

Who Wrote Hebrews?

Introduction



Paul's Letter to the Hebrews

The epistle of Hebrews was written to demonstrate to Jews that as great as the Mosaic Law was, as great as the Temple was, as great as the Levitical sacrifices were, Christ was superior (Hebrews 1.1-3, 4-2.18, 3.1-4.13, 4.14-10.18, 10.19-12.29). It revealed that Judaism based upon the Mosaic Law, Levitical sacrifices, etc. was over. Reality, in the person and work of Christ, replaced the shadows, symbols, and types of the Law and Prophets (Luke 24.25-32; Romans 15.4, 8). The Messiah had come and finished the work of salvation to which the Law and Prophets had pointed (John 19.30). Only through Him was salvation possible.

Authorship

A controversial but tantalizing question throughout church history has been the letter's authorship. Several personages have been identified as possible authors. They include Barnabas, Apollos, Silas, Luke, James, Clement of Rome,

Aquila, Priscilla, and Paul. For most of church history, Paul was the leading contender. But Paul has fallen into disfavor and modern scholarship has all but dismissed him as the book's author.¹ Anyone but Paul has become *de rigueur* and *chic* among professional theologians. This study will examine and weigh the objections to and evidence for Pauline authorship of Hebrews.

Arguments Against Pauline Authorship

Five major objections exist to Pauline authorship:²

1. The letter is anonymous which is contrary to Paul's practice in his other letters.
2. The writing style is dramatically better than Paul.
3. The logical development is much more tightly woven than is Paul's.
4. Spiritual eyewitnesses are appealed to (Hebrews 2.3) while Paul insisted on no intermediaries for his gospel (Galatians 1.12).
5. Timothy's imprisonment (Hebrews 13.23) does not seem to fit within Paul's lifetime since he is mentioned in Acts and Paul's letters as a free man.

Consideration of Pauline Objections

1. Anonymity

Paul's practice was to identify himself by name in his letters and Hebrews does not contain Paul's name. To whom did Paul write? His primary audience of his epistles was Gentiles as he was "the apostle of the Gentiles" (Romans 11.13). The audience of Hebrews was Jews. But throughout Acts, we read Paul went to Jews first and then turned to Gentiles when they rejected Christ (Acts 13, 18, 28). The Lord had revealed to Paul that the Jews would not receive his message (Acts 22.17-18). But Paul, because of his love for his people, continued to try and evangelize them. Despite the fact the Holy Spirit had revealed

trouble awaited him in Jerusalem, he was determined to preach to them (Acts 20.22-23, 21.4, 10-13).

Paul had a strong personality. This is clear from the record of Acts and his letters. Despite Paul's conversion, his personality did not change and God used his zeal for His purposes. Paul loved his nation and his people. He must have asked himself thousands of times how he could have been so blind. He knew the Law and the Prophets inside and out. He had been taught by one of the greatest of Israel's rabbis. He had been recognized as a rising star among the Pharisees. Despite all this, he had failed miserably. That he had been unable to recognize the Messiah must have stunned him. How could he, with all his education, with all his brilliance, have missed the One to whom the whole Law and the prophets pointed? But God, in His matchless grace saved Paul. Paul was convinced that if he, who had been so blind, could be changed, his nation could also. With this motivation, he persisted in evangelizing Jews. But his personal experience confirmed the Lord's words. They steadfastly rebuffed his message of salvation, even to the point of trying to kill him. Paul's efforts resulted in his imprisonment in Rome, which is where he is at the end of Acts.³ Jewish opposition to Paul was a reasonable explanation for not identifying himself by name as the letter's author. Such explanation was recognized by Eusebius (c. 263-339 A.D.) who gave the following account of Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 A.D.):

- 1. To sum up briefly, he has given in the Hypotyposes abridged accounts of all canonical Scripture, not omitting the disputed books,—I refer to Jude and the other Catholic epistles, and Barnabas and the so-called Apocalypse of Peter.*
- 2. He says that the Epistle to the Hebrews is the work of Paul, and that it was written to the Hebrews in the Hebrew language; but that Luke translated it carefully and published it for the Greeks, and hence the same style of expression is found in this epistle and in the Acts.*
- 3. But he says that*

the words, Paul the Apostle, were probably not prefixed, because, in sending it to the Hebrews, who were prejudiced and suspicious of him, he wisely did not wish to repel them at the very beginning by giving his name. 4. Farther on he says: But now, as the blessed presbyter said, since the Lord being the apostle of the Almighty, was sent to the Hebrews, Paul, as sent to the Gentiles, on account of his modesty did not subscribe himself an apostle of the Hebrews, through respect for the Lord, and because being a herald and apostle of the Gentiles he wrote to the Hebrews out of his superabundance (Eusebius, Church History 6.14.1-4).

Eta Linnemann responded to Donald Guthrie's assertion that anonymity did not conform to Pauline style, stating: "*The truth is, anonymity is not a question of style but of necessity. Whoever writes anonymously has grounds for so doing*" (italics hers) and that no one who denies Hebrews to Paul has given a reason why other proposed authors wrote it anonymously.⁴ Such analysis lends great weight to Pauline authorship. Who besides Paul would wish to remain anonymous?

2. Writing Style

Early in Church history scholars recognized the writing style of Hebrews was different from Paul's epistles. Origen (c. 184-253 A.D.) wrote, "Whoever wrote the epistle, God only knows for sure." Opponents of Pauline authorship use Origen's statement to support their case. Removed from its context, the statement is a half-truth. Eusebius preserved Origen's complete statement which reads as follows:

11. In addition he makes the following statements in regard to the Epistle to the Hebrews in his Homilies upon it: 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' (2 Corinthians 11:6) that is, in expression; but that its diction is purer Greek, any one who

has the power to discern differences of phraseology will acknowledge. 12. 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.' 13. Farther on he adds: If I gave my opinion, I should say that the thoughts are those of the apostle, but the diction and phraseology are those of some one who remembered the apostolic teachings, and wrote 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 this. For not without reason have the ancients handed it down as Paul's. 14. 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. But let this suffice on these matters. (Eusebius, Church History, 6.25.11-14).

These words indicate Origen believed Paul authored Hebrews but was *composed* by another. The nature of Origen's doubt was style and composition, not substance. Origen consistently ascribed authorship to Paul in his writings, e.g., *De Principiis, Against Celsus, To Africanus.*⁵

Eusebius himself wrote:

Paul's fourteen epistles are well known and undisputed. It is not indeed right to overlook the fact that some have rejected the Epistle to the Hebrews, saying that it is disputed by the church of Rome, on the ground that it was not written by Paul. But what has been said concerning this epistle by those who lived before our time I shall quote in the proper place. In regard to the so-called Acts of Paul, I have not found them among the undisputed writings. (Eusebius, Church History 3.3.5)

For as Paul had addressed the Hebrews in the language of his

country; some say that the evangelist Luke, others that Clement, translated the epistle. (Eusebius, Church History 3.38.2-3)

Paul's letters of Romans to Philemon number thirteen. Hebrews makes fourteen. Could Luke have collaborated with Paul in writing Hebrews? It is reasonable since he was Paul's constant traveling companion, was familiar with Paul's messages to the Jews (serving as Paul's personal historian as well as his personal physician), was Jewish, and was with Paul during his imprisonment in Rome. David L. Allen recently argued for Lukan authorship of Hebrews, and Dave Black has argued Luke was Paul's penman, as have Andrew W. Pitts and Joshua F. Walker.⁶

3. Logical Development

The objection that "the logical development is much more tightly woven than is Paul's" is an interesting one. The primary issues of any writing involve purpose and audience. Paul's letters of Romans through Philemon addressed Christian (mostly Gentile) congregations to instruct, encourage, and correct. Hebrews addresses Jews, who may or may not have been believers, to demonstrate the choice before them was now Christ or nothing. The fulfillment of the Mosaic Law had come in the person of the Messiah and the administration of the Law was over.

Perhaps the greatest question for those who make this objection is whether they think Romans is inferior in logical development to Hebrews and a corollary question is whether they think Paul could not construct a tightly woven logical argument. Paul had been taught and trained by the greatest rabbi of his day, Gamaliel. He had been a star student. He had reasoned with and preached to Jews throughout his ministry. Acts ends with Paul's meeting with the Jewish leaders in Rome, which occurred only a few days after he arrived. Luke recorded he "was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the

kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening (Acts 28.23).” Paul had a great deal of time to construct, develop, and practice his arguments (cf. Acts 13.14-43, 18.4-6). Is not Luke’s record of Paul’s words to the Jews in Pisidia Antioch, Corinth, and Rome *the* argument of Hebrews?

Consider the following passages from Acts:

“Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: ¹⁷ The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. ¹⁸ For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. ¹⁹ When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance—all of which took about four hundred and fifty years. ²⁰ After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. ²¹ Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. ²² After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.’ ²³ From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, ²⁴ after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. ²⁵ And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’ ²⁶ “Brethren, sons of Abraham’s family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. ²⁷ For those who live in Jerusalem, and their

rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. ²⁸ And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. ²⁹ When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. ³⁰ But God raised Him from the dead; ³¹ and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. ³² And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, ³³ that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You.' ³⁴ As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' ³⁵ Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'You will not allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.' ³⁶ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; ³⁷ but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. ³⁸ Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, ³⁹ and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. ⁴⁰ Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: ⁴¹ 'Behold, you scoffers, and marvel, and perish; for I am accomplishing a work in your days, a work which you will never believe, though someone should describe it to you.'" ⁴² As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath. ⁴³ Now

when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God (Acts 13.16-43).

In the passage above, Paul addressed the Jews in Antioch Pisidia in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Was this a tightly woven logical argument? Particular attention should be paid to verses 38-41. Again, is this not the argument of Hebrews?

Luke, Paul's doctor, companion, and fellow-prisoner, recorded Paul's interaction with the Jews immediately following his arrival in Rome in Acts 28.23-27:

²³ When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. ²⁴ Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. ²⁵ And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, ²⁶ saying, 'Go to this people and say, "You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; ²⁷ For the heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them."'

The burden of proof of this objection rests upon those who reject Pauline authorship. In order for the objection to be valid, opponents of Pauline authorship must demonstrate at least two things: 1) Romans is inferior in logical development

to Hebrews, and 2) Paul could not form a tightly woven logical argument in light of the arguments he made in Acts to the Jews. Good luck.

4. Spiritual Eyewitnesses

Another major argument against Pauline authorship has been Hebrews 2.3. The passage reads:

¹ For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. ² For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, ³ how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, ⁴ God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will (Hebrews 2.1-4).

Those who make the argument maintain the passage means the writer claimed he learned the gospel from those who heard Jesus directly and this is contrary to Paul's statement of having received the gospel directly from the ascended Lord (Galatians 1.11-12; cf. Ephesians 3.3). For example, Paul Ellingworth in his *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* wrote:

The single most striking piece of internal evidence against Pauline authorship of Hebrews is the author's explicit statement that the message which began with Jesus ὑπὸ τῶν ἀκουσάντων εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐβεβαιώθη (2:3); in other words, that the author and his readers received the gospel indirectly.⁷

Is this what the text reads? My intent is not to exegete the passage but to make two points:

1. The first point is the passage states the message of salvation “was confirmed to us by those who heard” (ὕπὸ τῶν ἀκουσάντων εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐβεβαιώθη). Presumably, “those who heard” referred to the Twelve and/or those who witnessed Jesus’ earthly ministry. The “us” is not Paul but the Jews. This is clear both from the context of the entire passage as well as from the first part of the verse: “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” Again, the “we” are Jews. This is also clear from Hebrews 4.2. The “us” are Jews. Thus, the sense of the verse is: “After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us [Jews] by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.” The word [βεβαιώω](#) means “confirmed.” It does *not* mean “learned” or “received.” How anyone derives *learned* or *received* from βεβαιώω is incomprehensible. The word βεβαιώω is used 8x in the New Testament (Mark 16.20; Romans 15.8, 1 Corinthians 1.6, 8; 2 Corinthians 1.21; Colossians 2.7; Hebrews 2.3, 13.9). Note the passages where it is found and specifically who used the term.
2. The second point is that those who make this objection assume the message of salvation of the Twelve was the same message of salvation of Paul. Such a view has no Scriptural support. The Twelve preached the “gospel of the kingdom.” Salvation according to the gospel of the kingdom was faith in the *identity* of Christ (John 3.18; Acts 2.21, 38, 3.6, 16, 4.7, 10, 12, 17-18, 30, 5.28, 40-41), who He was (Matthew 16.15-17; John 11.25-27; Acts 8.37), the Messiah, the Son of God. Paul did not preach the gospel of the kingdom after he returned from Arabia. He preached the “gospel of the grace of God.” Paul’s gospel was based, not upon the *identity* of Christ, but upon the *work* of Christ: that He died for our sins and rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15.1-4).

These were two different gospels. Both were valid from the time Paul received his gospel (Galatians 1.12), presumably during his three years in Arabia and Damascus, until the Jerusalem Council, in 51 A.D. At the end of that Council, only one gospel remained: Paul's gospel (Acts 15.11, cf. Galatians 1.7-9).⁸

5. Timothy's Imprisonment

Hebrews 13.22-24, reads:

²² But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. ²³ Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. ²⁴ Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

This objection to Pauline authorship is the claim that no record exists of Timothy being in prison from Acts or Paul's epistles. Therefore, it is reasoned, the writer was not Paul.

Paul's letters reveal others were confined with him in Rome. Aristarchus and Epaphras were with him (Colossians 4.10; Philemon 1.23) as was Luke (Colossians 4.14; Philemon 1.24). Evidently, Timothy was also (Colossians 1.1; Philemon 1.1; Philippians 1.1, 2.19). From Philippians 2.19-24, we can conclude Timothy was released before Paul. Thus, the statement, "Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly" (Hebrews 13.23) confirms the Philippian passage.

Additional Arguments For Pauline Authorship

1. Peter's Support of Pauline Authorship

Peter wrote the following shortly before his death:

¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, ¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, ¹⁶ as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3.14-16).

Peter's ministered to Jews, not Gentiles (Acts 2.22, 36, 3.12, 25; Galatians 2.7-9; 1 Peter 1.1) while Paul's ministry was primarily to Gentiles (Romans 11.13; Galatians 2.7-9). In the passage above, Peter wrote Jewish believers about Paul's having written to them. What letter did Paul write to Jews? Two possibilities exist: 1) An unknown, lost letter, or 2) Hebrews.

Peter seems to have had access to Paul's writings even though he had little contact with him. He confessed he found some of Paul's teachings difficult. These teachings were Paul's secrets ([μυστήριον](#), Romans 11.25, 16.25; 1 Corinthians 2.7, 4.1, 13.2, 14.2, 15.51; Ephesians 1.9, 3.3-4, 9, 5.32, 6.19; Colossians 1.26-27, 2.2, 4.3; 2 Thessalonians 2.7; 1 Timothy 3.9, 16).⁹ Paul's secrets included his doctrine of the Church as the "body of Christ," the Rapture, the significance of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, the believer's heavenly citizenship, the temporary blinding of Israel, and salvation by faith alone. Jesus had taught none of these things in His earthly ministry. Nor had He revealed them to the Twelve. These unknown truths, these secrets, He revealed to Paul alone.

Another important point of this passage is that by the time Peter wrote 2 Peter, i.e., 68 A.D., Paul's letters were recognized as Scripture. Peter's statement, "as they

do also the rest of the Scriptures” (ὡς καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς γραφὰς) recognized Paul’s writings had the same God-breathed (θεόπνευστος) authority as the Old Testament scriptures.¹⁰

Paul wrote the following to the Colossians:

Colossians 1.24-27

²⁴ Νῦν χαίρω ἐν τοῖς παθήμασιν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, καὶ ἀνταναπληρῶ τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, ὃ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐκκλησία, ²⁵ ἧς ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ διάκονος κατὰ τὴν οἰκονομίαν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς πληρῶσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, ²⁶ τὸ μυστήριον τὸ ἀποκεκρυμμένον ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν γενεῶν νῦν δὲ ἐφανερώθη τοῖς ἁγίοις αὐτοῦ, ²⁷ οἷς ἠθέλησεν ὁ θεὸς γνωρίσαι τί τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τοῦ μυστηρίου τούτου ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, ὅς ἐστὶν Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν, ἡ ἐλπίς τῆς δόξης,

²⁴ Now, I rejoice in sufferings for you, and I fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for His body, which is the Church; ²⁵ of which I became minister, according to the administration of God given to me for you to complete the word of God, ²⁶ the secret having been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been made manifest to His saints; ²⁷ to whom God willed to make known what [is] the wealth of the glory of this secret among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you the hope of glory:

In verse 25, Paul wrote God had given him the task of completing the Word of God ([πληρῶσαι](#) τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ). Its completion included the Lord’s revelation of teachings He had kept secret, which included the indwelling Christ in believers. Since Paul’s writings completed the Scriptures, it means John’s writings were written before Paul’s and that Paul had the last word from God to the human race. Peter, in concert with Paul, recognized Paul’s letters completed the

canon. Thus, the canon of Scripture was completed with 2 Timothy, about 68 A.D.

Lastly, particularly in light of Peter's recognition that Paul's letters completed the Word of God, he directed Jewish believers to heed Paul. At the end of his life, he did not refer them to James, John, Jude, or the gospels. He told them to heed Paul. Such direction would make sense only if Paul wrote Hebrews and that Peter recognized Paul's writings completed the Scriptures.

2. Salutation

Paul wrote the following words to the Thessalonians:

¹⁷ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write. ¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all (2 Thessalonians 3.17-18).

Paul wrote the above because the Thessalonians had received a letter purportedly from him that the Day of the Lord (the Tribulation) had come (2 Thessalonians 2.1-2). This upset them because Paul had taught them previously that Christ would deliver them, i.e., remove them from the earth before this event (1 Thessalonians 1.9-10, 4.13-18, 5.9-11). To foil further forgeries, Paul included a "grace" statement at the beginning and end of his letters written by his own hand. Paul normally dictated his letters but he included his "grace" statements as a sample of his handwriting for a "sign" or "token" ([σημείον](#)) of his authorship (cf. 1 Corinthians 16.21; Colossians 4.18).

| Paul's Epistles: Grace Salutations | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Romans 1.7, 16.20, 24 | Philippians 1.2, 4.23 | 2 Timothy 1.2, 4.22 |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 Corinthians 1.3, 16.23 | Colossians 1.2, 4.18 | Titus 1.4, 3.15 |
| 2 Corinthians 1.2, 13.14 | 1 Thessalonians 1.1, 5.28 | Philemon 1.3, 1.25 |
| Galatians 1.13, 6.18 | 2 Thessalonians 1.2, 3.18 | <i>and</i> |
| Ephesians 1.2, 6.24 | 1 Timothy 1.2, 6.21 | Hebrews 13.25 |

For our purposes, what is notable is that Paul's "grace" greeting acted as a "check digit" in a barcode that ensured the letter's authenticity. Since Hebrews 13.25 included this "check digit," Paul's σημεῖον, we have further evidence of Paul's authorship of Hebrews.

3. Hebrews Location in the Canon

W. H. P. Hatch summed up the evidence as follows:

In the manuscripts and versions of the New Testament, in lists of books accepted as canonical, and in the works of ecclesiastical writers the Epistle to the Hebrews occupies three different positions: (I) Among the epistles addressed to churches, i.e. after Romans, after 2 Corinthians, and very rarely after Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Titus. (II) After 2 Thessalonians, i.e. after the epistles to the churches. (III) After Philemon, i.e. at the end of the Pauline canon.^{[11](#)}



A folio page of P⁴⁶

☒ ⁴⁶, one of the oldest extant New Testament manuscripts on papyrus, and dated about 200 A.D., contains most of the Pauline epistles. It contains (in order) the last eight chapters of Romans, all of Hebrews, almost all of 1–2 Corinthians, all of Ephesians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, and two chapters of 1 Thessalonians.

The main points are two:

1. Hebrews is found in the earliest manuscripts of the Pauline corpus.
2. Hebrews is located in various places in the canon but *always* in the Pauline corpus. In the oldest uncials (☐ A B C) it follows 2 Thessalonians and is before the Pastorals. In the predecessors of Codex B, it is between Galatians and Ephesians. In the Sahidic version it is before Galatians and in the Chester-Beatty papyrus codex it is located right after Romans.

4. Audience, Purpose, and Date of the Letter

Hebrews was written from Italy (Hebrews 13.24). While the author did not state his name, he assumed his audience knew him (Hebrews 10.32-34, 13.19, 22-23). Galatians was written to Gentiles and Hebrews was written to Jews but they

shared a common purpose. The message of both was that hope no longer existed in the Mosaic Law or in the ministrations of the Temple, i.e. the Levitical sacrifices.

The letter was sent most likely to the assembly in Jerusalem. Paul was *persona non grata* in Jerusalem and this would explain anonymity. Jerusalem was the center of Law-keeping Jews. Even though the Jewish leaders had reached an agreement with Paul at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), they continued to advance the Mosaic Law. When Paul came to Jerusalem, James reveled in the Mosaic Law (Acts 21.17-21). This demonstrates he had little understanding of or sympathy with Paul's ministry. Peter also had difficulties with Paul but recognized the glorified Lord had revealed to Paul, truths He had not shown the Twelve. He recognized and acknowledged Paul was the future and instructed his Jewish readers to heed him (2 Peter 3.15-16 cf. Acts 15.11). The jurisdiction of the Mosaic Law was over. Paul had argued vigorously that Gentiles were free from it, but more than that, the Law had ended for Jews also. Paul wrote Hebrews to explain to Jews the Law's meaning and significance in light of God's work of the cross. The issue was Christ's death and resurrection, not Law.

Another possibility is that Hebrews was written to assemblies in Asia Minor. Sadly, despite Paul's tireless work in this region, i.e., Galatia, Ephesus, Colossae, Lystra, Iconium, Antioch of Pisidia, the established churches abandoned his teachings (2 Timothy 1.15). In light Paul's letter to the Galatians, it seems likely (influenced by the Jerusalem assembly) they left Paul's teachings and followed the Law-keeping Jews of Jerusalem.

Defection from Paul's doctrines began in his lifetime and has continued for nearly 2,000 years. The doctrines of the Twelve and Paul have been merged and homogenized into a syncretic mess. Paul has been read into the gospels and the gospels into Paul. The vast majority of Christendom spends most of its time in the gospels. The Twelve are viewed as apostles of the

Church instead of Paul, *the* apostle of the Church, the body of Christ. But the Scriptures reveal the Twelve were apostles of Israel (cf. Matthew 19.28) not the Church. They had *nothing* to do with the Church. The Lord committed the great doctrines of the Church, the body of Christ, to Paul alone. Paul called these doctrines “secrets.” The Twelve *never* had a ministry to Gentiles. That was the domain the risen Lord gave Paul. Since most of Christendom spends 90% of its time in the gospels, it remains ignorant of Paul’s great truths for the Church. This explains the Church’s confusion and weakness. While the gospels are beneficial, as is all Scripture (2 Timothy 3.16), for learning (Romans 15.4; 1 Corinthians 10.11), the gospels are Old Testament. They were written to Jews for Jews. They recorded the Lord’s ministry to Israel (Romans 15.8), not to the Church, the body of Christ.

Paul probably wrote Hebrews early, around 53 A.D.¹² right after he wrote the Thessalonians. Paul was deeply grieved over Jewish rejection of the Messiah. After he arrived in Rome, only three days passed before he met with the chief Jews of the city (Acts 28.17). According to Luke’s record, some believed Paul’s message and some rejected it (Acts 28.24). This was Paul’s third major appeal to the Jews (cf. Acts 13, 18, 28) during the Acts period. Is it not reasonable, given Paul’s zeal for evangelism to Jews, his determination to go to Jerusalem despite dire warnings, and the fact he had time, for him to have written a systematic exposition to demonstrate to Jews that Christ had fulfilled the Law, the Old Testament types, and was indeed the Messiah? Was anyone better equipped for such a task?

4. Literary Similarities

We have already examined the salutation correspondences of Paul’s letters to Gentile churches, i.e., Romans through Philemon, to Hebrews. Other indicators of Pauline authorship include his usage of Habakkuk 2.4, quoted three times in the

New Testament: Romans 1.17, Galatians 3.11, and Hebrews 10.38. Such quotation fits with Paul's great emphasis on faith (Romans 3.26-30, 4.3-5, 5.1; Galatians 2.16, Ephesians 2.8-9, et. al. cf. Hebrews 4.2, 6.1, 12, 10.22, 38-39, 11.1-9, 11, 13, 17, 20-24, 27-31, 33, 39, 12.2, 13.7). Paul exalted Christ over all created beings (Ephesians 1.10, 20, 4.10; Philippians 2.9-10; Colossians 1.14-21; 2 Thessalonians 1.7 cf. Hebrews 1.1-14, 4.14, 7.26, 8.1). Other themes expounded in Hebrews include heavenly calling (1 Corinthians 15.49; 2 Corinthians 5.1-2; Ephesians 1.3, 2.6; Philippians 3.20; 2 Timothy 4.18 cf. Hebrews 3.1, 11.16, 12.22),¹³ and the temporary nature of the Mosaic Law (2 Corinthians 3.6-18; Galatians 3.19-26 cf. Hebrews 7.18-19, 8.3-10.13). Expressions such as "but now" (νυν[ὶ] δὲ) are found throughout Paul's writings and in Hebrews (Hebrews 2.8, 8.6, 9.26, 11.16, 12.26).¹⁴

The author's purpose in writing is revealed in Hebrews 13.22. It reads:

And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words.

The word "exhortation" is παράκλησις. Only Luke and Paul used this word. Indeed, Paul delivered the word word of exhortation to the Jews at Psidia Antioch (Acts 13.15). Lastly, no other writer wrote about the body of Christ. It is uniquely Paul. It is found in his others letters. And it is found in Hebrews 13.3.

Conclusion

This is where I need write: Game Over. Arguments against Pauline authorship of Hebrews are sickly and feeble. Arguments for alternative authors have all the weaknesses and none of the strengths of Pauline authorship and only highly speculative arguments can be made for non-Paul authors. That modern scholarship has hungrily seized such arguments

demonstrates infirmity, not health.

Evidence for Pauline authorship of Hebrews is more than substantial: it is overwhelming. The most reasonable explanation, recognized early in Church history, is Paul wrote Hebrews. When the internal evidence is examined, it overcomes easily issues of style. It is possible Luke worked with Paul and penned it but *that* is the only thing in doubt. Paul wrote Hebrews.

¹ Echoing the hubris of recent scholarship, Dan Wallace stated in [Hebrews: Introduction, Argument, and Outline](#), “the arguments against Pauline authorship, however, are conclusive.” In the same work, he stated authorship of Hebrews was “explicitly denied by Origen, the successor to Clement, who uttered his now-famous agnostic confession: ‘Whoever wrote the epistle, God only knows for sure.’” Dr. Wallace fails to recognize Origen’s words expressed uncertainty, *not* denial. Such a statement creates doubt as to his having read Origen.

² Ibid.

³ Paul, like most of us, learned some lessons the hard way. The Jews wished (and tried) to kill him. They failed, but their persecution resulted in his imprisonment. Paul wrote he was “the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles” (Ephesians 3.1). The Lord Himself put Paul in prison (in rented quarters, not a dungeon) to focus his attention upon his commission, “the apostle to the Gentiles” (Romans 11.13). After this experience, Paul no longer went to Jew “first” (cf. Romans 1.16).

⁴ Eta Linnemann, “A Call for a Retrial in the Case of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *Faith and Mission*, vol. 19, Issue 2, 2002, p.37. Professor Linneman’s article is essential reading for those who doubt Pauline authorship. She takes to task many arguments advanced against Pauline authorship and largely demolishes them. Another excellent study that addresses literary and theological similarities between Galatians and

Hebrews is Ben Witherington's article, "The Influence of Galatians on Hebrews," *New Testament Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1, January 1991, 146-152.

⁵ See [What Origen really taught about the authorship of Hebrews](#) by Benno Zuiddam.

⁶ See David L. Allen, *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews*, B & H Academic, 2010.; Dave Black, [Origen on the Authorship of Hebrews](#); Andrew W. Pitts and Joshua F. Walker, [The Authorship of Hebrews: A Further Development in the Luke-Paul Relationship](#).

⁷ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Eerdmans, 1993, p. 7.

⁸ See the author's study, [The Great Hinge](#).

⁹ See the author's study, [Paul's "Mystery"](#).

¹⁰ See the author's study, [Inspiration of Scripture](#).

¹¹ William H. P. Hatch, "The Position of Hebrews in the Canon of the New Testament," *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Apr., 1936), pp. 133. Professor Hatch's work is the definitive study of this subject. F.F. Bruce noted that the Chester Beatty collection of manuscripts, the "oldest known surviving copy of the Pauline letters" (dated end of the second century), includes Hebrews among the Pauline writings (F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 466).

¹² Internal evidence of the letter eliminates the possibility it was written after 70 A.D. The Temple and its operations were clearly continuing. Furthermore, given the subject matter of the letter, had the Temple been destroyed it could not have escaped mention. See John A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, London, SCM Press, 1976. Robinson was a liberal theologian who recognized that evidence to support the chronological arguments of liberal theologians in dating New Testament texts was threadbare. His book stunned the scholarly community because he dated all New Testament books before 70

A.D.—earlier than most conservative scholars. Paul’s statement in Hebrews 13.24, “those from Italy greet you” is evidence he wrote from Rome during his imprisonment as did his request for prayer for restoration in Hebrews 13.18-19. Paul wrote he was made a minister to complete the Scriptures (Colossians 1.25). This eliminates potential authors of Hebrews beyond c. 68 A.D., e.g., Clement of Rome.

¹³ One of Paul’s great secrets was that the Church, the body of Christ, was a new creation with a heavenly destiny. Israel’s hope was earthly. This is what all the covenants and Old Testament prophecies proclaimed. Thus, Jesus instructed his disciples to pray for the kingdom to come, “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6.10). Nothing in the Old Testament or in Jesus’ ministry revealed a heavenly destiny for Jewish believers. Heavenly citizenship was an unknown truth until the risen Lord disclosed it to Paul. Paul used the term [ἐπουράνιος](#) to describe the believer’s heavenly destiny and relationship. It occurs 23x in 17 verses (John 3.12, 1 Corinthians 15.40, 48-49; Ephesians 1.3, 20, 2.6, 3.10, 6.12, Philippians 2.10, 2 Timothy 4.18; Hebrews 3.1, 6.4, 8.5, 9.23, 11.16, 12.22). Other than the one occurrence in John, it occurred only in Paul’s letters and Hebrews.

¹⁴ See the author’s study, [But Now...](#)

©2013 Don Samdahl. Anyone is free to reproduce this material and distribute it, but it may not be sold.

Updated, May 6, 2016