

**Hebrews 1:1-2a****Craig Crawshaw**

*As we approach this magnificent book, let us begin with an overview of its importance.*

**1. LOCATION IN OUR BIBLE**

FIRST let us notice where it is located in the Holy Scripture. After the New Testament begins with the four gospel accounts of Jesus' life and ministry (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), followed by the book of Acts (the one lone book of history in the New Testament), comes all the writings of Paul. All the letters to the churches are first: Romans (16 chapters), 1 & 2 Corinthians (16/13), Galatians (6), Ephesians (6), Philippians (4), Colossians (4), 1 & 2 Thessalonians (5/3). Thus, the total letters to the churches written by Paul are 9. Notice that they are arranged from longest to shortest (allowing for the pairs to be together, and the shorter chapter number in the pair to determine its location in the order).

Following are Paul's 4 letters written to individuals, also called the "Pastoral Epistles." Again, they are in order by length: 1 & 2 Timothy (6/4), Titus (3), Philemon (1). This makes for a total of 13 books clearly written by Paul.

And then, follows HEBREWS. Its position in the sequence can either be the last of the Pauline writings, or the first of the non-Pauline writings. For the clearly non-Pauline writings are next and last, again in order of length as before: James (5), 1 & 2 Peter (5/3), 1, 2 & 3 John (5/1/1), Jude (1). Revelation, written by John, is last despite its length (22 chapters) because of its obvious concluding description of the end times .

Thus Hebrews stands as either the culmination of Paul's writings (so placed in the canon because early scholarship was convinced of Pauline authorship), or the beginning of non-Pauline writings (appropriate for the more modern scholarship that largely questions his authorship). If we take the latter to be true, which appears to be likely, then:

ROMANS begins the Pauline writings – the great theological treatise written primarily to the Gentile mindset. Generally speaking, Paul writes on how we are to believe.

HEBREWS begins the non-Pauline writings – the great theological treatise written primarily to the Jewish mindset. These writings generally speaking teach us how we are to live out our faith.

**2. WHO, WHEN, TO WHOM, WHY ?**

**WHO WROTE HEBREWS?** The eastern Roman world around Israel believed Paul to be the author, which accounts for the book being brought to quickly into the canon of Scripture. The western world was less convinced, largely due to the phraseology of the Greek so different from Paul's usage in other books. Therefore, a number of alternate authors such as Barnabas, Apollos, Priscilla and Aquila have been proposed, but with little other than speculation to support the claim. The uncertainty as to the authorship of Hebrews should not diminish our commitment to the book as the Word of God, however. It has long stood as a cherished portion of the Biblical canon of Scripture, and we should consider and cherish it the same.

**WHEN WAS HEBREWS WRITTEN?** We assume it must have been written before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 A.D., since there is so much mention of the temple and its functions and no mention of its demise. Also since there are mentions of mounting persecutions, we assume it to be written during the persecutions of Nero, dating the book in the 62-68 A.D. vicinity. This was during the time that Paul was doing much of his writings. – another argument to support his authorship.

**TO WHOM WAS HEBREWS WRITTEN?** The very title suggests it is written to Jews, and the emphasis on keeping strong in the faith suggests it is for Hebrew Christians. The second to the last verse, 13:24, reads: “Those from Italy greet you.” This could mean that Hebrews was written FROM Italy (probably Rome) with the Italians greeting the recipients. But it seems a bit unlikely that the Hebrews of the Roman church would be writing to another city and church, as there are no other examples of this kind of communication in the Bible. Or it could mean that the Italians, along with the author in a far away place, were writing TO Italy, greeting the recipients back in (probably) Rome. This later choice seems favorable to me as well as to many others, making this the book of “Second Romans” – the first being primarily to Gentiles and the second to Hebrews. If Paul did write the book, or had a hand in its writing, it is very possible that this was written after Paul had been released from prison by Nero (at a trial following the book of Acts) while Paul was travelling before he was rearrested and sent to Rome for execution.

**WHY WAS IT WRITTEN?** This is an easier question to answer, for we look to internal evidence of the text, which we have readily available. It was written to convince Hebrew believers, and indeed all believers, to persevere in their faith because of Jesus the Christ being a superior alternative to and fulfillment of the Jewish system of sacrifice and priesthood in order to achieve access to God.

### 3. KEYS TO THE CONTENT

- √ A.B. Bruce’s classic commentary is profoundly entitled:  
    “The First Apology For Christianity” [apology = defense]
- √ William Barkley: The book of Hebrews is the most difficult and challenging in the New Testament  
    The author is giving us “solid food” and not just “milk” in this which goes beyond “elementary principles” to deeper truths leading to maturity (5:11-6:3)
- √ “Connecting the dots” between the Old and New Testaments – especially regarding the sacrificial system and the priesthood
  
- √ **A book of COMPARISONS - “better” (13x) & “perfect” (14x)**  
    better than angels (1:4), a better hope (7:19), a better covenant founded on better promises (8:6)  
    [Jesus] having been made perfect (5:9), a Son made perfect forever (7:28), perfect tabernacle (9:11), author and perfecter of our faith (12:1)
- √ **A book of INTROSPECTION - “let us” (12x) & “faith” (34x)**  
    “let us . . .” be diligent (4:11), hold fast our confession (4:14), draw near (4:16), press on (6:1), consider how to stimulate (10:24), run with endurance (12:1), continually offer up a sacrifice of praise \*13:15)  
    faith is the evidence of things hoped for (11:1), without faith it is impossible to please God (11:6), Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith (12:1), imitate their faith (13:7)
- √ **A book of LOOKING BEYOND**  
    “eternal” or “forever” (16x)  
    Jesus’ throne forever (1:8), eternal salvation (5:9), eternal redemption (9:12), eternal inheritance (9:15), Jesus the same forever (13:8)

√ **Especially written for the Jewish mindset:**

Multiple O.T. quotations

Multiple O.T. references to the priesthood, sacrificial system and the temple layout

Multiple comparisons of Jesus to angels

√ **3 Key “P” Themes: Preeminence, Priesthood & Perseverance**

1. The preeminence of Jesus over angels, Moses, the priesthood of Aaron, temple sacrifices, and working to achieve a relationship with God
2. The priesthood of Jesus in the line of Melchizedek over the Aaronic priesthood
3. The challenge to persevere in our faith as God perseveres to bring us to Himself

**4. A BOOK FULL OF QUOTABLE QUOTES**

**3:13** “Encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today’ “

**4:12** “For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword ...”

**4:16** “Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

**9:22** “... without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

**9:27** “it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment”

**10:14** “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified”

**10:24** “Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together.”

**11:6** “And without faith it is impossible to please Him”

**12:1-2** “Let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus”

**13:4** “Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled”

**13:8** “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

**13:17** “Obey your leaders and keep watch over them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

For all these reasons, and more, Hebrews is a book well worth our careful and devoted attention. And we will be spending many weeks and months to come sifting its riches.

**INTRODUCTORY TEXT FOR TODAY**

*Hebrews 1:1-2 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.*

***In Many Portions*** (*specific times through history*)

To Adam and Eve –at the beginning of creation - in the garden of Eden  
To Noah – some 1000 years later - telling him to build an ark  
To Abraham – some 1000 years later - calling him to the promised land  
To Moses – some 500 years later - to lead the people of Israel out of bondage  
To Kings – some 500 years later - through the presence of the Spirit  
To Prophets –sporadically throughout history

***And In Many Ways*** (*different kinds of communication*)

Walking in the garden with man (Adam and Eve)  
Through angels (Abraham)  
Through visions, such as heavenly ladders (Jacob)  
Through dreams (Joseph)  
Through a burning bush (Moses)  
Through a donkey (Balaam)  
Through a fleece (Gideon)  
Through creation (Psalm 19) – “The heavens declare the glory of God”  
Through inspiration of the Spirit (David, Solomon)  
Through a gentle whisper (Elijah)  
Through miraculous signs (various prophets)

The point of all this is that God, though always present in the affairs of man, did not speak continually during the times of the Old Testament – there were long periods of silence. Nor did he speak consistently – there were many different ways in which God chose to communicate with man.

What we are to learn from this opening prelude of Hebrews is this: God now speaks continually and specifically – through the Word of Jesus Christ, revealed in His teaching while on earth and exclaimed by the apostles in the Holy Writings of the New Testament.

The “many portions” and “many ways” are known as “general revelation” – that is, generally revealing God’s plan and heart. But speaking through Jesus Christ is “specific revelation” – clearly revealing God’s plan of salvation and heart of love.

We are to know that there is nothing else we need to hear from God or know about God except what has been revealed by Jesus Christ. There are no further prophecies or prophets forthcoming, or revelations yet to be delivered.

Joseph Smith has not brought further revelation of God in the Book of Mormon.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses do not have further revelation of God to share from their kingdom teachings

There is no additional Divine message to be delivered by communing with saints gone by, including the Mother Mary

There is no new message from God to be had from any human Pope

**A PERFECT Savior makes for a . . .**

**A BETTER hope** - Jesus crucified and resurrected for our salvation

**A BETTER covenant** – salvation by grace through faith without works

**A BETTER priest** – who intercedes for us forever

**A BETTER sacrifice** – once and for all

**A BETTER country** – a heavenly one to be home forever