

An unrolled scroll of parchment with Hebrew text, held by two wooden rollers. The scroll is open, showing two columns of text written in a cursive Hebrew script. The parchment is aged and yellowed. The rollers are made of light-colored wood and have circular bases with a central hole. The scroll is set against a plain white background.

Hebrews

Introduction

Author

- Unidentified. Origen said “Only God knows”
- Suggestions
 - Clement of Alexandria and others suggested Paul (cf. Commentary on Hebrews, Robert Milligan, p. 5-19).
 - Tertullian suggested Barnabas
 - Luther suggested Apollos
 - Some suggest Priscilla
 - I think it sounds like John
- Many think it was **not an apostle** (Hebrews 2:3) since they heard firsthand from Jesus (cf. Galatians 1:11-12 re. Paul)

Recipients

- Jewish Christians (they needed to know how to respond to their Jewish parents at Passover)
- Personally acquainted with the author, Hebrews 10:34; 13:19)

Date

- Prior to 96 (Clement of Rome quotes from Hebrews in his letter written in 96)
- There are indications that it was written prior to 70 A.D.
 - There is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple
 - The author writes as though priests were still offering sacrifices – Hebrew 8:4; 10:11
- If the Jewish Christians were in Palestine, it was likely before or at the beginning of the Jewish Wars (ca. 66-70 A.D.; cf. Hebrews 12:4).
- **63-65 A.D.** is often suggested.

Contemporaneous events in the Roman Empire (90's)

- No significant military action this decade
- Economically,
 - In AD 92, the Flavian Palace was completed by Domitian at enormous expense.
 - The empire saw reforms by Nerva after the death of Domitian in 96, including but not limited to a string of economic reforms intended to alleviate the burden of taxation from the most needy Romans.
 - Before long, Nerva's expenses strained the economy of Rome and, although perhaps not ruinous to the extent once suggested by Syme, necessitated the formation of a special commission on the economy to drastically reduce expenditures.

Contemporaneous events in the Roman Empire (90's)

- According to some historians, Jews and Christians were heavily persecuted toward the end of Domitian's reign (89-96).
 - The Book of Revelation, which mentions at least one instance of martyrdom (Rev 2:13; cf. 6:9), is thought by some scholars to have been written during Domitian's reign.
 - According to Barnes, "Melito, Tertullian, and Bruttius stated that Domitian persecuted the Christians.
 - Domitian soon changed his mind and recalled those whom he had exiled". A minority of the historians have maintained that there was little or no anti-Christian activity during Domitian's time.
 - The lack of consensus by historians about the extent of persecution during the reign of Domitian derives from the fact that while accounts of persecution exist, these accounts are cursory or their reliability is debated.

Contemporaneous events in the Roman Empire (90's)

- Josephus wrote [*Antiquities of the Jews*](#) (covering the history of the Jewish people), [*Against Apion*](#) (a defense of Judaism as a classical religion and philosophy against criticism by Apion), and [*The Life of Flavius Josephus*](#) (an autobiographical text where Josephus details his own life).
- Tacitus wrote [*Germania*](#) (a historical and ethnographic work on the Germanic peoples outside the Roman Empire) and [*Agricola*](#) (which recounts the life of his father-in-law, an eminent Roman general and governor of Britain).

Purpose and Theme

- The author wrote this epistle to prevent his readers from abandoning their faith in Christ (Hebrews 2:1-4).
- To encourage his Jewish brethren not to go back to the Old Law, he endeavored to show the superiority of Christ and His Covenant (Hebrews 8:1-2, 6).

Purpose and Theme

- A key word found throughout the epistle is "**better**":
 - Christ is "better than the angels" - Hebrews 1:4
 - We enjoy "the bringing in of a better hope" - Hebrews 7:19
 - Jesus has become "the surety of a better covenant" - Hebrews 7:22
 - He is also "the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises" - Hebrews 8:6
 - The heavenly things benefit from "better sacrifices" - Hebrews 9:23

Purpose and Theme

- The theme of this epistle was to exhort his readers to remain faithful to the much better things they have in Christ (Hebrews 13:22).

Cursory Outline

1. The superiority of Christ (Hebrews 1:1-8:6)

- A. Better than the prophets, as a much better Spokesman (1:1-3)
- B. Better than the angels, by virtue of His Deity and humanity (1:4 - 2:18)
- C. Better than Moses, for He is the Son who provides a heavenly rest (3:1 - 4:13)
- D. Better than Aaron, as His priesthood is a superior one (4:16 - 8:6)

2. The superiority of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:7 - 10:18)

- A. For it is based upon better promises (8:7-13)
- B. For it is based upon a better sanctuary (9:1-28)
- C. For it is based upon a better sacrifice (10:1-18)

3. Exhortations drawn from this superiority (Hebrews 10:19 - 13:25)

- A. Draw near to God and hold fast (10:19-39)
- B. Run the race of faith with endurance (11:1 - 12:29)
- C. Miscellaneous exhortations (13:1-25)