

# Introduction to letter to the Hebrews

## Who is it addressed to ?

Hebrews (assumed from the contents – very Jewish material)

Messianic Jews (Judaism was a mix of different groups)

It has a detailed discussion of Jewish history and practices to help an audience, mainly of Messianic believers in the congregation.

## Who wrote it? (it doesn't say)

Origen c 254 AD said “who actually wrote the letter, only God knows”

KJV attributes it to Paul but it is not his style.

In the end, it doesn't matter - it was recognised by the early church as scripture and included in the NT cannon

## Where was it sent to ? What address?

Hebrews 13:24 ... Those who come from Italy send you greetings.

Recipients are 'relatives/friends' of those FROM Italy who send greetings ... so it was probably sent TO Rome.

This also gives us a good reason why the letter was written because of events taking place in Rome at that time.

**When was it written ?**

**Before** the destruction of the temple in **AD 70**

Temple rituals are still being practiced

Hebrews 7:27 ... those high priests (*who*) **offer** sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people,

Possibly to second generation believers. Timothy is still alive.

Hebrews 13:23 You should know that our brother Timothy has been released,

**When was it written ?**

**After** Paul's letter to the Romans **AD 60?**

Since Romans makes no mention of persecution  
but Hebrews deals with believers facing persecution

Hebrews 10:32-34 But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property,

## Why was it written ?

Persecution is beginning (lost property etc, imprisoned , but not killed yet)

Hebrews 12:4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

This suggests sometime in Nero's (54-68 AD) later stage. The Fire of Rome was in 64 AD, which Nero blamed the Christians for.

There are repeated warnings to not return to the Judaism they had left. This suggests the reason for the letter. Jews could return to the synagogue to escape persecution as a member of the unprotected Christian sect. The Jewish synagogue was accepted in Rome. However they could return only on the basis of renouncing Jesus as the Messiah and Lord – which meant abandoning their faith!

The message is 'Don't give up what is better to return to the old'.

## **Important points about the Hebrew believers?**

**They knew their OT scriptures** . The writer doesn't give references and proof texts. He assumes they know Jesus is the Messiah. His aim is to establish in their hearts that Jesus is better than all they have left and are thinking of going back to.

**Angels had a prominent place.** The Jewish view of God was exalted – He was above mankind. They believed that God dealt with humans through the mediation of angels. This could lead to the risk of angel worship.

Colossians 2:18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,

## **Important points about the letter to the Hebrew believers?**

**Topics** : It deals with issues that are especially important to Jews.

**Structure** : The letter gives sections of teaching followed by warnings. The warnings of the dangers get stronger as the letter progresses, going from

The danger of drifting

The danger of doubting

The danger of denying

**The message** : “Jesus is better”:-

than Angels, the Law, the temple worship, the priesthood.

Stay with Him. Don't go back and lose it all.

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,

OT times in various ways – but fragmented, shadows

Use of term ‘shadow’ is a helpful one

Hebrews 8:4-5 ... there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.”



but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,

Now there is a clear superior communication by his Son

Note: the writer assumes the know Jesus is God's Son.

whom he appointed heir of all things,

What does he inherit as messiah?

The whole restored creation

Colossians 1:16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

When ? His enemies defeated

Philippians 2:9-11 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

and through whom he made the universe.

They accept he is the creator

John 1:3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

He created the universe and its inhabitants  
Angels, man, animals etc  
Jesus as man lifts humanity to the throne :

Psalm 8:5-6 Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet,

The Son is the radiance of God`s glory  
and the exact representation of his being,

Do you want to know what God is like? Look to Jesus!

John 14:9 Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

He is Not an idol

sustaining all things by his powerful word.

Everything was created by his word  
He keeps it going - eg. Our next breath  
One day He will call the end by his word

Don't throw away the best for less

After he had provided purification for sins,  
he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Work done, The executive throne

So he became as much superior to the angels  
as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

No comparison - above angels  
(a relevant subject to the Jewish people)

Use of term “name” not simply a label.

For to which of the angels did God ever say,  
"You are my Son; today I have become your Father"?  
Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"?

Psalms 2:7, 2 Samuel 7:14 quotes.

Shows 2<sup>nd</sup> temple period understanding of these passages as messianic.  
In 2 Samuel 7:7-14, the initial reference about God's promise to David and Solomon but it's bigger than them.

2 Samuel 7:16 Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.



For to which of the angels did God ever say,  
"You are my Son; today I have become your Father"?  
Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"?

The answer is "Never" No angel was ever called the Son,

Contrast:

Eternal Son before creation [John 1:2](#) He was with God in the beginning.

Jesus at his baptism (at the beginning of his ministry)

[Matthew 3:17](#) And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

by His Resurrection :

[Romans 1:4](#) He was declared to be the Son of God in power ...  
by his resurrection from the dead,

And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world,

Psalm 91

Firstborn (human thinking problem

God got more children (no other only begotten) rest adopted

JW problem with Colossians 1 :13

Firstborn of(over) all creation

Rights of firstborn -> heir (again) (not always natural firstborn is the heir eg Jacob, Reuben )

Co- heirs through union with Jesus

Romans 8:17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

he says, "Let all God`s angels worship him."

That settles it!  
Creatures worship the creator

This verse comes from Deuteronomy 32:43  
(in the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls)

In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes **his** angels winds, **his** servants flames of fire."

Psalm 104:4

The comparison suggests varied appearance and ministry

But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."

## Unchanging

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

On an eternal throne

Justice rules (at last!)

It's a wedding song (Psalm 45:6-7) - bridegroom.

Higher than angels true mediator

He also says, "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

Creation

O Lord .... (God's name given to Jesus)

Earth perishes

Eternal reign -> hope of new heaven and earth

**Lesson:**

***Things may be difficult now but hold on. The best is still to come.***

To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"?

Answer none!

He will triumph over his (our) enemies

Joshua 10:24 When they had brought these kings to Joshua, he summoned all the men of Israel and said to the army commanders who had come with him, "Come here and put your feet on the necks of these kings." So they came forward and placed their feet on their necks.

Game hunter analogy

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those  
who will inherit salvation?

Angels worship and work to serve believers  
Salvation is a grace gift

Psalm 34:7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear  
him, and he delivers them.

2 Kings 6:16-17 "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who  
are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha  
prayed, "Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see." Then the LORD  
opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of  
horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Eg. Peter in prison

Billy Graham: *"Angels: God's Secret Agents"*



What sort of things try to make believers give up?

How do you hold on to the future when the present  
is hard?

How much does the ministry of angels enter our  
experience?

**Jesus is better**  
**Don't go back when the going gets difficult.**