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# EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

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**Approximate date:** 64-70 C.E.

**Time period:** immediately prior to, or during, the Jewish revolt in the Land of Israel

**Author:** unknown, but often favored to be Barnabas or Apollos (and/or Priscilla)

**Location of author:** the Jewish Diaspora, probably Corinth or Italy

**Target audience and their location:** primarily the Jewish Diaspora, probably Rome, Alexandria, Eastern Mediterranean

**People:**

Timothy

**People mentioned:**

Yeshua the Messiah, Abraham, Moses, David, Joshua, Aaron, Melchizedek, Levi, Abel, Cain, Enoch, Noah, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Esau, Joseph, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, Samuel

**Places:**

Italy

**Places mentioned:**

Egypt, Salem, Tabernacle, Most Holy Place, Jericho, Mount Zion, Jerusalem

**Key Themes:**

superiority of Yeshua the Son over the angels / severe warning to pay attention to the message of Yeshua / participation of Yeshua in the human experience / faithfulness of Yeshua compared to that of Moses / warning to avoid the rebellion of Israel in the wilderness / Sabbath-rest for God's people / high priesthood of Yeshua / moving beyond elementary teachings and understandings of the faith / Yeshua's priesthood compared to priesthood of Melchizedek / Yeshua's priesthood inaugurates the era of the New Covenant / comparison of Earthly Tabernacle and its cultus to the work and present service of Yeshua / permanency of Yeshua's sacrifice compared to the temporality of the animal sacrifices / persecution and endurance of Believers / a call to remember the ancient giants of faith and what they accomplished or endured / persevering through the power of Yeshua / remembering the great company of saints in God's Kingdom / the need to function properly in the Body of Messiah / emulating the example of Yeshua who suffered and died for us

**Key Scriptures:** Hebrews 1:3; 4:12-13; 5:11-13; 6:1-5; 8:7-12; 10:10; 11:3; 12:1-2 /  
**The Superiority of Yeshua and His Present Ministry** (1:1-10:18);  
**Exhortations Based on the Preceding Argument** (10:19-13:17); **Conclusion**  
(13:18-25)<sup>1</sup>

**Theological Summary:** The overwhelming theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews is the superiority of Yeshua's sacrifice and blood atonement, when compared to the previous order of animal sacrifices of the Levitical priesthood. Yeshua's atoning work for sinful humanity is permanent, contrasted to animal sacrifices that at best could only provide a temporary covering for sin (9:26; 10:2). Yeshua's priesthood, typified by that of Melchizedek, has inaugurated the era of the New Covenant (8:6). All Messiah followers are to take great comfort and encouragement that permanent forgiveness from sins is available in the redeeming work of Yeshua, who intercedes before the Father in Heaven (8:1-2).

The Epistle to the Hebrews was known in early Christianity, actually being quoted as early as 95 C.E., demonstrating that it was written before the end of the First Century.<sup>2</sup> There are various parallels and familiarities detectable between the contents of Hebrews, and the Epistle of *1 Clement*, a late First Century work, and the *Shepherd of Hermas*, a Second Century work:

Noah, being found faithful, preached regeneration to the world through his ministry; and the Lord saved by him the animals which, with one accord, entered into the ark (*1 Clement* 9:4; cf. Hebrews 11:7).<sup>3</sup>

This is the way, beloved, in which we find our Saviour, even Jesus Christ, the High Priest of all our offerings, the defender and helper of our infirmity. By Him we look up to the heights of heaven (*1 Clement* 36:1; cf. Hebrews 1:3).<sup>4</sup>

Stand steadfast, therefore, ye who work righteousness, and doubt not, that your passage may be with the holy angels. Happy ye who endure the great tribulation that is coming on, and happy they who shall not deny their own life (*Hermas Vision* 2.2.7; cf. Hebrews 11:33).<sup>5</sup>

But you are saved, because you did not depart from the living God, and on account of your simplicity and great self-control. These have saved you, if you remain steadfast. And they will save all who act in the same manner, and walk in guilelessness and simplicity (*Hermas Vision* 2.3.2; cf. Hebrews 3:13).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 717-721.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Guthrie, "Hebrews, Epistle to the," in *ISBE*, 2:665; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 669; Harold W. Attridge, "Hebrews, Epistle to the," in *ABD*, 3:97; Carson and Moo, 605.

<sup>3</sup> *BibleWorks 8.0: Schaff, Early Church Fathers*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *BibleWorks 8.0: Ante-Nicene Fathers*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

But those which fell into the fire and were burned, are those who have departed for ever from the living God; nor does the thought of repentance ever come into their hearts, on account of their devotion to their lusts and to the crimes which they committed (Hermas *Vision* 3.7.2; Hebrews 3:13).<sup>7</sup>

“Well did you escape from it,” says she, “because you cast your care on God, and opened your heart to the Lord, believing that you can be saved by no other than by His great and glorious name. On this account the Lord has sent His angel, who has rule over the beasts, and whose name is Thegri, and has shut up its mouth, so that it cannot tear you. You have escaped from great tribulation on account of your faith, and because you did not doubt in the presence of such a beast” (Hermas *Vision* 4.2.4; Hebrews 11:33).<sup>8</sup>

There is certainly debate over the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews, as the author of the epistle is not specifically identified in the text.<sup>9</sup> There have been many proposals regarding Hebrews’ authorship made by contemporary examiners.<sup>10</sup> There are various extant traditions from the Christian history of the Second-Fourth Centuries C.E., suggesting different authors for Hebrews.

The Eastern Church held to the tradition that **the Apostle Paul** wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews in Hebrew, and then Luke translated it, based on the testimony of Clement of Alexandria from the late Second Century. The Fourth Century historian Eusebius recorded, “The epistle to the Hebrews he asserted was written by Paul to the Hebrews in the Hebrew tongue, but it was carefully translated by Luke and published among the Greeks since one finds the same character of style and of phraseology in the epistle as in Acts” (*Ecclesiastical History* 6.14.2).<sup>11</sup> Concurrent with this, one of the reasons, why Paul’s name would have remained anonymous throughout Hebrews, was because a widespread audience of Jewish Believers might have treated him with suspicion, given his mainly non-Jewish mission. That Paul was the author of Hebrews was seriously challenged, even very early on, as “This...speculation was probably not based on any genuine tradition but was rather an inference drawn by Clement himself from the title” (Guthrie, *ISBE*).<sup>12</sup> “The Muratorian Canon, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus of Rome all agree that Paul was not the author” (Carson and Moo).<sup>13</sup>

The composition style, of the Epistle to the Hebrews, does not easily conform to those of the other Pauline letters. The salutation in Hebrews 13:25, “Grace be with you all,” a common salutation in Pauline writing, is sometimes used as a support for Pauline authorship, but this cannot be taken as conclusive evidence. While Paul was an early candidate for Hebrews’

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Cf. W.L. Lane, “Hebrews,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, 456 has provided a list of more ancient references to Hebrews.

<sup>9</sup> E. Dinkler, “Hebrews, Letter to the,” in *IDB*, 2:571; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 668-670.

<sup>10</sup> Guthrie, “Hebrews, Epistle to the,” in *ISBE*, 2:666-667; Anthony C. Thiselton, “Hebrews,” in *ECB*, 1451; Carson and Moo, pp 600-604.

<sup>11</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, 204.

<sup>12</sup> Guthrie, “Hebrews, Epistle to the,” in *ISBE*, 2:665.

<sup>13</sup> Carson and Moo, 601.

authorship, as much of the theology could be viewed as “Pauline,” no complete certainty is attached to him. Origin of Alexandria’s commonly quoted view, from the Third Century C.E., was, “who it was that really wrote this epistle, God only knows” (*Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.14),<sup>14</sup> although the claim of Paul being the author of Hebrews did enable many early Christians to accept the epistle as canonical.<sup>15</sup> The Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages generally accepted Pauline authorship, until it was challenged by Luther and Calvin in the Protestant Reformation. Most evangelical Christians today totally discount Pauline authorship of Hebrews.

Tertullian of Carthage suggested **Barnabas** for the authorship of Hebrews, and his is the oldest extant tradition. He communicated in the late Second Century, “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” (*On Modesty* 20).<sup>16</sup> In support of Barnabas being the author of Hebrews, he is attested to be a Levite (Acts 4:26-37), and he had direct contact with those who heard and saw Yeshua firsthand (2:3). Barnabas would have been familiar with the intricacies of the sacrificial system, a definite theme of Hebrews, and would have been able to testify of Yeshua in a very Pauline-style of manner, yet distinct from Paul.

A third candidate who is widely proposed, being first suggested by Luther and now highly regarded among various theologians and commentators today, for the authorship of Hebrews, is **Apollos**. Apollos was an acquaintance of Paul (1 Corinthians 16:22), and was tutored by Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:26). Apollos was from Alexandria, and the manner of vocabulary in Hebrews shows some significant Alexandrian influence.<sup>17</sup> The Epistle to the Hebrews also strongly relies on the distinct renderings found within the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Tanach. More than any other text of the Messianic Scriptures, the Epistle to the Hebrews has thirty-two direct quotations from the Tanach, of which only four are not quoted explicitly from the Septuagint.<sup>18</sup> Apollos was attested to “be mighty in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24), and Hebrews demonstrates a unique style of oratorical rhetoric. Its author knew Timothy (13:23), and had influence within various First Century congregations of Believers.<sup>19</sup> The only major challenge to Apollos, being the author of Hebrews, is that there is no extant ancient tradition to substantiate it, only speculation based on internal evidence and Apollos’ place within the First Century *ekklēsia* as a Hellenistic Jew.

Other candidates for Hebrews’ authorship that are often proposed are Luke, Silas, and even Priscilla (sometimes with Aquila).<sup>20</sup> However, no complete certainty is extant favoring these.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, 216.

<sup>15</sup> Attridge, “Hebrews, Epistle to the,” in *ABD*, 3:97.

<sup>16</sup> *BibleWorks 8.0: Ante-Nicene Fathers*.

<sup>17</sup> A. Berkley Mickleson, “Hebrews, Letter to the,” in *NIDB*, 427.

<sup>18</sup> Dinkler, “Hebrews, Letter to the,” in *IDB*, 2:572; cf. Attridge, “Hebrews, Epistle to the,” in *ABD*, 3:102-103.

<sup>19</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 679.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Dinkler, “Hebrews, Letter to the,” in *IDB*, 2:572; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 674-682; Lane, “Hebrews,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, 444; James W. Thompson, “Hebrews, Epistle to the,” in *EDB*, 569; Carson and Moo, pp 604-604.

Thiselton is one who thinks that the most serious of all the candidates for Hebrews' authorship are Apollos, due to his command of the Tanach Scriptures (Acts 18:24), which would have likely been in their Septuagint form, and/or Priscilla and Aquila, since they would presumably be the ones referenced from Italy (13:24; cf. Acts 18:2).<sup>21</sup> If Priscilla had actually been the author of Hebrews as a female (even with assistance from Apollos), this could explain the anonymity present in the epistle, given common First Century prejudices.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, as Guthrie directs us, "Since Hebrews was known as early as Clement of Rome, but without mention of author, it seems most probable that the book circulated in the West anonymously....[I]ts own spiritual authority and value made it impossible to exclude it from the canon" (*ISBE*).<sup>23</sup>

We can deduce some things based on the style and linguistics of the Epistle to the Hebrews. While many Messianics believe that of all the books of the Apostolic Scriptures, Hebrews would have been written in Hebrew, the fact that there is no extant copy of a "Hebrew Hebrews" speaks for itself.<sup>24</sup> In fact, the Epistle to the Hebrews is widely recognized by scholars as actually having some of **the highest Greek composition of all of the Apostolic Scriptures**. The author of Hebrews "writes Greek with a purity of style and vocabulary to which the writings of Luke alone in the NT can be compared" (Guthrie, *ISBE*).<sup>25</sup> "He was capable of writing some of the finest Greek in the NT" (Lane).<sup>26</sup> The high level of Greek writing indicates that the "author was probably a Hellenist, a Greek-speaking Jew. He was familiar with the OT Scriptures and with the religious ideas of the Jews" (Guthrie, *ISBE*).<sup>27</sup> In the text of Hebrews "There is a constant rhythm between theology and moral appeal, which reminds one somewhat of passages in IV Maccabees and Philo" (*IDB*).<sup>28</sup> "The writer's method of argument generally proceeds in accordance with the rules of Greek rhetoric. He does not digress the way Paul does in most of his letters" (Guthrie, *ISBE*).<sup>29</sup>

Who was the main, intended audience of the Epistle to the Hebrews? The author testifies that the good news "was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard" (2:3). This indicates that the author and audience of Hebrews was definitely a second generation of Believers, placing the date of Hebrews certainly within the 60s C.E. A second generation authorship of Hebrews would also exclude Paul from being Hebrews' author, as he had met the Lord personally on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-18), even though a colleague of Paul could surely have composed it.

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<sup>21</sup> Thiselton, in *ECB*, 1451.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> Guthrie, "Hebrews, Epistle to the," in *ISBE*, 2:665.

<sup>24</sup> Concurrent with this, it is probably true that David H. Stern's Jewish New Testament/Complete Jewish Bible may be said to have made a faux pax when labeling the Epistle to the Hebrews as "Messianic Jews," when modern Hebrew New Testaments tend to have *Ivrim* (עִבְרִיִּים), Hebrew for "Hebrews," instead (for the Greek title *ἸΠΟΣ ΕΒΡΑΙΟΥΣ*, *Pros Hebraious*).

<sup>25</sup> Guthrie, "Hebrews, Epistle to the," in *ISBE*, 2:666.

<sup>26</sup> Lane, "Hebrews," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, 444; cf. Carson and Moo, 608.

<sup>27</sup> Guthrie, "Hebrews, Epistle to the," in *ISBE*, 2:665.

<sup>28</sup> Dinkler, "Hebrews, Letter to the," in *IDB*, 2:571.

<sup>29</sup> Guthrie, "Hebrews, Epistle to the," in *ISBE*, 2:664.

The author of Hebrews is believed by some to have been writing from Italy, indicated by his salutation “those from Italy<sup>30</sup> greet you” (13:24). But, this could also be taken as an indication of Hebrews being written to Italy.<sup>31</sup> The NEB notably paraphrases 13:24 with “Italian friends.” Those from Italy may be considered various persons in the author’s close circle of associates (i.e., Priscilla and Aquila per Acts 18:2). Many interpreters believe that the target audience of Hebrews was the community of Jewish Believers in Rome, but possibly also Corinth, Alexandria, and across the Diaspora.<sup>32</sup> The references and allusions, made to the Epistle to the Hebrews appearing in *1 Clement*, have sometimes been taken as a support for a main Roman audience of Hebrews.<sup>33</sup> Assuming that a composition of 64-70 C.E. is accurate, as the author of Hebrews speaks in the present tense of the sacrificial system still functioning (9:6, 8-9), the likely audience would primarily be Jewish Believers outside the Land of Israel in the Mediterranean Diaspora.<sup>34</sup> The author and audience of Hebrews were both acquainted with Timothy, who is said to have been arrested (13:23). Timothy was bidden by Paul to go to Rome (2 Timothy 4:9, 13, 21), and if he was really able to make it to Rome to see Paul, he could have surely been arrested while there.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is labeled by its author to be “a word of exhortation” (13:22), which is also seen in Acts 13:15 regarding the synagogue oration of Paul and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch. Hebrews may be justly thought to be a kind of “synagogue sermon” (*EDB*),<sup>35</sup> common to the Diaspora Jewish community. The Epistle to the Hebrews was likely intended to be delivered as some kind of a sermon, oration, lecture, or homily to those who originally received it.<sup>36</sup> Guthrie summarizes,

“[Hebrews] possess the oratorical character of a sermon. It contains hortatory asides, which might well suggest a preacher pausing in the course of his argument to address direct appeals to his audience (cf. 2:1; 3:1-12; 4:1, 14; 5:11; 6:9; 10:9; 13:7). Moreover, the carefully thought-out argument would fit in well with the idea of a preacher who before he begins has his conclusion clearly in his mind. The digressions are carefully controlled and the drift of the main theme is never lost. This latter consideration does not necessarily point to a sermon but would be well explained by such a hypothesis” (*ISBE*).<sup>37</sup>

One of the legitimate questions to be asked, about the audience, is whether it was entirely composed of First Century Jewish Believers. Given some of the theological themes of the epistle, deeply rooted in the Tanach, one might be inclined to think that its contents really only concerned Jews. Yet, there are interpreters who think that Greeks and Romans, being among the readership of Hebrews, can by no means be excluded. “It has been maintained that

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<sup>30</sup> Grk. *hoi apo tēs Italias* (οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας).

<sup>31</sup> Carson and Moo, pp 405-605.

<sup>32</sup> Guthrie, “Hebrews, Epistle to the,” in *ISBE*, 2:667; Attridge, “Hebrews, Epistle to the,” in *ABD*, 3:98.

<sup>33</sup> Thompson, “Hebrews, Epistle to the,” in *EDB*, 569; cf. Lane, “Hebrews,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, pp 445, 446-447; cf. Carson and Moo, pp 608-609.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Dinkler, “Hebrews, Letter to the,” in *IDB*, 2:572-573; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 697-701.

<sup>35</sup> Thompson, “Hebrews, Epistle to the,” in *EDB*, 568.

<sup>36</sup> Dinkler, “Hebrews, Letter to the,” in *IDB*, 2:572; Attridge, “Hebrews, Epistle to the,” in *ABD*, 3:98; Lane, “Hebrews,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, pp 450-451; Carson and Moo, pp 596.

<sup>37</sup> Guthrie, “Hebrews, Epistle to the,” in *ISBE*, 2:664.

Gentiles as well as Jews would be acquainted with the OT, since this was the Scripture of the early Church. Admittedly, the development of the argument in Hebrews would not be easy for Gentiles, but the same might be said for parts of the Epistle to the Romans, and Rome is generally assumed to have been a predominantly gentile church” (Guthrie, *ISBE*).<sup>38</sup> A mixed readership for Hebrews, while primarily being directed to First Century Jewish Believers, but *also* non-Jewish Believers, seems very likely.

All readers and examiners of Hebrews are generally agreed that the author is concerned with preventing apostasy from the Messiah.<sup>39</sup> That the Messiah has inaugurated some changes via His sacrifice and priestly work in Heaven (7:12), also cannot be avoided. A typical Christian approach to the Epistle to the Hebrews is seen in Guthrie’s remark, “it may be said that Hebrews is a Christian assessment of the OT cultus. It is as if the author is attempting to answer the problem of the place of OT cultic thought in Christian theology. He finds that a good deal of the imagery points to Christ as its perfect fulfillment. Christianity is a ‘better way’ than the old” (*ISBE*).<sup>40</sup> This evaluation of Hebrews is actually *much fairer* than that witnessed by some other theologians, because too many have thought that the author’s comparison and contrast, between the Messiah and the Tabernacle service, means that the latter is to be significantly devaluated and degraded. In actuality, though, while much of the argumentation style of the Epistle to the Hebrews has sometimes been taken as being anti-Judaism and anti-Temple, the author employs a common Rabbinic *qal v’chomer* or classical *a fortiori* approach, demonstrating great respect for the institutions and historical figures of Ancient Israel in order to precisely show **how much greater and grand the Messiah actually is**.<sup>41</sup>

In the mid-to-late 60s C.E., the bulk of the Jewish Believers in Yeshua were living in the Diaspora, and things in Judea were becoming increasingly violent per the actions of the Zealot movement and impending Jewish revolt. The author of Hebrews, seeing that the fall of the Temple was imminent, writes to reassure those whose faith was centered around the Temple—that the sacrifice of Yeshua is superior to the animal sacrifices. He writes, “there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness” (7:18), presumably until the restoration of the Temple in the Millennium (cf. Ezekiel chs. 40-44). The Levitical priesthood could only minister to the people of Israel in the Tabernacle and Temple. With the Temple soon to be gone, all of the Believers needed to definitely see themselves as being served by Yeshua’s priesthood in Heaven, something first prefigured by Melchizedek (ch. 7). There would be no more “safety net,” as it were, in the minds of various Believers, who may have thought that the animal sacrifices occurring in Jerusalem could provide them with

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 2:667.

Thompson, “Hebrews, Epistle to the,” in *EDB*, 569 actually proposes an almost entirely non-Jewish audience for “Hebrews.”

<sup>39</sup> Guthrie, “Hebrews, Epistle to the,” in *ISBE*, 2:668; cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 694-695 suggests that similar errors as those addressed by Paul in his letter to the Colossians, were possibly present among Hebrews’ audience.

<sup>40</sup> Guthrie, “Hebrews, Epistle to the,” in *ISBE*, 2:669.

<sup>41</sup> David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp 4-5, 41.

some level of restitution for their sins. *Only the final sacrifice of Yeshua could bring them permanent atonement and forgiveness* (cf. 10:2).

Do the necessary changes to the Tabernacle/Temple service and Levitical priesthood, resultant of Yeshua's final sacrifice, mean a complete denial of the code of conduct in the Torah or Law of Moses? Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) is, without a doubt, **the major theme** of the Epistle to the Hebrews.<sup>42</sup> The text opens up in ch. 1 with a lauded praise of the Messiah, emphasizing that all things have been given to Him and that all things are to worship Him. The author of Hebrews affirms the Divinity of Yeshua, and the fact that Yeshua is the Son of God, whereas Moses was only a servant. The author certainly does not demean Moses, indeed attesting that Moses was "faithful" (3:5); but Moses as only a mortal could never do what the Messiah has done as the Son of God. Faith is a theme of Hebrews, as the author describes prominent Tanach figures as those "of whom the world was not worthy" (11:38).

One of the key thrusts of Hebrews is the manifestation of the New Covenant in the lives of Believers, with the author offering extensive quotes from Jeremiah 31, the longest Tanach quotes found in the Apostolic Scriptures. While most Christian theologians have interpreted these New Covenant passages as somehow annulling the Torah, the author of Hebrews himself plainly states, "FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: **I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS**, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE" (8:10; cf. 10:16). Hebrews is frequently read as sometimes opposing the commandments of the Torah of Moses, yet the author of Hebrews is quite insistent that the Law has not been abolished, *twice* quoting the critical New Covenant promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34 that Moses' Teaching is to be written on the hearts and minds of God's people (8:8-12; 10:16-17)—something the Messiah has inaugurated by His priesthood.<sup>43</sup>

The Epistle to the Hebrews may be the second most difficult book of the Bible for today's Messianics to read and interpret (after Galatians). Why is this the case? It can often relate to various persons giving the Torah or Pentateuch *too high* a position in their spirituality, with the Messiah Himself and His teachings placed at a distant second. While it may be difficult to fathom, we do have people within our broad faith community, who in various ways tend to *de-emphasize* the final atonement of Yeshua, and who thus have difficulty understanding the Epistle to the Hebrews. Anything that is thought to demean Moses, the Tabernacle/Temple, the Levitical priesthood, and/or the Torah in general, is treated with (great) suspicion. Apparently, this includes the Messiah Himself.

Not all Messianic people have these kinds of difficulties with the Epistle to the Hebrews, recognizing this as a valued book of the Bible to be heeded by Believers. Their challenges with Hebrews tend to be more in terms of its transmission into English from the Greek in various modern versions (i.e., places where "covenant" appears in English and not in the source text: 8:7, 13; 9:1, 17, 24; 10:1), and the author's usage of many unique renderings found in the Septuagint, which they are unfamiliar with. This also regards various First Century issues, which requires readers of Hebrews to carefully engage with contemporary scholarship. Lane

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<sup>42</sup> Attridge, "Hebrews, Epistle to the," in *ABD*, 3:99.

<sup>43</sup> For a more detailed examination, consult the author's article "What is the New Covenant?"



properly directs us how, “Patient interaction with the text and with the discussion it has prompted, especially during recent decades, supports the opinion that Hebrews is a sermon in response to circumstances in the life of the audience.”<sup>44</sup> Performing such patient interaction well, for the Epistle to the Hebrews, is something doubtlessly required of all of today’s Messianic Believers. In the future, as the Messianic movement grows and expands—given our common belief that the Torah of Moses is relevant instruction for all Messiah followers—there are likely going to be many criticisms offered of it by Christian outsiders, using the Epistle to the Hebrews as a base.<sup>45</sup> Much more work and refinement, for us understanding the unique perspective and contribution of Hebrews—and avoiding the problems it addresses—are well-needed for the emerging Messianic movement.<sup>46</sup>

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## QUESTION FOR REFLECTION ON HEBREWS:

- 1. What do you think were the principal issues facing Hebrews’ audience?**
- 2. Of all the subjects examined in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which one struck you personally as being most important—or requiring further examination?**

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<sup>44</sup> Lane, “Hebrews,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & its Developments*, 443.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Carson and Moo, pp 611-612 where they claim that the audience of Hebrews will not be committing apostasy by denying faith in the Messiah, but instead not following a form of faith that gives a high degree of significance to the Law and its commandments.

<sup>46</sup> Consult the author’s commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic* for a more detailed examination of Hebrews.

**3. Have you ever made a connection between the New Covenant of Hebrews chs. 8, 10, with the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31? Describe your thoughts.**

**4. What lesson(s) do you think the emerging Messianic movement needs to learn from Hebrews? Do you think Hebrews presents any major theological or spiritual challenges to the present generation of Messianic Believers?**

## REFLECTION ON HEBREWS' PLACEMENT IN THE CANON

*Write two short paragraphs about what struck you about reading the Epistle to the Hebrews:*