



Knowing what the Hebrews knew

Introduction & Old Testament background for Hebrews 1:1-3



Introducing Hebrews

What kind of writing is it?

In some ways Hebrews seems like a letter: it was written to a specific group of people (see below), includes some very personal messages to those people (eg 13:23) and it ends in the style of a letter (13:23-25).

In other ways Hebrews seems like a sermon that has been written down: it begins like a speech (1:1) and the author calls it an “exhortation” (13:22) – the same Greek word appears in Acts 13:15 to refer to a sermon.

So perhaps the best way to think of Hebrews is as a “preach-letter”. As a letter, keep in mind the real-life situation of the people involved (see below). As a sermon, look out for the key points that the author is trying to make, and how they connect to each other.

When was it written?

Hebrews was probably written in the 60s AD, before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD. This would have been 30-40 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Who wrote it?

No one knows for sure. Early on many thought it was Paul, because he wrote so many other New Testament letters. But there are a number of differences between Hebrews and Paul’s letters, and 2:3 seems to indicate someone whose experience of Jesus wasn’t as first-hand as Paul’s (Acts 9:1-19).

Some think it may have been Barnabas, a Levite (Acts 4:36) who travelled on missions with Paul. Others think it may have been Priscilla, apparently an able teacher (Acts 18:26), writing anonymously due to her gender. Further suggestions include Apollos, Luke, Philip, Silvanus and Clement of Rome. In any case it was someone deeply familiar with the Law of Moses and personally known to the recipients of the preach-letter.

Who was it written to?

The traditional title of this preach-letter was “To the Hebrews”. This may not have been the author’s title, but it seems to fit, because “Hebrews” essentially means “Jews”, and the content is heavily related to Judaism.

We can learn a lot about the Hebrews from the preach-letter itself. They seem to be Christians who had come from a Jewish background, now living in a foreign city such as Rome (see the Italian reference in 13:24). As new believers they had been bold despite harsh persecution (eg 10:32-34). However they had failed to mature (eg 5:12) and were in danger of falling away (eg 2:1), something the author is keen to address!

How God spoke through the prophets long ago



For some examples of God speaking to His people through the Old Testament prophets, read Exodus 3:1-4:17 (Moses), 1 Kings 19:9-18 (Elijah), Isaiah 6 (Isaiah), Hosea 1:2 (Hosea), Amos 8:1-3 (Amos). *These sorts of moments are referred to in Hebrews 1:1.*



Engaging with the message

Questions & answers for Hebrews 1:1-3



Hot spots

- 1) What's alive for you in this passage? (Things that stand out, "aha" moments, questions you have, etc)



Digging into the passage

- 2) What point(s) do you think the author may be trying to make by comparing the Son to all of the prophets that have come before Him (1:1-2a)?

- 3) From the middle of verse 2 until the end of verse 3 the author makes a list of seven awesome facts about the Son. Using your own words, make a list of these seven awesome facts.

(You may like to read these verses in some different translations to help. One website that enables you to do this is www.biblegateway.com.)

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- 4) Choose one of these seven awesome facts that surprises/amazes you, and explain why it does.



Connecting life and faith

- 5) Do you believe that God still speaks today? If so, why and how? If not, why not?

- 6) How does it actually affect your life today to know those seven awesome facts about the Son? Give at least one example of the difference that one of those facts makes for you. (If nothing, then come back to this question at the end of this series!)