

What Origen really taught about the authorship of Hebrews

Prof Benno Zuiddam (DTh PhD)

Faculty of Theology
School for Biblical Studies and Ancient Languages
North West University
Potchefstroom
South Africa
www.bennozuidam.com

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Origen (quoted by Eusebius in *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.25, Migne 2006:111-112) says:

ὅτι ὁ χαρακτήρ τῆς λέξεως τῆς Πρὸς Ἑβραίους ἐπιγεγραμμένης ἐπιστολῆς οὐκ ἔχει τὸ ἐν λόγῳ ιδιωτικὸν τοῦ ἀποστόλου, ὁμολογήσαντος ἑαυτὸν ιδιώτην εἶναι τῷ λόγῳ, τοῦτ' ἐστὶν τῇ φράσει, ἀλλ' ἐστὶν ἡ ἐπιστολὴ συνθέσει τῆς λέξεως Ἑλληνικωτέρα, πᾶς ὁ ἐπιστάμενος κρίνειν φράσεων διαφορὰς ὁμολογήσαι ἂν. 6.25.12 πάλιν τε αὖ ὅτι τὰ νοήματα τῆς ἐπιστολῆς θαυμάσια ἐστὶν καὶ οὐ δευτέρα τῶν ἀποστολικῶν ὁμολογουμένων γραμμάτων, καὶ τοῦτο ἂν συμφῆσαι εἶναι ἀληθὲς πᾶς ὁ προσέχων τῇ ἀναγνώσει τῇ ἀποστολικῇ». 6.25.13 τούτοις μεθ' ἕτερα ἐπιφέρει λέγων· «ἐγὼ δὲ ἀποφαινόμενος εἶποιμι' ἂν ὅτι τὰ μὲν νοήματα τοῦ ἀποστόλου ἐστὶν, ἡ δὲ φράσις καὶ ἡ σύνθεσις ἀπομνημονεύσαντός τινος τὰ ἀποστολικά καὶ ὡσπερ σχολιογραφήσαντός τινος τὰ εἰρημένα ὑπὸ τοῦ διδασκάλου. εἴ τις οὖν ἐκκλησία ἔχει ταύτην τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ὡς Παύλου, αὕτη εὐδοκιμεῖτω καὶ ἐπὶ τούτῳ· οὐ γὰρ εἰκὴ οἱ ἀρχαῖοι ἄνδρες ὡς Παύλου αὐτὴν παραδεδώκασιν. 6.25.14 τίς δὲ ὁ γράψας τὴν ἐπιστολὴν, τὸ μὲν ἀληθὲς θεὸς οἶδεν, ἡ δὲ εἰς ἡμᾶς φθάσασα ἱστορία ὑπὸ τινῶν μὲν λεγόντων ὅτι Κλήμης, ὁ γενόμενος ἐπίσκοπος Ῥωμαίων, ἔγραψεν τὴν ἐπιστολὴν, ὑπὸ τινῶν δὲ ὅτι Λουκᾶς, ὁ γράψας τὸ εὐαγγέλιον καὶ τὰς Πράξεις.

Translation:

That the character of the diction of the epistle entitled To the Hebrews has not the apostle's rudeness in speech, who confessed himself rude in speech, that is, in style, but that the epistle is better Greek in the framing of its diction, will be admitted by everyone who is able to discern differences of style. But again, on the other hand, that the thoughts of the epistle are admirable, and not inferior to the acknowledged writings of the apostle, to this also everyone will consent as true who has given attention to reading the apostle.... But as for myself, if I were to state my own opinion, I should say that the thoughts are the apostle's, but that the style and composition belonged to one who called to mind the apostle's teachings and, as it were, made short notes of what his master said. If any church, therefore, holds this epistle as Paul's, let it be commended for this also. For not without reason have the men of old handed it down as Paul's. But who wrote the epistle, in truth God knows. Yet the account which

has reached us [is twofold], some saying that Clement, who was bishop of the Romans, wrote the epistle, others, that it was Luke, he who wrote the Gospel and the Acts.

Origen maintains Pauline authorship throughout *De Principiis*: (e.g. Preface 1; 1.2.5; 3.1.10; 4.1.13).

Pref. 1. 1. 1. All who believe and are assured that grace and truth were obtained through Jesus Christ, and who know Christ to be the truth, agreeably to His own declaration, "I am the truth," derive the knowledge which incites men to a good and happy life from no other source than from the very words and teaching of Christ. And by the words of Christ we do not mean those only which He spoke when He became man and tabernacled in the flesh; for before that time, Christ, the Word of God, was in Moses and the prophets. For without the Word of God, how could they have been able to prophesy of Christ? And were it not our purpose to confine the present treatise within the limits of all attainable brevity, it would not be difficult to show, in proof of this statement, out of the Holy Scriptures, how Moses or the prophets both spoke and performed all they did through being filled with the Spirit of Christ. And therefore I think it sufficient to quote this one testimony of Paul from the Epistle to the Hebrews, in which he says: "By faith Moses, when he had come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of the Egyptians." Moreover, that after His ascension into heaven He spoke in His apostles, is shown by Paul in these words: "Or do you seek a proof of Christ who speaks in me?"

(This translation used from: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04120.htm>)

1.2.5. Let us now ascertain how those statements which we have advanced are supported by the authority of holy Scripture. The Apostle Paul says, that the only-begotten Son is the "image of the invisible God," and "the first-born of every creature." And when writing to the Hebrews, he says of Him that He is "the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person." Now, we find in the treatise called the Wisdom of Solomon the following description of the wisdom of God: "For she is the breath of the power of God, and the purest efflux of the glory of the Almighty." Nothing that is polluted can therefore come upon her. For she is the splendour of the eternal light, and the stainless mirror of God's working, and the image of His goodness. Now we say, as before, that Wisdom has her existence nowhere else save in Him who is the beginning of all things: from whom also is derived everything that is wise, because He Himself is the only one who is by nature a Son, and is therefore termed the Only-begotten.

1.2.7. But since we quoted the language of Paul regarding Christ, where He says of Him that He is "the brightness of the glory of God, and the express figure of His person," let us see what idea we are to form of this. According to John, "God is light." The only-begotten Son, therefore, is the glory of this light, proceeding inseparably from (God) Himself, as brightness does from light, and illuminating the whole of creation. For, agreeably to what we have already explained as to the manner in which He is the Way, and conducts to the Father.

1.5.1. There are certain holy angels of God whom Paul terms "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." In the writings also of St. Paul himself we find him designating them, from some unknown source, as thrones, and dominions, and principalities, and powers; and after this enumeration, as if knowing that there were still other rational offices and orders besides those which he had named, he says of the Saviour: "Who is above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." From which he shows that there were certain beings besides those which he had mentioned, which may be named indeed in this world, but were not now enumerated by him, and perhaps were not known by any other individual; and that there were others which may not be named in this world, but will be named in the world to come.

(These translations used from: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04121.htm>)

3.1.10. But since we acknowledge the God who spoke by Moses to be not only just, but also good, let us carefully inquire how it is in keeping with the character of a just and good Deity to have hardened the heart of Pharaoh. And let us see whether, following the example of the Apostle Paul, we are able to solve the difficulty by help of some parallel instances: if we can show, e.g., that by one and the same

act God has pity upon one individual, but hardens another; not purposing or desiring that he who is hardened should be so, but because, in the manifestation of His goodness and patience, the heart of those who treat His kindness and forbearance with contempt and insolence is hardened by the punishment of their crimes being delayed; while those, on the other hand, who make His goodness and patience the occasion of their repentance and reformation, obtain compassion. To show more clearly, however, what we mean, let us take the illustration employed by the Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where he says, "For the earth, which drinks in the rain that comes oft upon it, and brings forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, will receive blessing from God; but that which bears thorns and briers is rejected, and is near unto cursing, whose end is to be burned." Now from those words of Paul which we have quoted, it is clearly shown that by one and the same act on the part of God— that, viz., by which He sends rain upon the earth— one portion of the ground, when carefully cultivated, brings forth good fruits; while another, neglected and uncared for, produces thorns and thistles. And if one, speaking as it were in the person of the rain, were to say, "It is I, the rain, that have made the good fruits, and it is I that have caused the thorns and thistles to grow," however hard the statement might appear, it would nevertheless be true; for unless the rain had fallen, neither fruits, nor thorns, nor thistles would have sprung up, whereas by the coming of the rain the earth gave birth to both.

(This translation used from: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04123.htm>)

4.1.13. Moreover, in the Epistle to the Galatians, as if upbraiding those who think that they read the law, and yet do not understand it, judging that those do not understand it who do not reflect that allegories are contained under what is written, he says: "Tell me, you that desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written, Abraham had two sons; the one by the bond-maid, the other by the free woman. But he who was by the bond-maid was born according to the flesh; but he of the free woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants," and so on. Now we must carefully observe each word employed by him. He says: "You who desire to be under the law," not "You that are under the law;" and, "Do you not hear the law?"— "hearing" being understood to mean "comprehending" and "knowing." And in the Epistle to the Colossians, briefly abridging the meaning of the whole legislation, he says: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a festival, or of a new moon, or of Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come." Moreover, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, discoursing of those who belong to the circumcision, he writes: "who serve for an ensample and shadow of heavenly things." Now it is probable that, from these illustrations, those will entertain no doubt with respect to the five books of Moses, who have once given in their adhesion to the apostle, as divinely inspired; but do you wish to know, with regard to the rest of the history, if it also happened as a pattern? We must note, then, the expression in the Epistle to the Romans, "I have left to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal," quoted from the third book of Kings, which Paul has understood as equivalent (in meaning) to those who are Israelites according to election, because not only were the Gentiles benefited by the advent of Christ, but also certain of the race of God.

(This translation used from: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04124.htm>)

Origen writes in *Epistula ad Africanum* 11.67-68 (Migne):

ὁ τὴν πρὸς Ἑβραίους γράψας φησὶν· «Ἐλιθάσθησαν, ἐπρίσθησαν, ἐν φόνῳ μαχαίρας ἀπέθανον.» Πευσόμεθα γὰρ ἐπὶ τίνα ἀναφέρηται τὸ, «ἐπρίσθησαν,» κατὰ τι ἔθος ἀρχαῖον οὐ μόνον Ἑβραϊκόν, ἀλλὰ καὶ Ἑλληνικόν, πληθυντικῶς λεγόμενον περὶ ἑνός. Σαφές δ' ὅτι αἱ παραδόσεις λέγουσι πεπρίσθαι Ἡσαΐαν τὸν προφήτην· καὶ ἐν τινὶ ἀποκρύφῳ τοῦτο φέρεται· ὅπερ τάχα ἐπίτηδες ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων ἑραδιουργηται, λέξεις τινὰς τὰς μὴ πρεπούσας παρεμβεβληκότων τῇ γραφῇ, ἵν' ἡ ὅλη ἀπιστηθῇ· ἀλλ' εἰκός τινα, θλιβόμενον ἀπὸ τῆς εἰς ταῦτα ἀποδείξεως, συγχρήσασθαι τῷ βουλήματι τῶν ἀθετούντων τὴν Ἐπιστολήν, ὡς οὐ 11.68 Παύλῳ γεγραμμένην· πρὸς ὃν ἄλλων λόγων κατ' ἰδίαν χρῆζομεν εἰς ἀπόδειξιν τοῦ εἶναι Παύλου τὴν ἐπιστολήν.

Translation:

As an example, take the story told about Isaiah; and guaranteed by the Epistle to the Hebrews, which is found in none of their public books. For the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in speaking of the prophets, and what they suffered, says, "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were slain with the sword" To whom, I ask, does the "sawn asunder" refer (for by an old idiom, not peculiar to Hebrew, but found also in Greek, this is said in the plural, although it refers to but one person)? Now we know very well that tradition says that Isaiah the prophet was sawn asunder; and this is found in some apocryphal work, which probably the Jews have purposely tampered with, introducing some phrases manifestly incorrect, that discredit might be thrown on the whole. However, some one hard pressed by this argument may have recourse to the opinion of those who reject this Epistle as not being Paul's; against whom I must at some other time use other arguments to prove that it is Paul's.