

## Hebrews: *Sticking with the Best*

### Introduction

**I. The Author**—Since the human author of this epistle does not state his name, its authorship is uncertain. Some speculate that the apostle Paul may have been the author. However, there are two key arguments against Pauline authorship: 1) Paul always states his name in his other letters (2 Thess 3:17); 2) the author places himself outside the apostolic circle (2:3-4). While the human author of this letter remains a mystery to us, the identity of the human author is not necessary for us to know. This letter bears all the marks of an inspired, canonical letter for the edification of the church.

**II. The Audience**—Most scholars agree that the epistle to the Hebrews was not a circular letter but was written to a specific local assembly. This conclusion is deduced from several passages in the epistle which indicate that a specific assembly is in view (10:24-25, 32; 13:7, 17, 24). However, there is wide divergence of opinion concerning the ethnic and spiritual background of the addressees. There are three main views concerning the *ethnic* background of the addressees: Jewish, non-Jewish and mixed. The best, and most widely accepted, interpretation is that the audience is a local community of Jewish believers. This is clearly observed throughout this epistle where there are no references to Gentile society, no references to the Jewish-Gentile controversy, and where the background of the epistle is entirely set in Jewish history and religion. The *spiritual* condition of the addressees is also a debated issue. There are three different views on this issue: professing believers, true believers, or a mixture of true and professing believers. The view that this epistle is written only to professing Christians is rejected by almost all conservative commentators. Most commentators agree that the majority of this epistle is written to encourage Jewish believers to mature in their faith by setting forth the superiority of Christ and His work. This fact is easily observed in the various names the author uses to refer to his audience: “holy brethren” (3:1); “partakers of a heavenly calling” (3:1); “partakers of Christ” (3:14); “beloved” (6:9); and “brethren” (13:22).

The real question concerns the intended audience of the five warning passages. Does the author consider them to be true believers in danger of divine discipline/loss of rewards or only professing Christians in danger of missing justification? While both views have been ably defended by scholars, the better interpretation is that the warning sections are written to professing believers who are in danger of apostasy, that is, missing justification by reverting back to Judaism.

**III. The Aim**—The purpose is twofold. First, the author writes to encourage the believers to mature in Christ (5: 12-14; 10:24; 12:1-2; 13:15-17, 20-22). Second, this epistle was written to warn the readers of the grave danger of apostatizing by disowning Christ and defecting back to Judaism.

#### **IV. The Arrangement—**

- I. The Doctrine of Christ's Superiority (1:1—10:18)
- II. The Duty from Christ's Superiority (10:19—13:36)

#### **V. The Analysis—**

##### I. The Doctrine of Christ's Superiority (1:1–10:18)

###### A. The Theme (1:1-3)

###### B. Christ's Superiority over Angels (1:4–2:18)

*The First Warning Passage – The Danger of Drifting (2:1-4)*

###### C. Christ's Superiority over Moses (3:1-6)

*The Second Warning Passage – The Danger of Disobedience (3:7–4:13)*

###### E. Christ's Better Priesthood (4:14–8:6)

*The Third Warning Passage – The Danger of Degeneration (5:11–6:20)*

###### H. Christ's Better Sacrifice (9:11–10:18)

##### II. The Duty from Christ's Superiority (10:19—13:25)

*The Fourth Warning Passage – The Danger of Despising (10:26-39)*

###### A. Faith (11:1-40)

###### B. Hope (12:1-29)

*The Fifth Warning Passage—The Danger of Denying (12:25-29)*

###### C. Love (13:1-17)

###### D. Conclusion (13:18-25)

#### **VII. The Application**