passage he never refers to Jesus as “high priest” but always as “priest,” even though he is speaking of the high priesthood of Jesus. Why does he do this? Most likely he does so because the LXX text

295 S. Kistemaker’s The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Amsterdam: van Soerst, 1961) is an indispensable study on this topic.
297 For examples of rabbinic interpretive methodology in Hebrews, see Lane, Hebrews 1–8, cxix–cxxiv.
of Ps 110:4 says “You are a priest” rather than “You are a high priest.” When he concluded his commentary on Ps 110:4, he returned to the title “high priest” for Jesus in Heb 7:25–28. In 7:26 the author returned to the first person plural that he had last used in 6:20. Outside 7:1–25, the author only refers to Jesus as “priest” once (10:21), and there he employed the adjective “great,” which is a normal LXX expression designating the high priest.298 Such careful following of the language of the LXX illustrates the author’s reverence for written Scripture.

One of the distinctive features of the author’s use of the Old Testament is the method of citation. Whereas Paul was fond of using “it is written,” the author of Hebrews avoided this totally and instead used some form of the verb “to speak.” In most cases it is God himself who is identified as the speaker through the psalmist or prophet. Four times quotations are attributed to Jesus and three times to the Holy Spirit. Four times the human authors are mentioned: Moses twice, David once, and the unusual “someone says” in Heb 2:6. In Heb 4:7, the unusual “God saying through David” is used. In addition, the author often used the present tense verb “to say” in quoting the Old Testament, illustrating for his readers and for us the living power of Scripture that is perennially applicable. Also, the author makes no distinction whatsoever between the spoken and the written word of God. Words of human authors are understood by the author to be the very words of God. The author of Hebrews held a very high view of the inspiration of the Old Testament.299

298 J. Kurianal, Jesus Our High Priest: Ps 110,4 as the Substructure of Heb 5,1–7,28 (European University Studies, Series XXIII, Theology, 693; Frankfurt am Main: Bern, 2000), 158.
Only as the people of God hear the Word of God correctly from the Old Testament will they be able to press on to maturity and not drift away and draw back (2:1–4; 6:1–3; 10:22–25; 12:1–2).

For the author of Hebrews, the written Scripture is actually the very words of God spoken personally to the readers. Here propositional revelation is at one and the same time personal as well. This is clearly illustrated in three places in Hebrews 10. In v. 30 the author introduced the quotation of Deut 32:35 with the words, “For we know him who said.” Here the referent is God. In Heb 10:5 the author placed the words of Ps 40:6–8 on the lips of Jesus. Jeremiah 31:33 is quoted in Heb 10:15 with the citation formula, “The Holy Spirit also testifies to us.” This not only illustrates the author’s Trinitarian understanding of divine inspiration when it comes to the Old Testament, but it also signifies the supremely authoritative character of these written scriptures in that they are “spoken” by God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. But even more than this, the author’s use of Scripture in this chapter indicates his willingness to evoke the very authority of God for his own statements to his readers. Stanley wrote that in Heb 9:8 “our author goes beyond merely attributing the words of Scripture to the Holy Spirit, assigning to him at least part of the interpretive process as well. In other words, the Holy Spirit bears witness not only

author of Hebrews sustains his appeal to the audience to listen to the voice of God from Scripture, is very helpful for gaining a concise understanding of the epistle as a whole. For a more detailed analysis of the author’s hermeneutical method, see the groundbreaking work by G. Hughes, Hebrews and Hermeneutics: The Epistle to the Hebrews as an Example of Biblical Interpretation, in SNTSMS 32 (Cambridge: University Press, 1979).
through the words of Scripture, but through the logical implications drawn from Scripture as well.”

Eisenbaum has noticed a feature of the author’s quotations of the Old Testament that has often been missed: most of them are quotations of direct speech from the Old Testament rather than from narrative texts. The quotations contain “either the literal words of God (although often a character such as Moses is the actual speaker), the oracular utterings of the prophets, or the musings of the psalmist. Given the hermeneutical presuppositions of the time, we can safely assume that, for the author of Hebrews, these are all instances of divine utterance.” This provides evidence of the author’s own understanding of Scripture as God’s speech and of his interest in helping his readers to understand that Scripture is God speaking directly to them in their current situation.

In Heb 13:5–6 the author introduced a quotation from Deut 31:6 with the words “because God has said.” He then introduces a quotation of Ps 118:6–7 with the words “So we say with confidence.” This latter quotation is striking in that here the author did not refer to Scripture as being spoken by God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, any human author, or “Scripture says.” Instead both the author and readers are the ones speaking Scripture, though clearly not in the sense of its originating source. That the author can introduce a Scripture quotation in this way shows the normative claim on both author and readers that

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301 P. Eisenbaum, The Jewish Heroes of Christian History: Hebrews 11 in Literary Context, SBLDS 156, ed. P. Perkins (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 92. Eisenbaum also noted that “the hermeneutical distinction that motivates our author to quote directly in
the Scriptures make in their current lives. Such usage also implies the author’s desire to teach his readers that they are not in need of extra-biblical revelation to meet the trials and challenges of daily life; the written Scripture, which constitutes the very speech of God addressing them in the present time, is sufficient. In answer to the question “Does God still speak today?” our author would reply: “Yes indeed; he speaks in his written word, which is simultaneously the word of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.” The trajectory for understanding Scripture in this fashion was begun in the prologue when the author identified Jesus, the Logos, as God’s “speech.”

6. Hebrews and Textual Criticism

For the ministering Bible student who does not have the time to delve deeply into the various text critical issues in Hebrews, Trotter’s table of the important textual variants is unsurpassed.\(^{302}\) One should also consult B. Metzger’s *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*,\(^ {303}\) in addition to the exegetical commentaries that deal with these matters in more detail. This commentary only deals with the most important text critical issues that significantly affect interpretation.

7. The Outline and Structure of Hebrews

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\(^{302}\) Trotter, *Interpreting Hebrews*, 95–110. Also helpful is his listing of books on textual criticism to aid in the study of Hebrews (111–13).

\(^{303}\) *TCGNT*, 591–607.
In the same way that background questions for Hebrews have engendered diverse proposals, the outline and structure of the epistle are no different. Space considerations prohibit a thorough investigation of this subject. The best summary and evaluation of the various analyses of the structure of Hebrews are in C. Westfall’s *Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews* (previously cited).\(^{304}\) Older commentators tended to organize Hebrews according to thematic content with little regard for the hortatory sections of the epistle. A traditional topical approach is to divide the epistle into two major sections: doctrinal (usually concluding at either 10:18 or 10:39) and practical (11:1–13:25).\(^{305}\) A second approach, begun principally with the work of the Jesuit scholar A. Vanhoye, attempts to analyze the epistle more as an entire discourse using linguistic principles and discourse analysis.\(^{306}\) He divided the epistle into five major sections arranged

\[^{304}\text{In addition to C. Westfall, see the surveys in Guthrie, *Structure*, 3–20; Lane, *Hebrews* 1–8, lxxxiv–xcviii; and Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 50–58.}\]


concentrically around the theme of Christ’s priesthood. Nauck’s tripartite division of Hebrews (1:1–4:13; 4:14–10:31; 10:32–13:17) has been very influential among scholars.307 A third approach to the structure of the epistle follows the perspective of rhetorical criticism. Early practitioners include K. Nissilä and W. Übelacker.308 Both suggested Hebrews is an example of deliberative or exhortatory rhetoric. Others take it as an example of epideictic or instructive rhetoric.309

Koester, for example, suggested the following outline, based on classical rhetorical categories.

I. Exordium (1:1–2:4)

II. Proposition (2:5–9)

III. Arguments (2:10–12:27)

A. First Series (2:10–6:20)

1. Argument: Jesus received glory through faithful suffering—a way that others are called to follow (2:10–5:10)

2. Transitional Digression: Warning and Encouragement (5:11–6:20)

explains the “anomaly” of the conceptual and verbal patterns in the epistle that do not mesh together well in Bligh’s assessment.


B. Second Series (7:1–10:39)

1. Argument: Jesus’ suffering is the sacrifice that enables others to approach God (7:1–10:25)

2. Transitional Digression: Warning and Encouragement (10:26–39)

C. Third Series (11:1–12:27)

1. Argument: God’s people persevere through suffering to glory by faith (11:1–12:24)


IV. Peroration (12:28–13:21)

V. Epistolary Postscript (13:22–25)\(^{310}\)

In the latter half of the twentieth century, scholars began to take note of the significance of the hortatory sections of Hebrews in the overall structure (e.g., 2:1–4; 4:11, 14–16; 10:19–25). O. Michel concluded that the most salient sections of Hebrews must be the hortatory passages.\(^{311}\) This insight opened the door for a significant advance in the understanding of the structure of the epistle. Kümmel concurred and said the

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\(^{311}\) O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, KEK (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 27.
hortatory passages function as the goal and purpose of the entire discourse. F. F. Bruce agreed with this assessment and argued that the climax of Hebrews is in 10:19–25: “The preceding argument leads up, stage by stage, to this exhortation, and what comes after reinforces it.” The text itself bears out this analysis, for in 13:22 the author speaks of his text as “a word of exhortation.” The imperatives and hortatory subjunctives in the epistle should be ranked at the highest thematic level.

Building on these insights, L. L. Neeley, G. Guthrie, and C. Westfall have furthered the quest for the structure of Hebrews from the perspective of discourse analysis. One of the most significant studies on the structure of Hebrews is L. L. Neeley’s “A Discourse Analysis of Hebrews.” Neeley applied the discourse theory of her mentor Robert Longacre to Hebrews. She utilized four major systems of information organization in discourse: (1) the combining of sentences into larger units—paragraphs and embedded discourses; (2) constituent structure—how discourse units function in the overall discourse; (3) distinction between backbone and support information; and (4) semantic organization. Neeley concluded that the epistle comprises three major

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316 Neeley, “Discourse Analysis,” 1. One of the strength’s of Neeley’s analysis is her careful attention to the conjunctions that link paragraphs and sections together.
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sections (1:1–4:13; 4:14–10:18; 10:19–13:25) and that Hebrews is structured in an overall chiastic framework: \(^{317}\)

A 1–4:13

B 4:14–6:20

C 7:1–28

C’ 8:1–10:18

B’ 10:19–10:39

A’ 11–13

She took the theme statements from the three major sections and produced the following macrostructure for Hebrews:

1:1–4:13 God has spoken to us in his Son

4:14–10:18 who as our high priest has offered a complete sacrifice for sins and by this obtained salvation for us.

10:19–13:21 Therefore let us draw near to God with a true heart in full assurance of faith in Jesus and the sufficiency of his finished sacrifice; let us hold fast the confession of the hope in him without wavering, and let us consider each other to stir up to love and good works. \(^{318}\)

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\(^{317}\) Neeley wrote, “A special feature of the lexico-semantic unity of Hebrews is a chiastic ordering of major semantic divisions in the discourse as a whole. These divisions, not corresponding exactly with the organization of Hebrews into embedded discourses on different levels of embedding, form another system of organization which is superimposed on the constituent structure and is also distinct from the backbone of the book” (Ibid., 61–62).

\(^{318}\) Ibid., 61.
Building on Vanhoye and Neeley, G. Guthrie primarily analyzed discourse issues of cohesion, inclusio, and transition in Hebrews,\(^{319}\) thus furthering our understanding of the overall structure of the book. His outline attempts to show semantic overlap that occurs between the alternating expository and hortatory genres in the epistle.\(^{320}\) His chiastic framework of 3:1–12:2, however, is highly debatable.\(^{321}\)

C. Westfall’s analysis and outline, based on systemic-functional linguistics, is similar to that of Neeley, especially in her decisions concerning major divisions.\(^{322}\) Her work provides the most thorough analysis from a discourse perspective to date. She correctly noted the pivotal nature of the hortatory subjunctives at 4:14–16 and 10:22–25:

Most of the hortatory subjunctives provide a conclusion to the preceding unit and the point of departure for the subsequent unit. The author often marks the hortatory subjunctive unit as a conclusion with an inferential conjunction, but also expands the sentence with information and introduces the next unit, so that the hortatory subjunctive units look forward and backwards.\(^{323}\)

The following outline attempts to incorporate the insights gleaned from Neeley, Guthrie, and Westfall, but it is closest to Neeley and Westfall.\(^{324}\)

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\(^{320}\) Ibid., 144.

\(^{321}\) Ibid., 136.

\(^{322}\) Westfall, *Discourse Analysis*, 297–301.

\(^{323}\) Ibid., 299.

\(^{324}\) N. Miller, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Analytical and Exegetical Handbook* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1988), is the work of a linguist based on the discourse analysis methods of J. Beekman, J. Callow, and M. Kopesec (*The Semantic Structure of Written Communication* [Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1981]), and her outline of the epistle is found on pp. xvi–xviii. Miller’s goal in this work is to provide “an extensive and in-depth resource book for translators and students” (vi). Her
1:1–4 Introduction God has spoken with finality in Jesus the Son
1:5–4:13 Main Division 1 The superiority of the Son whose atonement impels us to hear and obey God’s Word
1:5–2:18 Section 1 Because Jesus, in his unique identity with God, is superior to angels, and because he is our high priest who made atonement for our sins, we must listen to the truths about Christ and act on them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Section 1</th>
<th>Sub-Section 2</th>
<th>Sub-Section 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:5–14</td>
<td>2:1–4</td>
<td>2:5–18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Son as God is superior to angels as revelation bearer</td>
<td>Do not neglect the great truths about salvation.</td>
<td>Jesus has accomplished atonement for us as our high priest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having considered the faithfulness of the Son, let us also be faithful and obey the word of God so we may enter into rest.</td>
<td>Jesus is superior to Moses</td>
<td>Strive through diligent obedience to enter God’s Rest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:1–6</td>
<td>3:7–19</td>
<td>4:1–13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus is superior to Moses</td>
<td>Beware of unbelief that leads us away from Christ</td>
<td>Since Jesus is our high priest, we should hold fast our confession and go on to spiritual maturity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since Jesus is our high priest, hold fast the confession and draw near to God.</td>
<td>Leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.</td>
<td>Christ’s high priesthood and sacrifice ground our continued efforts to grow spiritually by pressing on to maturity, holding fast the confession, and drawing near to God’s throne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since Jesus is our high priest, hold fast the confession and draw near to God.</td>
<td>Leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.</td>
<td>God’s faithfulness to his promises to and through Christ provides strength to persevere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:11–6:12</td>
<td>6:13–20</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:1–28</td>
<td>7:1–28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christ’s priesthood is Melchizedekian not Levitical.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:1–10:18</td>
<td>8:1–13</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant. The old covenant has been superceded by Him and the new covenant has been inaugurated by Christ’s death.</td>
<td>Jesus as high priest has obtained a heavenly ministry and inaugurated the new covenant.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:1–13</td>
<td>8:1–13</td>
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</table>

work is a valuable tool in examining the underlying semantic structure of Hebrews, especially at the lower levels of discourse meaning.
9:1–14  Section 2  Limitations of the first covenant contrast with Christ’s better covenant.
9:15–28  Section 3  Christ is the mediator of the new covenant of salvation.
10:1–18  Section 4  Jesus’ sacrifice for sin was complete, final, and eternally effective.
10:19–13:21  Main Division 4  Draw near, hold fast your confession, persevere by faith, and show love to one another.
10:19–39  Section 1  Christians must draw near, endure, and love one another rather than sin willfully.
10:19–25  Sub-section 1  Draw near, hold fast, and love one another
10:26–34  Sub-section 2  Do not continue sinning willfully
10:35–39  Sub-section 3  Do not cast away your confidence
11:1–40  Section 2  Christians must live by faith following the example of Old Testament saints.
11:1–2  Sub-section 1  Faith’s necessity in the Christian life
11:3–16  Sub-section 2  Faith sees God’s promises from a distance
11:17–40  Sub-section 3  Faith overcomes all adversity
12:1–29  Section 3  Live the Christian life with endurance; do not lose courage under the Lord’s discipline; serve the Lord with fear.
12:1–3  Sub-section 1  Christians must run the race with endurance
12:4–13  Sub-section 2  Christians must endure God’s discipline
12:14–17  Sub-section 3  Christians must pursue peace and holiness
12:18–24  Sub-section 4  Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion contrasted
12:25–29  Sub-section 5  Obey and serve God with reverence and fear
13:1–21  Section 4  Show love in all things and obey church leaders
13:1–8  Sub-section 1  Continue in love in all aspects of life
13:9–16  Sub-section 2  Continue to offer daily sacrifice of praise
13:17–21  Sub-section 3  Concluding exhortations and benediction
13:22–25  Conclusion and Final Greetings

Semantic analysis furnishes significant evidence of the book’s basic tripartite structure.\textsuperscript{325} This will be presented at the appropriate place in the commentary. Following

\textsuperscript{325} See Nauck (“Hebräerbriefs,” 203–04), which has been followed by many since. L. Neeley and C. Westfall’s in-depth analysis of the discourse structure of Hebrews concluded that the text reveals a clear tripartite structure along the lines of those suggested by Nauck. K. Backhaus, whose literary analysis identified the same tripartite structure, assigned a single word to each section that summarizes how the author is pressing his readers to new spiritual insight: Hear (1:5–4:13), Interpret (4:14–10:18), Act (10:19–13:21); \textit{Der neue Bund und das Werden der Kirche: Die Diatheke-Deutung des Hebräerbiefes im Rahmen der frühchristlichen Theologiegeschichte}, in
a well-crafted prologue (1:1–4), the first major section ends at 4:13. The second major section in the epistle (4:14–10:18) is concerned with Jesus’s priestly office (4.14–7:28) and with his saving work (8:1–10:18). It also contains an extended warning (5:11–6:8) followed by encouragement (6:9–20). The third major section (10:19–13:21) is followed by a formal conclusion in 13:22–25. The three major discourse divisions each have their own function within the discourse. Though section two builds on section one by further developing thematic material introduced there, each of these two sections function semantically to provide the grounds for the final section (10:19–13:21). This third section is actually the major hortatory section of the epistle. It begins with a hortatory paragraph (10:19–25) followed by both warning (10:26–31) and encouragement (10:32–39). This is followed by a lengthy expository section (chap. 11), but with a covert semantic message—“have faith.” Hebrews 12:1 begins with the most pronounced conjunction in the epistle (τοιγαροῦν, “therefore”) and introduces the major hortatory paragraph (12:1–3) that dominates the rest of the epistle. The remainder of chaps. 12 and 13 has numerous command forms (imperatives and hortatory subjunctives in Greek) identifying the majority of these paragraphs as hortatory in nature. This third section of the epistle (10:19–13:21) is best taken semantically as an example of an embedded hortatory discourse unit. It is preceded semantically by two embedded “grounds” units that furnish the basis of the final hortatory unit. Semantically, a hortatory passage has a higher prominence than its co-text that functions as ground or reason; hence, 10:19–13:21 is the

most important information that the author wanted to convey. In the figure below, the word “EXHORTATION” is placed in all capitals and the two “grounds” sections are identified with lower case letters. Embedded within each of these three major discourse units are other smaller units comprised of paragraphs that semantically join to form these larger units.

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326 See J. Beekman, J. Callow, and M. Kopesec, *The Semantic Structure of Written Communication*, 106–7, on the grounds-EXHORTATION relationship. See the chart summary of the relations involving communication units on p. 112. The theory is overviewed on pp. 5–34 and detailed on pp. 35–140. B. Lindars (“The Rhetorical Structure of Hebrews,” 384, 406) correctly noted, against Vanhoye, that the climax of the epistle’s argument is in 10:19–12:29 because the purpose of the epistle is essentially practical.
Once this overall structure is grasped, it becomes much easier to trace the argument of the epistle. For summaries of the argument of Hebrews that are rhetorically informed, Olbricht and deSilva are helpful.327