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Hebrews Introduction (Part 1)



Hebrews - Steve Gregg

In this introduction to the book of Hebrews, Steve Gregg reflects on the mysterious authorship of the book and its unique audience. He notes that although the book shares similarities with Paul's writings, it has distinct differences and is likely not his work. Gregg also discusses the book's arguments against the old Jewish sacrificial system and its emphasis on the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, the book of Hebrews presents a tight and compelling argument for the superiority of Christ over all other spiritual authorities.

Transcript

In this session, I'd like to give an introduction to the book of Hebrews. All books of the Bible, I think, when we study them, we can benefit from some introductory considerations. Authorship, recipients, setting, things like that are very helpful to us in understanding why the author says things that he says, and how they fit into his overall purpose, and so forth.

The book of Hebrews is particularly in need of some consideration if we really want to appreciate its meaning and understand what the author is trying to get across. Just some basic facts about the book of Hebrews. There's 305 verses in the book of Hebrews, which isn't very important in itself, except when you consider that about 49 of those verses, or approximately 1 in 6 of the verses in Hebrews, is a quotation from the Old Testament.

And therefore, Hebrews, more than any other book of the New Testament, is thick with references to the Old Testament. This is one of the clues as to what kind of readership it may have. We'll talk about that separately.

But the author is very conversant in the Old Testament. I remember as a young man many years ago, when I was a young man, and reading the book of Hebrews, just being so impressed with the tightness of the argument of the author. What a good debater he would be.

How good he was at making his points and backing them up with scripture. He would see things in the Old Testament that the average person wouldn't see. His treatment, for

example, in chapter 7 of Melchizedek is incredible.

We have only, what, four verses, five verses maybe, in the Old Testament about Melchizedek? And they say very little, and the author just takes every detail of what's there and unfolds it into this huge theological treatise. And he's just one who's meditated, obviously, on the Old Testament a great deal. And has brought forth, like Jesus said, every scribe that is instructed in things of the kingdom is like a householder who brings out of his treasures new treasures and old treasures.

And this book, probably more than most New Testament books, is full of Old Testament treasure that is brought out as one who is instructed in the ways of the kingdom of God and has seen the Old Testament through that lens. And it's important for us, and this would be true no matter what New Testament book we're studying, but in Hebrews especially, to recognize that the New Testament writers did see things in the Old Testament that the average rabbi of Israel, though studied in the Old Testament, would not see. And part of the reason for that, maybe the main reason for that, is that in Luke 24, it says that Jesus opened their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.

They, in this case, are the apostles in the upper room with Jesus after his resurrection, the very night he had been raised from the dead, only 12 hours earlier. So this is the first time he's gathered with the entire group. Well, as near as we can tell.

Luke, it's hard to tell because this may be a later gathering, but it seems to be the very night that Jesus rose from the dead. It says in Luke 24, in verse 44, or 45, let me see here. Verse 45, he opened their understanding that they might comprehend the scriptures.

Now the scriptures, of course, means the Old Testament scriptures. There were no New Testament scriptures at the time. And that means that Jesus gave them some kind of an enlightened understanding of the Old Testament, which apparently would be available no other way.

Why not just go talk to the rabbis about the Old Testament? Well, Jesus never opened their understanding. Remember, Jesus even said on one occasion, in Matthew, he says, I thank you, Father, that you've hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. The disciples were like babes.

The wise and prudent would be the wise rabbis, the scholarly ones. But they didn't have it. The understanding of what the Old Testament was really about was missed by most of the rabbis.

In fact, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3 that there's a veil over the heart and the mind of the average Jew when he reads the Old Testament. That veil is taken away in Christ, he says,

when they turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away. So the assumption is that even though the Old Testament were the scriptures of the Jews, most of the Jews were not qualified, really, to understand them the way that God meant them.

Therefore, Jesus had to illuminate a group of people, his disciples, because they would be the teachers of the church. They would be the writers of the New Testament, and show them what those scriptures really meant. So we find that the writer of Hebrews, or any New Testament writer, any apostle, is using Old Testament scriptures in a way that seems novel or innovative.

Or you might say, I wouldn't have gotten that from that passage. Very possibly you wouldn't have. Very possibly no one would have, unless Jesus had illuminated their understandings.

And that's what we're going to find in this book more than any other New Testament book. Well, Revelation too, because it's got a ton of Old Testament scriptures woven through it. But no quotations.

Hebrews quotes the scriptures about one verse out of six in his book. Revelation has hundreds of allusions to scripture, but not one quote from the Old Testament. Interestingly.

So, these scriptures from the Old Testament in Hebrews come from 27 different Old Testament passages. And in the 13 chapters of Hebrews, there's 37 different times when the author interrupts himself to quote something from the Old Testament. So this guy, his mind is bathed in the Old Testament.

I said this guy, partly because we don't know who the guy was. I couldn't tell you his name. Whoever it was that wrote it, we have only one real clue.

I mean, there might be other clues, but they're much too general. The only thing that's like a specific clue is in chapter 13 of verse 23, where we find that the author is a person who is associated in some ways with Timothy. In Hebrews chapter 13 in verse 23, just before the book closes, the author says, Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.

So the author is intending to visit his audience, who have not yet really been identified either. We'll have to talk about who the audience was. Well, whoever the audience was and whoever the author was, the author intended to travel with Timothy, and it seemed like a natural thing to do.

He says, Our brother Timothy is at liberty. We'll be coming together to see you if possible. Now, this book was by many early Christians attributed to Paul, but the Western church in general did not think Paul wrote it.

Clement of Rome, who is probably a contemporary of Paul's, Paul does mention in Romans somebody named Clement. It might not be the same Clement who wrote the book that's called Clement from Rome, but a very early church father in Rome did not think Paul wrote it. The Western church as a whole, for the most part, rejected Paul's authorship of the book.

Although our Bible might, if you have a King James anyway, it might say the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Hebrews. That entire title is missing from the actual manuscripts. The book is anonymously written.

Very unusual for a New Testament book. I mean, the Gospels are written that way, but the epistles mostly are not anonymous. This is one of the things that caused the early church to withhold acceptance of it in the canon as long as they did.

Hebrews was with the last group of books that were accepted by the church as part of the New Testament. And this acceptance wasn't until about 397 AD, three and a half centuries after Christ died. The church finally accepted the last batch of books that were held in question, which included Hebrews because it was anonymous, Revelation because its authorship was questioned, and 2 Peter and Jude because Peter's authorship was questioned and Jude's apostleship was questioned.

So the church had its questions about some of these books for a long time. But Hebrews, Revelation, Jude, and 2 Peter came to be accepted pretty much together by the church. And one of the problems was, the main problem with Hebrews, was that no one knew who wrote it.

And to be included in the sacred canon of scripture, it's helpful to know who wrote a book. For example, to know if he's a heretic or not. Now, if he's an apostle, it's a slam dunk for inclusion, because that was what the New Testament was supposed to essentially be, the apostolic writings.

And if you knew an author to be an apostle, it's a shoo-in for inclusion in the canon. But if you don't know that he's an apostle, you need to find out if he's got apostolic credentials in some other way. For example, Luke had apostolic credentials, though he was not himself one of the apostles.

Mark had apostolic credentials, though he was not one of the apostles. But the reason is that Mark was the protegee of Peter, and Luke was a protegee of Paul, and traveled extensively with them, and no doubt wrote their books under the oversight of these two apostles. And that's what gives them authority to be in the New Testament.

But who wrote this book? Well, if Paul wrote it, it belongs in the New Testament without any question. If Paul didn't write it, we have to know whether the writer was somebody who had some kind of, by extension, some kind of apostolic credential. Now, I personally

believe that whoever wrote it did have that credential.

And I believe the reason is because he traveled with Timothy. Now, Timothy, Paul may have been dead by the time this was written. We don't know.

We don't know the exact date. We have some limitations on how late it could have been. But it could possibly have been written after Paul was dead, and Timothy would then not be with Paul anymore.

Timothy traveled with Paul a lot in Paul's later life. They were fairly inseparable. If Timothy is coming out of prison and traveling without Paul, it may be that Paul had died, but this person was apparently a companion of Timothy also, which means almost certainly a companion of Paul at one point.

And therefore, the connection with Timothy and the probable connection with Paul gives this author considerable weight, more than just any old Christian writer who has something that he'd like to say. This person seems to be representing apostolic teaching. For one thing, if the author was not on the same page with Paul, Timothy would certainly have known it, and Timothy would no doubt have felt a need to correct the author.

Timothy knew Paul's doctrine inside. Paul told Timothy, you've fully known my doctrine and my way of life. So, I mean, for this person to be traveling with Timothy means that we can pretty much rule out any suggestion that this author would be saying things that Timothy would disagree with.

And if he was saying anything that Paul would disagree with, Timothy would disagree with it too. So, we can say that whoever wrote it no doubt has the weight of apostolic sanction, and therefore, it's good to have the book in our Bible. It belongs there.

But it's probably not Paul. Now, it could be that Paul wrote it. Why would anyone say he didn't write it? Well, there's a number of reasons that it was questioned.

One is that the Greek style is quite different than Paul's. This is probably the main problem. Paul's writings, we have enough of them to know something about his style of writing.

He didn't write very literate Greek. He had these really long, run-on sentences, and, you know, his grammar wasn't as good as some. He had his own distinctive vocabulary in some cases that he leaned on.

We have a lot of samples of Paul's writings, and Hebrews just in many respects does not resemble it. The most telling feature against Paul in it is that the Greek is very polished. Whoever wrote it was a very literate writer in Greek, which Paul apparently was not.

Another issue is that Paul is not named as the author, and Paul usually names himself. In

fact, in all the other epistles of Paul that we know of, he puts his name right up there in the front. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ to so-and-so.

This author does not identify himself or his audience, though he does expect them to know who he is, obviously. He says, I'm going to come visit you along with Timothy. He assumes they know who he is.

In fact, his authority was, he presumes that they would recognize his authority. So the audience is not unaware of who he is, but we may be. In any case, the literary style, the fact that it's anonymously written and so forth, has been a stumbling block to the acceptance of the theory that Paul is the author.

Now, of course, there is a possibility that Paul is the author, and that he had an amanuensis who wrote very good Greek. It could even have been Luke. Luke's Greek style was excellent.

The book of Luke and the book of Acts are considered to have some of the very best, most polished Greek in the entire New Testament. Luke was a Greek, and therefore, that was his native language. And scholars agree that Luke and Acts have excellent Greek.

In fact, Luke, Acts, and Hebrews are the three books that have the very best Greek in the New Testament. And therefore, if Luke served as an amanuensis, and Paul simply dictated, as he often did, his letters, and we know that. I mean, for example, in Romans, we know that Romans was dictated to a man named Tertius.

Because in chapter 16 of Romans, Paul's saying, say hi to so and so, say hi to so and so, say hi to so and so, and then Paul takes a breath, and you find this, I, Tertius, who wrote this letter, also send my greetings. Paul apparently took a moment to think of who else he wanted to greet, and Tertius said, I'll stick my little greeting in here too. I'm the one who's writing this letter.

And it may be that Luke was the one writing this letter, and Paul was the one dictating the letter. Now, an amanuensis was like a secretary, but he wasn't like a stenographer. He didn't take down letters word for word, usually.

He would have the ability to rephrase things if it was better to do so, and many times a piece of writing would much more reflect the amanuensis literary style than that of the person dictating. And so, it's not impossible that Paul really is the substantial author of this. You know, he says, I'll be coming with Timothy.

Could mean, we think of Paul. When we think of someone saying, when Timothy's at liberty, we'll come together. Well, in the book of Acts, Timothy is almost always with Paul.

So, we can't rule out 100% that Paul's the author. I think most scholars rule it out now,

and the Western church didn't accept Paul as the author in the early days. But there have always been some who thought Paul was the author, and there's some reason for it.

Now, there are some things in Hebrews that are very Pauline. There's an emphasis on the new covenant. Paul talked about the new covenant in 2 Corinthians.

There's an emphasis on the milk and the solid food. The dichotomy, that the immature drink only milk. The mature can eat solid food.

We find this in the end of Hebrews 5. We also find it in 1 Corinthians 3, the opening verses from Paul. It's true, more than one person might have come up with such metaphors, but I don't know how natural it would be for people to come up with the exact same metaphor, uninfluenced by each other. It may be this is a very Pauline thought, it seems to me.

I'm not committed to this being Paul's epistle. I'm just saying that I don't know that it can be ruled out quite as neatly as some people would. It seems like the objections can be overcome, but there are other theories, quite a few other theories as to who wrote it.

Clement of Alexandria, for example, who was in the 3rd century, believed that Paul was the author and had written it in Aramaic, but that Luke had translated it into Greek. Now, this sounds a little bit like my suggestion that Paul could have dictated it and Luke was the amanuensis. However, my suggestion is better than Clement of Alexandria, because Clement's suggestion suggests that Paul actually wrote it in Aramaic and that Luke translated it.

So we're looking at a translation, not an original. We're looking at a book translated into Greek. Now, the reason this theory really doesn't work, although otherwise it's a great theory, is not for this problem.

I mean, you've got Paul's thought, it seems to me, but Luke's style. So why not a translation from Paul's writing into Luke's writing? Well, the problem with that is there are employed in the book of Hebrews certain what we'd have to call plays on words that work in Greek, but they don't work in Aramaic. And a person writing in Aramaic would not have made this particular kind of an argument.

For example, in chapter 9, verses 16 and 17, it says, For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives. Now, the word testament here is, the argument is counting on the fact that in Greek, the word testament and covenant are the same.

Now, a testament is a will, a last will and testament. A covenant is something else, but the same Greek word is used for both. Not so in Aramaic.

There are different words in Aramaic and Hebrew for testament and covenant. And therefore, if Paul was writing this in Aramaic, as Clement of Alexandria thought, he wouldn't have made this argument because it wouldn't work in Aramaic. The writer is assuming that the readers are Greek and that the Greek word that can mean covenant or testament is going to work out for them.

While Paul could have made that argument in Greek and Luke could have smoothed it out using his style, it's not likely that Paul made that argument in an Aramaic original and Luke translated it. This does not have the features of a book translated into Greek. It actually depends on a Greek thinking to come up with the arguments because it uses special characteristics of Greek vocabulary and so forth.

There are some who think that Luke himself is the author and could have even been written without Paul's dictation. Luke could write. He wrote the book of Luke.

He wrote the book of Acts. If he's the author of this book, it has his style. Since his other books are in scripture, it would certainly make a strong argument for this book being in scripture too.

The biggest problem with Luke being the actual author is the strong impression that one gets that the author is Jewish. One of those reasons is because the author is not only so conversant in the Old Testament, but so enamored with Old Testament ritual, especially the Yom Kippur ritual, which receives a lot of attention in chapters 9 and 10. Some people think it's almost like a Levite wrote it because it's so taken up with matters of the priesthood, the Melchizedek priesthood, and the Aaronic priesthood, and the Day of Atonement ritual, the Holy of Holies.

They say, Luke was a Greek, and this sounds like it's written by some person who's definitely got a Jewish mindset. Maybe so. However, I happen to know some Gentile Christians who are very conversant in Old Testament rituals and laws.

In fact, some of them have a very Jewish mindset. It's not impossible that Luke may have written this. I think that a well-informed Gentile Christian theologian could have written similar things.

The concerns do seem to be the concerns more of a Jewish writer than of a Gentile writer, but I don't think we could rule out entirely that Luke could have written it, certainly. How do we know that Luke was not a Jew? Well, we only have one passage that informs us of that, but it seems to do so quite effectively, and that's in Colossians 4. In Colossians 4.11, Paul is listing some of the people who are with him when he's sending the letter. He says, Jesus, who is called Justice, that's not our Jesus, that's another Jesus.

These are my only fellow workers, he's listed some before that, for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision. These are the only Jewish co-workers I have. But then, down

in verse 14, he lists some other people, including Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, great Jew.

Now, he has listed all the Jewish Christian co-workers earlier, up to verse 11, then he lists some other guys who obviously are not Jewish, and Luke is among them. So, we know that Luke is no doubt the only author in the New Testament who is not a Jew. And that being so, just makes it kind of intuitively unlikely that he would write such a Jewish-oriented book as the book of Hebrews.

Or, for that matter, he would have to think of himself as the right guy to write to a Jewish audience, if indeed his audience was Jewish. I mean, the Jewish Christians had trouble with Paul, in many cases. At least the ones who were Judeans did.

And if they would have had trouble with Paul, they might have had even more trouble with, you know, a Gentile, who had been discipled entirely by Paul. I mean, it's hard to know why he would be the right guy to write a letter like this. It's interesting that Tertullian, who wrote in the 2nd century, or early 3rd century, he thought Barnabas, Paul's companion Barnabas, was the author of Hebrews.

Now, he didn't make any arguments for it. He didn't say because this or that, but he spoke as if it was a given. He spoke as if everyone thought so, as if that was the generally regarded opinion about Hebrews in his day.

That his contemporaries seemed to think of Barnabas as the author. It's not impossible, but we don't have any particular evidence in the book that would confirm this. You might say, well, he traveled with Timothy, but Barnabas didn't.

Barnabas was Paul's companion on his first missionary journey, and Timothy didn't join him until his second missionary journey, when Silas was his main companion. Barnabas had taken off in another direction. Of course, after Paul's death, it's not impossible that Barnabas and Timothy could have worked together.

But there's nothing intrinsically probable about Barnabas being the author, notwithstanding Tertullian thinking so. Now, in modern times, there's been some other views. Martin Luther was the first to suggest that Apollos wrote it.

Who's Apollos? Well, Apollos was an Alexandrian Jew, who's mentioned at the end of Acts chapter 18. And he came from Alexandria to Ephesus. He didn't encounter Paul there, but he did encounter Paul's friends, Priscilla and Aquila.

They helped him refine his understanding of doctrine somewhat. And then he moved on and went to Corinth, and who knows where from there. At some point later on, Paul did come into contact with Apollos.

We don't know how extensive that contact was, but we know that Paul said at the end of

1 Corinthians, in chapter 16, that he had appealed to Apollos to go to Corinth. Apollos had not chosen to accept that appeal, but we know that Apollos somewhere connected after the time that Apollos left Corinth. Little else do we know about him, except that the Bible says he was a very strong debater.

Apollos was a very eloquent man, argued strongly. And Luther thought, well, there's a couple of reasons here, then, to maybe suggest Apollos is the author here. One is that the author clearly was a good debater.

The author clearly was strong in the scriptures, as Apollos is said to be. And, although this is not as important as Luther might have suggested, the book of Hebrews, when it quotes the Old Testament, quotes entirely from the Septuagint. Now, the Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was made in Alexandria.

Alexandria, Egypt, is where the 70 scholars translated the Hebrew scriptures into Greek, two centuries or more before Christ. And Apollos is from Alexandria, the very place where the Septuagint comes from, and he quotes exclusively from it. The reason I say that's not a very important point is that, although it's true that it's the city where the Septuagint was translated, by the time of Jesus and by the time that Hebrews was written, basically Jews all over the Roman Empire used the Septuagint.

Almost all the New Testament writers quote the Septuagint, though not necessarily always exclusively from it. Paul sometimes quotes the Septuagint, sometimes the Hebrew, sometimes he kind of paraphrases, makes up his own translation. But the point is, the writer of Hebrews used the Septuagint exclusively, but that doesn't say anything about the venue from which the author hailed, or where he lived.

So, I don't think there's much argument for Apollos. It's kind of an attractive suggestion, just because he's a mysterious kind of a guy, and I don't know, I've always kind of thought it was a fun suggestion, but I don't think there's anything really to support it. In more recent times, there are some scholars who suggest that Priscilla was the author.

Now, what are the arguments for that? Well, Priscilla knew Paul and Timothy. She and her husband were their hosts in Corinth and worked with them in Ephesus, and Paul greets them when they've gone back to Rome, in Romans chapter 16. They were close workers.

Paul said they had hazarded their lives for him in Romans 16, so they were very close, trusted friends of Paul. And the suggestion that it was, say, Priscilla, rather than Aquila, who wrote this, comes from the attempt to explain why the book was written anonymously. And the suggestion is that since women were not really well-received as teachers in the early church, a woman writing this book had to more or less keep her gender under wraps and just write an anonymous book.

It's a very creative suggestion, especially popular among evangelical feminists, I think, but it's not really a very likely one. For example, the author, whoever it was, expected that the audience knew who they were. So if a woman writing a book would not be acceptable, keeping her name off the front page would not prevent the book from being unacceptable.

The readers knew who the author was. Furthermore, it would be very strange for Priscilla, a married woman, to be traveling with Timothy, a single man. Why would Priscilla travel with another man? Another man might travel with Timothy, but either if Priscilla's, if her husband was still alive, or even if he was dead, it would be very unlike an early Christian practice for a single or married woman to be traveling with another man and not her husband.

I don't really think there's any support whatsoever that can be brought for Priscilla being the author. Origen, in the late 3rd century, is the one always quoted after a final consideration of the options of authorship, and he always is quoted as saying, God only knows who wrote the book of Hebrews. He said, as for who is the author of Hebrews, God only knows.

And that was the opinion of the, pretty much the 3rd century church. And I'd say it has to be pretty much our opinion too. We can see possibilities of Paul, we can see possibilities of Luke, or some collaboration in some way of Paul and Luke, but we don't, I mean, those are possibilities, but no one knows for sure, and we're going to simply proceed in this set of lectures with the assumption that we don't know who wrote it, we probably will never know until we go to heaven who wrote it, but that whoever it was was close enough to Timothy and therefore close enough to Paul to have weight, the weight of apostolic authority, at least as much as Mark and Luke had.

And it may even have been Luke who wrote it, we don't know. Now, who were the recipients? This too is unusual with the book of Hebrews because most books written by Paul and Peter, and for that matter even James, identify something about who their audience is. 1 John does not, and this book does not, and that's pretty much it.

Who were the audience of this book? Well, we can deduce some things. A strong suggestion is that they were Hebrew Christians. We know they were Christians, that they were Hebrew Christians seems likely due to the fact that the author assumed they were familiar with the scriptures at a very high level, the Old Testament scriptures.

Once again, a very well instructed Gentile church could be very knowledgeable of the Hebrew scriptures too. But all other things being equal, it's more likely that Jewish people who have been raised in the synagogue would immediately recognize the scriptures that the writer is using and have a tendency to appreciate the arguments. And the early Christian sources that talk about the book of Hebrews indicate that it was written to Jewish Christians.

So there's that to go on too. I think it's a pretty good likelihood they were Jewish Christians. Also, we do read that they seem to be in danger of backsliding.

Hebrews 10, 25 and 26 even suggest they were thinking about backsliding back to the sacrificial system, which would mean that they had come out of that system. We'll look at that scripture more later on. But it's my assumption that the early tradition as well as what little evidence we have from the book itself would support the traditional readership being the Hebrew Christians.

The book of Hebrews or to the Hebrews is of course a traditional attribution of a title. The author didn't give it that title. Where were these people when he wrote to them? Two possibilities seem to be competing with one another.

One is that they were in Italy or Rome. The other is that they're in Jerusalem or Judea. Why? Well, there's one verse that seems rather ambiguous and it points... seen one way, it points to one of those and seen the other way, it points to the other direction.

That verse is chapter 13 or I guess we could say... It says, Now those from Italy means that there were some people from Italy that were with Paul and wished that they would... or I should say with the author and wished to send along their greetings along with the author's greetings. Which could mean that the author was in Italy in Rome writing from there and that those other Italians who were with him there in Italy were sending their greetings as well. And therefore, some have thought that Rome was the source of the letter where the author was living when he wrote it.

But there's another way that could be taken. He didn't say those in Italy but those from Italy greet you. This has suggested that the author was somewhere else not in Italy and with him were people who were from Italy and possibly the letter was written to Jewish Christians in Rome who had friends, Roman or Italian friends who happened to be away and happened to be where the writer was and they're sending greetings back to the home church.

They are from Italy and if the letter was going to Italy those who are from Italy might wish to send greetings back to their friends at home in Rome or somewhere else in Italy. So, this verse itself can go two different ways. It's either suggesting the letter is being sent from Italy in which case most probably Rome or to Italy which again would probably suggest Rome as the main thing that we don't really know.

There's a lot of mysteries about the book of Hebrews. We don't know who wrote it. We don't know for sure who it's written to.

We don't know where they were or where the author was for sure. But there is some other data that needs to be considered. It doesn't settle the matter for us but it's worthy of consideration.

In chapter 13 verses 13 through 14 it says, Therefore let us go forth with him outside the camp bearing his reproach. This is in the context of how Jesus was excluded from the camp. He was treated as the off-scouring of Jewish society.

He was treated like the unclean parts of the animal which are burned outside the camp in the ritual and he was taken outside the camp and killed. So, it's like Israel treated him as an unclean thing and the author said, well, let's go with him then. If they're going to treat him that way, let them treat us that way too.

Let's go with him outside the camp bearing his reproach. For here we have no continuing city. No doubt it's an allusion to the fact that Jerusalem, their city was not a continuing city.

It was no doubt soon going to be destroyed. I'll give you some evidence of that in a moment. But he may be exhorting Jewish Christians in Jerusalem to see their present venue as not a permanent venue.

This is not a continuing city. This is going down. Jerusalem is going down.

The Romans are coming. It's going to be burned down. You're going to have to get out.

Let's leave. Let's go outside the camp like Jesus did. They put him outside the camp.

Maybe we ought to go out too and share his reproach. So, there's a suggestion is made that possibly these people were in Jerusalem and the allusion to their city there could be an indicator. Sadly, this is not conclusive either because Jews anywhere in the empire would still see Jerusalem as their capital city.

Even though they don't live in Jerusalem, they would make pilgrimages there. Their worship center was there. It was their religious center.

And so, he could say such things about Jerusalem to Jews no matter where they were. So, what do we have? We don't know. We don't know who the author is.

We don't know for sure who the readers were though they were almost certainly Hebrew Christians. We don't know where they lived for sure or where the author was. Obviously, whatever value we're going to get from the book is going to have to be, you know, it's sort of a universal value that's not based specifically on where these people were.

But where they were and who they were is not perhaps as important to know as what condition they were in. Some scholars are pretty sure that they were second-generation Christians. The reason for that is that the writer says in chapter 2 that they had heard the gospel from those who were eyewitnesses.

These were not people who had seen Jesus themselves. In chapter 2, verses 3 and 4, he says, How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation which at the first began to

be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed to us by those who heard him? God also being witness, etc. So there were others who heard him, but these weren't them.

These people were not the ones who heard him. What Jesus said was confirmed to the listeners through the apostolic witnesses apparently. Also, some commentators have said their leaders were dead, their first generation of leaders were dead.

I don't see this as likely, but all the commentators say it, and once one commentator says it, all the others say it because they dare not disagree with each other. But when you look at their reasons for saying things, you wonder who came up with this first. But virtually all the commentators say this was late enough that the first generation of leaders of the church had died.

How do we know that? Because there's three references to their leaders, and one of them says remember them as if they were dead. In chapter 13, 7, it says, Remember those who lead you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. The fact that it says to remember them, it suggested some commentators, most commentators, suggest they had died.

Their first round of leaders were now a thing of the past. They were now a second generation of Christians. But it doesn't say remember those who led you.

It says those who lead you. It's in the present tense. I don't know how a group of dead leaders would still be leading them unless it was through their memory and maybe what they'd written.

But in verse 17, it says, Obey those who rule over you, the same people who lead you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls. What, from heaven? No, you obey these people because they're leading you now. They're the leaders of your church right now.

You obey them. Remembering them doesn't mean that they're gone. It just means don't forget, you know, who they are, what they're, the honor that's due to them, and what they've, you know, the example they leave you.

Keep that in your mind. It's just like when the, in the 10 Commandments, it says remember the Sabbaths. Keep it.

It doesn't mean that the Sabbath is no longer an institution. It just means don't forget it. It doesn't mean that they're gone.

The Sabbath is gone. And then in verse 24, which is not in your notes, Hebrews 13, 24, it says greet those who lead you. This would be very difficult to do if they were dead.

So it seems to me that all three references to those who lead you, all those three

references in chapter 13, give strong indication their leaders were living. Of course, this doesn't mean that they were second or third or first generation leaders. They're just leaders.

But what it does mean is those commentators that insist that the first batch of leaders were dead don't have anything in the passage that I can see to support that notion. I personally believe these people were living probably in the second generation of Christians, but before the destruction of Jerusalem. And I'll supply reasons for that in a moment.

The people in question had been Christians for some time, however. This is not early in their Christian lives. They were Christians long enough that they should have been able to teach others, the writer says.

In Hebrews 5, verse 12, the writer says, for though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God. And so they've been Christians long enough they should be teachers in the church, not babes. And he goes on to complain that they only are capable of digesting milk and not solid food.

So they have not grown as much as they should have in the time they've had. But apparently they've had a considerable length of time since their church was founded. In chapter 10 of Hebrews, he reminds them of some of their background.

In verses 32 and 33, he says, but recall the former days in which after you were illuminated, you endured great struggle with sufferings, partly while you were made a spectacle, both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated. For you had compassion on me. So obviously, though it's written anonymously, the writer thinks they know who he is.

You had compassion on me in my chains and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. So these people had suffered earlier in their life and it held strong. But the evidence in the book is that they were not holding quite so strong anymore.

They had a history of having Christians a long time. And in the earlier days, the former days, they actually had been very strong through a time of great testing. However, they were kind of waffling now, it would appear.

They were in danger of going back. And that's something we will see in several passages because the author, though he makes a pretty airtight point by point argument through his book, he interrupts himself at least five times where he kind of goes off away from his main argument to have sort of a digression. These digressions are varying lengths, but there are five of them.

At least most scholars identify five of them. And they have a beginning and an end. Usually what happens is in his argument, he'll reach a point where he makes an affirmation.

And then the affirmation he makes reminds him that he needs to warn them about something. So he'll go off on a digression to warn them. Then he'll come back to his main point where he left off and he'll continue the argument as if that parenthesis had not been there.

And all of these parentheses have the same thing essentially in view, and that is not to fall away and not to fail to progress. The assumption seems to be that if you don't progress spiritually, you will lose ground spiritually. The Christian life is not static.

You don't rest on the laurels of an earlier period of time when you were a good Christian and say, well, if I was a good Christian then I must be now. If you don't gain ground, you lose ground. This is a dynamic relationship with God that you're either cultivating or neglecting.

And a neglected relationship deteriorates. A cultivated relationship, if it's well cultivated, grows deeper and better. And so the author is assuming that these people need to continue growing and often exhorts them to continue growing.

He also assumes that since they're maybe not doing that, that they're losing ground. And I won't look at all these now because we will as we go through the book, but I'd like to just say at this point that what appears to be the case is that these readers were converts out of a Jewish background who took a lot of heat from their Jewish contemporaries, their neighbors, their family, because they had embraced Christianity, which in the early days was very much persecuted by the Jewish synagogues and the Sanhedrin. And because they even had their property confiscated, he says in chapter 10, and, you know, apparently suffered other things, reproaches and imprisonments and things.

They had stood firm at one time, but I think they were getting tired of it. They're getting tired of the burden of persecution. And apparently their thinking went something like this.

I deduce this from the way the argument goes in the book. He seems to be arguing against what's happening in their minds, trying to bring them back around the right way of thinking. And apparently they're thinking it was something like this.

We were Jews before we were worshiping at the temple. There's a sacrificial system there. There's priests there.

God ordained these. These are not a man made pagan kind of a religion. This is God ordained.

God gave it to Moses. It was ordained by angels at Mount Sinai. You know, it was after Moses, there was this long series of prophets and so forth that God brought to confirm this covenant and to encourage people to, to offer pure worship of God at his temple and his tabernacle before that.

This is a divine institution. When we were doing that, we weren't being persecuted. When we were just fitting in with our families and our neighbors and going to the temple and worshiping in that way and offering sacrifices, life was not that bad.

But now that we're following Jesus and we've neglected all of that, our friends and family are offended and they persecute us. So God certainly can't be very offended if we go back and worship him in the way that he ordained through Moses and through the angels and through, you know, those 1400 years of the old covenant. How could God object to that? He's he, he ordained it.

And therefore they're, they're backing away from their radical stance for Christ back to looking kind of devoted to the sacrificial system as a means of being atoned for. And in particularly the day of atonement, you know, Kipper they're looking to that too. Now, the reason I say that this is what they're doing is because the author is at pains to show them that there is nothing to go back to.

Apparently the temple was still standing or else they wouldn't have been thinking this way. But although the temple is standing, it wasn't going to stand for much longer. There's two ways that Paul argues against what I say, Paul, that's my upbringing.

I don't really believe Paul's the author, frankly, but I teach more Paul's epistles than I teach Hebrew Hebrews. So the author is arguing in such a way as to assume that they, they are first of all trusting in a defunct system. It's defunct because God has brought in a new system.

And as he says in Hebrews 8 13, he says where there's a new covenant, the old is obsolete. Chapter eight, verse 13. So one part of the argument is the old system is obsolete.

You may go back, but it's, it's something that God doesn't honor anymore. It's obsolete and it's going to be disappearing soon. He makes that very point in the same verse.

He says that which is growing old is obsolete and it's about ready to vanish away. A reference, I believe to the, the near destruction of the temple and all of its sacrifices and the priesthood and all of that. It's going to vanish soon.

Why go back there? It's only temporary. But the other argument he makes, and he makes this first, is that even if it was something that's going to be around for a while and not obsolete, it is inferior to what you already have in Christ. Sure.

The law was given by Moses, a great man. Sure. It was endorsed by angels at Mount Sinai.

Sure. You've got a great number of Hebrew heroes of the faith, including the august priesthood of Aaron and so forth. You've got all that in the old, but what we have in the new is Jesus.

And Jesus is so much above any angel, so much above Moses, so much above Joshua, so much above Aaron. So much above the prophets that even if two options remained, why would you pick the inferior option? Christ is so superior that having him, it's worth all the persecution. If the only option would be go back to that inferior system, but going back to the inferior system is not only stupid because it's inferior, but because it's only temporary and it's going away.

So don't go there. And this, I believe explains one of the really difficult passages in Hebrews 10 that lots of people have questions about and are concerned about because in Hebrews 10, 26, it says for, if we sin willfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there is no longer, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. Now this particular statement has really perplexed a lot of Christians.

Because our sacrifice for sins is Christ. And it sounds like he's saying, once you've known Christ, if you go sin again, Christ's sacrifice is gone. There remains no more.

Any sacrifice for sins. His sacrifice is just not available to you anymore. And some people taking this verse totally out of the context, just as a standalone scriptural statement has led people to feel like some people that if you commit a sin, after you're a Christian, you're gone.

You know, Christ's sacrifice is of no value to you. Now there's a good reason to reject that. One is because it's just flat wrong.

And all the rest of scripture would say so. I mean, probably, uh, nowhere more than in first John chapter two, uh, first John two says, the, my little children, these things I write to you that you do not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ, the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

But he's talking to Christians. He says, if we sin, Christ is our advocate. He is the propitiation.

Certainly. He's not saying that if you sin, there's no more sacrifice, no more Jesus for you, no more cross, no more blood. You're out.

Well then what is the writer of Hebrews saying? When the context is not too hard to figure it out, look at just above the passage we read up to verse 16 through 18. You see,

there is a quotation versus 16 and 17 from Jeremiah 31 about the new covenant. Uh, it's actually the second time that the writer of Hebrews quotes that passage.

He quotes it in a chapter eight. Also, it's a favorite passage of his. He quotes it twice, much more at length in chapter eight, but he comes back to it here.

And in the passage about the new covenant in verse 17, it says, he adds their sins and lawless deeds. I will remember no more. Now, the point the writer of Hebrews is making in chapter 10 is that in the old covenant sacrificial system, there always remained another sacrifice because no sacrifice they offered was complete and final.

The high priest had to offer new sacrifices every year on the day of atonement. And he's made earlier in this chapter, well, Jesus only had to offer one sacrifice once and for all, no more are needed. And now where he's quoting Jeremiah 31, that their deeds lawless deeds, I will remember no more.

He says this by way of commentary in verse 18. where there is remission of these, that is in the new covenant where there's remission of sins, that's just been mentioned where there's remission of sins. There is no longer an offering for sin.

That is, there remains no sacrifice, meaning there's no more necessary sacrifices. Now, this is certainly the sacrifices in the temple are of no value. You only go to the temple and offer sacrifices.

If your sin problem is not resolved, but in under the new covenant, your sin problem is resolved. There are sins and transgressions. I'll remember no more.

He says, well, then there's no more sacrifice, no more offering for sin. Now that's almost the same statement we read at the end of verse 26. There remains no sacrifice for sin.

What it means is there remains outside of Christ, no sacrifice for sin. The old system doesn't have any more valid or legitimate sacrifices for you to turn back to. And seeing that as the meaning of the author, then gives us a better way of understanding what verse 26 is saying.

If we sin willfully, now, some translations say if we go on sinning willfully, because the word sin is in an imperfect tense. It's not just if I, if I commit one sin willfully after I'm saved, I'm gone. It's done.

But the point here is if you go back to your life, under Judaism, where you were disobedient to Christ, but you counted on an animal sacrifice every year to cover you. Don't do it. Now you've known the truth.

If you go back to a sinful life, and you're looking to the sacrifices of the temple to atone for you, it won't work. There is no more sacrifice for sin. There.

That's what he's implying. If you're going back to your previous religion, instead of falling forward with Christ, you are going back to something that isn't even there. Now, of course, he's not really saying that it isn't there.

The temple is standing at the time that this is written. Like I said, if it wasn't, they wouldn't be talking about going back and offering sacrifices again, because they don't offer them except at the temple. And since the destruction of the temple in AD 70, Jews have not offered sacrifice anymore.

But he's not saying they literally have stopped offering, but they, as far as God is concerned, if he's made a new covenant and your sins and transgressions are remitted, there's no more sacrifice for sin necessary or valid. They may be offering them every day at the temple, but they're not worth anything to God. And so the idea here is the readers, and this will be necessary to see as we read through the whole book, the argument is against this particular trend on the part of the readers, to consider that they're going to go back to the Jewish way of life.

There was less persecution for them then. They didn't have to live such a holy life because they could always just offer another sacrifice and it'd be okay. It's like Judaism.

I think that Judaism was a really strict way of life, but actually it had not become that. It had become a life of do what you want. Of course you're breaking the law, but that's what the sacrifices are there to cover.

You've got the sacrificial system. You're not supposed to break the law, but everyone does. And it doesn't matter much if you do, because you can always go off for another sacrifice.

It's a little bit like the mentality of some Christians, you know, that, well, it doesn't matter if you sin or not because there's always Jesus. He'll forgive you. And while it is true that Jesus will forgive, he doesn't forgive people who are thinking that way.

He forgives people who are repentant. He forgives people who are humbled and say, God, be merciful to me, a sinner, because they don't love their sin. They're in bondage to sin, it may be, but they don't love it.

But the people who say, well, I just want to live in sin. I'll just check in with Jesus once in a while to keep my accounts clean. It's very much like what the Jews were with their sacrificial system.

We just live the way we live. And fortunately, we've got that temple there. We've got those sacrifices.

That'll cover us. He says, no, that's not going to work for you. If you live in sin, you reject Christ, move away from your life of discipleship and obedience to Christ, and you go

back to your typical fleshly life and think you're going to offer a sacrifice in the temple.

It won't happen. It's not going to happen for you there. God won't notice it.

He won't appreciate it. In fact, he says, not only is there no sacrifice for sin if you do it, but there's a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation, which will devour the adversaries. Looks like he'll go down with the enemies.

Don't go back to the sinking ship. Stay in the lifeboat, in fact, on the new ship. All right, so this is what the audience of the letter originally was about.

Now, as far as the timing of the writing of the book, I'll have to take that in our next lecture because it is time to break. And so we'll come back and finish out our introduction to the book.