
a *Grace Notes* course

Foundations 200

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Foundations 209

New Testament Survey: 1 Thessalonians to Hebrews

Grace Notes

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First Thessalonians

(Christ: The Promise of God To Us)

AUTHOR AND NAME OF BOOK

As declared in 1:1 and 2:18, Paul is the author of 1 Thessalonians.

DATE OF WRITING

A.D. 51-52

The two letters to the Thessalonians were written from Corinth during the apostle's eighteen-month stay in that city (Acts 18:1-11). The first epistle was written during the earlier part of that period just after Timothy had returned from Thessalonica with news of the progress of the church. The second letter was sent just a few weeks (or at the most a few months) later. Any date assigned will have to be approximate, though probably A.D. 51-52.

THEME AND PURPOSE

Paul was only in Thessalonica for three weeks (Acts 17:2), so he was not able to give adequate instruction to the new church. Therefore, the purpose of this epistle to the Thessalonians can be summarized as follows: to express his thankfulness for what God was doing in the lives of the Thessalonians (1:2-3), to defend himself against a campaign to slander his ministry (2:1-12), to encourage them to stand fast against persecution and pressure to return to their former pagan lifestyles (3:2-3; 4:1-12), to answer a doctrinal question pertaining to the fate of Christians who had died (4:1-13), to answer questions regarding the "Day of the Lord" (5:1-11), and to deal with certain problems that had developed in their life as a church (5:12-13; 19-20).

CHRIST AS SEEN IN 1 THESSALONIANS

With the coming of the Lord mentioned in every chapter, Christ is presented as the Believer's hope of salvation both now and at His coming. When He comes, He will deliver us from wrath (undoubtedly a reference to the Tribulation) (1:10; 5:4-11), give rewards (2:19), perfect us (3:13), resurrect us (4:13-18), and sanctify (set apart) all those who have trusted in Him (5:23).

OUTLINE

1. The Past: The Work Of Faith. (1:1-3:13)

A. The Commendation Of The Thessalonians. (1:1-10)

- 1). The Evaluation Of Paul. (1:1-4)
- 2). The Evidence Of Life. (1:5-7)
- 3). The Explanation Of The Evidence. (1:8-10)

B. The Conduct Of The Apostle And His Fellow Workers. (2:1-12)

- 1). Their Witness. (2:1-2)
- 2). Their Word. (2:3-7a)
- 3). Their Walk. (2:7b-12)

C. The Conduct Of The Thessalonians. (2:13-16)

- 1). Their Reception Of The Word. (2:13)
- 2). Their Response To The Word. (2:14)
- 3). The Rejection Of The Word. (2:15-16)

D. The Concern Of The Apostle. (2:17-20)

- 1). His Heart For The Thessalonians. (2:17)
- 2). His Hindrance By Satan. (2:18)
- 3). His Hope In The Thessalonians. (2:19-20)

E. The Confirmation Of The Thessalonians. (3:1-10)

- 1). The Sending Of Timothy. (3:1-5)
- 2). The Report Of Timothy. (3:6-10)

F. The Concluding Prayer. (3:11-13)

1). The Prayer That He Might Return To The Thessalonians. (3:11)

2). The Prayer That The Thessalonians Might Grow In Love. (3:12)

3). The Prayer That Their Hearts Might Be Established In Holiness. (3:13)

2. The Present: The Labor Of Love. (4:1-12)

A. Their Love For God Expressed In Sanctified Living. (4:1-8)

B. Their Love For The Brethren, An Expression Of Being God Taught. (4:9-10)

C. Their Love For The Lost Expressed In Godly Living. (4:11-12)

3. The Prospective: The Endurance Of Hope. (4:13-5:28)

A. Concerning The Day Of Christ: The Comfort Of His Coming. (4:13-18)

- 1). The Resurrection Of Sleeping Saints. (4:13-16)
- 2). The Rapture Of Living Saints. (4:17-18)

B. Concerning The Day Of The Lord. (5:1-11)

- 1). The Coming Of The Day Of The Lord. (5:1-5)
- 2). The Conduct Of Christians. (5:6-10)
- 3). The Conclusion. (5:11)

C. Concerning Deportment In The Congregation. (5:12-28)

- 1). The Concluding Prescription. (5:12-22)
- 2). The Concluding Petition. (5:23-24)
- 3). The Concluding Postscript. (5:25-28)

Second Thessalonians

(Christ: The Reward of God To Us)

AUTHOR AND NAME OF BOOK

As with 1 Thessalonians, this letter was also written by Paul (2 Thessalonians 1:1; 3:17).

DATE OF WRITING

A.D. 51-52

Because the historical circumstances are very similar to those of 1 Thessalonians, most believe it was written not long after the first letter, perhaps about six months. While conditions in the church were similar, the persecution seems to have grown (1:4-5), and this, with other factors, led Paul to write this letter from Corinth sometime in A.D. 51 or 52 after Silas and Timothy, the bearers of the first letter, had returned with the news of the new developments.

THEME AND PURPOSE

Second Thessalonians was evidently prompted by three main developments that Paul heard about: (1) the news of increasing persecution which they were facing (1:4-5), (2) reports of a false-Pauline letter and other distortions of his teaching regarding the "Day of the Lord" (2:1f.), and (3) the way some were responding to belief in the return of the Lord. This belief was being used as a basis for not doing their daily work, so the apostle wrote to admonish them for their idleness

(laziness) and the disorderliness (no order in their life) which had increased (3:5-15).

To meet the needs that occasioned this epistle, Paul wrote this epistle to comfort and correct. In doing so he pursued three broad purposes. He wrote: (1) to inspire the Thessalonians to endure by describing the reward and punishment that will occur in the future judgment of God (1:3-10); (2) to clarify the main events belonging to the day of the Lord in order to prove the falseness of the claims that the day had already arrived (2:1-2); (3) to give detailed instructions covering the steps the church should take in correcting those who refuse to work (3:6-15).

CHRIST AS SEEN IN 2 THESSALONIANS

A major theme of this book, especially chapters 1-2, is the return of Christ in judgment when He will put down all rebellion and bring punishment. Second Thessalonians anticipates Christ, the coming Judge.

OUTLINE

1. Salutation Or Introduction. (1:1-2)

2. He Commends And Comforts Regarding Persecution. (1:4-12)

3. He Corrects And Challenges Regarding The Day Of The Lord. (2:1-17)

A. In Relation To The Present. (2:1-2)

B. In Relation To The Apostasy. (2:3a)

C. In Relation To The Man Of Lawlessness. (2:3b-4)

D. In Relation To The Restrainer. (2:5-9)

E. In Relation To Unbelievers. (2:10-12)

F. In Relation To Believers. (2:13-17)

4. He Commands And Convicts Regarding Idleness. (3:1-16)

A. The Confidence Of The Apostle. (3:1-5)

B. The Commands Of The Apostle. (3:6-15)

5. His Concluding Benediction And Greeting. (3:16-18)

First Timothy

(Christ: The Mediator of God To Us)

AUTHOR AND NAME OF BOOK

Timothy was a young minister at Ephesus facing conflicts and challenges in the church and in his community. Paul, as Timothy's mentor wrote him two personal letters of advice and counsel. For similar reasons, Paul also wrote to Titus in Crete. These three letters are called the pastoral epistles.

DATE OF WRITING

A.D. 63-66

It seems clear by comparing Acts with the epistles that 1 Timothy and Titus belong to the period after Paul's first release and acquittal (legal charges removed) in Rome. Because of this, 1 Timothy must be dated after his first release, around the spring of A.D. 63, but before the beginning of the persecutions under the Roman emperor Nero in A.D. 64. This epistle was probably written in A.D. 63 right after his first release. Titus was written around A.D. 65 and 2 Timothy in A.D. 66. Paul died in A.D. 67, according to the early church father, Eusebius. As a Roman citizen, he died by the sword (beheaded) rather than by crucifixion as did Peter.

Paul's missionary journeys occurred during the years A.D. 48-56. From A.D. 56-60 Paul was slowly making his way through the Roman courts, arriving ultimately at Rome. For two years, A.D. 61-62, Paul was held under house arrest in Rome and at the end of that time, he was released. From A.D. 62-67 Paul traveled more or less freely, leaving Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete, and then subsequently writing each of them a letter. Thus the approximate dates for 1 Timothy and Titus are perhaps A.D. 63-66. After being recaptured and once again imprisoned, Paul wrote Timothy a second letter, 2 Timothy. Thus, 2 Timothy, dated approximately A.D. 67, represents the last Pauline Epistle.¹

THEME AND PURPOSE

At least five clear purposes can be seen in 1 Timothy. Paul wrote: (1) to encourage and boost the spirit and courage of Timothy by reminding him of his charge or duty (1:3), of his spiritual gift (4:14), his good confession (6:12), and of the deposit of doctrine entrusted to him (6:20); (2) to give Timothy Biblical insight in dealing with the

errors of false teachers and to encourage Timothy himself to continue in sound doctrine (1:3-11, 18-20; 4:1-16; 6:3-10); (3) to give direction concerning church conduct in worship (2:1-15); (4) to give guidance regarding numerous issues that would arise and to show how they should be handled. This would include such things as: qualification for elders and deacons (3:1-16), proper behavior toward the various age groups-towards elders and widows (5:1-16); and, (5) to warn against the evils of materialism (6:11-19).

The theme of 1 Timothy, as with Titus and 2 Timothy involves the individual and the church. For the individual, the theme is "*fight the good fight*" (1:18). For the church, the theme is how to function in the church, the house of God (3:15).

CHRIST AS SEEN IN 1 TIMOTHY

Several passages stand out in pointing us to the person and ministry of the Savior. He is the source of our calling, strength, faith, and love so needed for ministry (1:12-14), the one who came to save sinners (1:15), "*the one Mediator between God and men*" (2:5), "*God manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory*" (3:16), and "*the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe*" (4:10).

OUTLINE

- 1. The Salutation. (1:1-2)**
- 2. Instructions Concerning Doctrine. (1:3-20)**
 - A. Warnings Against False Doctrine. (1:3-11)
 - B. Paul's Testimony Of Grace. (1:12-17)
 - C. Paul's Charge To Timothy. (1:18-20)
- 3. Instructions Concerning Worship. (2:1-2:15)**
 - A. Instructions Concerning Prayer. (2:1-7)
 - B. Instructions Concerning Men And Women. (2:8-15)
- 4. Instructions Concerning Leaders. (3:1-16)**
 - A. Concerning Elders And Deacons. (3:1-13)
 - B. Parenthetical Explanation. (3:14-16)
- 5. Instructions Concerning Dangers. (4:1-16)**
 - A. Description Of The Dangers. (4:1-5)

¹ Walvoord/Zuck, electronic media

B. Duties And Defenses Against The Dangers. (4:6-16)

6. Instructions Concerning Various Responsibilities. (5:1-6:10)

- A. Concerning Various Age-Groups. (5:1-2)
- B. Concerning Widows. (5:3-16)
- C. Concerning Elders. (5:17-25)
- D. Concerning Slaves And Masters. (6:1-2)
- E. Concerning The Heretical And Greedy. (6:3-10)

7. Final Instructions To Timothy. (6:11-21)

- A. Exhortation To Godliness. (6:11-16)
- B. Instructions For The Rich. (6:17-19)
- C. Exhortations To Remain Faithful. (6:20-21)

Second Timothy

(Christ: The Judge of God To Us)

AUTHOR AND NAME OF BOOK

See 1 Timothy.

DATE OF WRITING

A.D. 67

See 1 Timothy.

THEME AND PURPOSE

When we turn to 2 Timothy we find a very different atmosphere. In 1 Timothy and Titus, Paul was free and able to travel, but here he is a prisoner facing death. In this letter Paul had two major purposes in mind: (1) to urge Timothy to come to Rome as soon as possible in view of his impending death (cf. 4:9, 21 with 4:6-8); and, (2) to admonish Timothy to keep holding on to sound doctrine, to defend it against all error, to endure hardship as a good soldier, and to realize we are living in days of growing apostasy.

As with 1 Timothy, there is a personal and a corporate aspect in the themes of the book: For the individual, the theme is *“kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you”* (2 Timothy 1:6), though there are several other verses that could form the theme both individually and corporately (1:14; 2:1, 2; 2:15; 4:5). For the church, the theme could be to entrust sound teaching to faithful men who will be able to teach others also by suffering and serving as a good soldier of Christ (2:2-4) or

perhaps fighting the good fight and finishing the course (4:6-7).

CHRIST AS SEEN IN 2 TIMOTHY

At the heart of all ministry and our ability to endure in ministry is the doctrine of the person and work of Christ. It is not surprising, therefore, that even in a book emphasizing endurance in ministry, the doctrine of Christ is the foundation. Here, He is described as the One who *“abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”* (1:10), as the One who rose from the dead (2:8), as the One who gives salvation and eternal glory (2:10), as the One with whom all Believers have died, with whom they will live, and from whom they will be rewarded for faithful service (as in the crown of righteousness) and in the privilege of reigning with Him (2:11-13; 4:8).

OUTLINE

- 1. The Salutation. (1:1-2)**
- 2. The Expression Of Thanks For Timothy. (1:3-7)**
- 3. The Call To Remember Timothy’s Responsibilities. (1:8-18)**
- 4. The Character Of A Faithful Servant. (2:1-26)**
 - A. He Is Strong In Grace. (2:1)
 - B. He Is A Multiplier Of Disciples. (2:2)
 - C. He Is Single-Minded Like A Soldier. (2:3-4)
 - D. He Is Strict Like An Athlete And Enduring Like A Farmer. (2:5-13)
 - E. He Is A Diligent Workman. (2:14-19)
 - F. He Is Sanctified Vessel. (2:20-23)
 - G. He Is A Gentle Servant. (2:24-26)
- 5. The Caution For A Faithful Servant. (3:1-17)**
 - A. The Peril Of Apostasy. (3:1-9)
 - B. The Protection From Apostasy. (3:10-17)
- 6. The Charge To Preach The Word. (4:1-5)**
- 7. The Comfort Of A Faithful Servant. (4:6-18)**
 - A. A Good Finish To Life. (4:6-7)
 - B. A Good Future After Life. (4:8)
 - C. Good Friends In Life. (4:9-18)
- 8. Concluding Greetings. (4:19-22)**

Titus

(Christ: The Kindness of God To Us)

AUTHOR AND NAME OF BOOK

Since the Pastoral Letters have been treated previously on the matter of authorship, see 1 Timothy.

Titus is never mentioned in Acts, but there are many references to him in Paul's epistles (13 times). These passages make it clear that he was one of Paul's closest and most trusted fellow-workers in the gospel. When Paul left Antioch for Jerusalem to discuss the gospel of grace (Acts 15:1f.) with the leaders there, he took Titus (a Gentile) with him (Galatians 2:1-3) as an example of one accepted by grace without circumcision. This vindicated Paul's stand on that issue (Galatians 2:3-5). It also appears that Titus worked with Paul at Ephesus during the third missionary journey. From there the apostle sent him to Corinth where he helped that church with its work (2 Corinthians 2:12-13; 7:5-6; 8:6).

DATE OF WRITING

A.D. 62-67

A summary of the events important to this epistle will help give some idea of a probable date for Titus, though the exact time is unknown. Paul was released from his house arrest in Rome (where we find him at the end of Acts). Perhaps because Paul was a Roman citizen and his accusers could not prove the charges, they chose not to press charges against him before Caesar (Acts 24-25; 28:30). Their case was lost and Paul was freed. The apostle then visited Ephesus, where he left Timothy to supervise the church, and went on to Macedonia. From Macedonia (northern Greece), he wrote 1 Timothy (1 Timothy 1:3). He then visited Crete, leaving Titus there to put in order the remaining matters in the churches of Crete. Following this, Paul went to Nicopolis in Achaia (southern Greece, Titus 3:12). Then, either from Macedonia or Nicopolis, Paul wrote the epistle to Titus to encourage and instruct him. Afterwards, he visited Troas (2 Timothy 4:13) where he was then arrested, taken to Rome, imprisoned, and finally beheaded. As mentioned previously, it was from Rome, during this second imprisonment in

the dungeon that he wrote 2 Timothy. These events took place from about A.D. 62-67.

THEME AND PURPOSE

Several themes and purposes are seen in this epistle. Paul wrote: (1) to instruct Titus about what he should do to correct the matters that were lacking in order to properly establish the churches in Crete; (2) to give Titus personal authorization in view of the opposition Titus was facing (2:15; 3:1-15); (3) to give instruction on how to meet this opposition and special instructions concerning faith and conduct, and to warn about false teachers (1:5, 10-11; 2:1-8, 15; 3:1-11); and, to express his plans to join Titus again in Nicopolis for the winter (3:12). Whether this meeting ever occurred, we do not know. Tradition has it that Titus later returned to Crete and there served out the rest of his life.

The theme is to show how the grace of God that appeared to us in the saving life and death of Christ instructs us to deny ungodliness and to live righteously and soberly as a people full of good works that are in keeping with the doctrine of God (2:10-3:9).

Several important issues are discussed in the letter including qualifications for elders (1:5-9), instructions to various age groups (2:1-8), relationship to government (3:1-2), the relation of regeneration to human works and to the Spirit (3:5), and the role of grace in promoting good works among God's people (2:11-3:8).

CHRIST AS SEEN IN TITUS

Consistent with the other teachings of Paul, we see how the conduct of the Christian is connected with the person and work of Christ, past, present, and future. In this book we see the deity (2:13) and redemptive work of the Savior (2:12). Here Christ Jesus is described as *“our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds”* (2:13-14).

OUTLINE

1. Salutation And Opening Greetings. (1:1-4)
2. Ordination Of Elders In The Church. (1:5-9)
3. Offenders In The Church. (1:10-16)

4. Operation In The Church. (2:1-3:11)

- A. Duties For Titus. (2:1-10)
- B. Directions Regarding God's Grace. (2:11-15)
- C. Demonstration Of Good Works. (3:1-11)

5. Final Instructions And Greetings. (3:12-15)**Philemon****(Christ: The Confidence of God To Us)****AUTHOR AND NAME OF BOOK**

As with the other prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians), Philemon was written by Paul during his first confinement in Rome. The letter is written to Philemon, the owner of Onesimus, one of the millions of slaves in the Roman Empire, who had stolen from his master and run away. Onesimus had made his way to Rome, where he came in contact with the apostle Paul, who led him to trust in Christ (1:10). So now both Onesimus and Philemon were faced with doing their Christian duty toward one another. Onesimus was to return to his master and Philemon was to receive him with forgiveness as a Christian brother. Death was the normal punishment for a runaway slave, but Paul intercedes on behalf of Onesimus.

DATE OF WRITING

A.D. 61

Since it was written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, it was written around A.D. 61.

THEME AND PURPOSE

The primary purpose of this letter, the most personal of all Paul's letters, was to ask Philemon to forgive Onesimus and accept him back as a beloved brother and fellow servant in the gospel (1:10-17). Paul asks Philemon to charge any debts that Onesimus may have made to his own account. As such, this epistle is a fitting illustration of Christ who took our place as our substitute (1:18). A secondary purpose is to teach the practicality of Christian love as we seek to express the life-changing effects of Christ's life in ours as it changes our relationships with others whether in the home or in the master/slave or employer/employee relationships. In the other

prison epistles, Paul spoke of this new relationship (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22; 4:1). In this letter we have a wonderful example. A final purpose was to express Paul's thanksgiving for Philemon and to request preparation for lodging for him when he was released from prison (1:4-7,22). The theme, then, is the life-changing power of the gospel to reach into the varied social conditions of society and change our relationships from bondage to brotherhood.

Philemon was not the only slave owner in the Colossian church (Colossians 4:1), so this letter gave guidelines for other Christian masters in their relationships to their slave-brothers. Paul did not deny the rights of Philemon over his slave, but he asked Philemon to relate the principle of Christian brotherhood to the situation with Onesimus (1:16). At the same time, Paul offered to pay personally whatever Onesimus owed. This letter is not an attack against slavery as such, but a suggestion as to how Christian masters and slaves could live their faith within that system. It is possible that Philemon did free Onesimus and send him back to Paul (1:14). It has also been suggested that Onesimus became a minister and later bishop of the church at Ephesus.²

CHRIST AS SEEN IN PHILEMON

The forgiveness that the believer finds in Christ is beautifully portrayed by analogy (an illustration) in Philemon. Onesimus, guilty of a great offense (1:11, 18), is motivated by Paul's love to intercede on his behalf (1:10-17). Paul lays aside his rights (1:8) and becomes Onesimus' substitute by assuming his debt (1:19-19). By Philemon's gracious act, Onesimus is restored and placed in a new relationship (1:15-16). In this analogy, we are as Onesimus. Paul's advocacy before Philemon is parallel to Christ's work of mediation before the Father. Onesimus was condemned by law but saved by grace.³

OUTLINE**1. Prayer Of Thanksgiving For Philemon. (1:1-7)**

² Ryrie, p. 1939.

³ Wilkinson/Boa, p. 444.

2. Petition Of Paul For Onesimus. (1:8-18)**3. Promise Of Paul To Philemon. (1:19-21)****4. Personal Matters. (1:22-25)****THE GENERAL EPISTLES****INTRODUCTION**

We now come to the final eight epistles of the New Testament canon, seven of which have often been called the General or Catholic Epistles, though Hebrews has been excluded from this description. The term Catholic was used in the sense of general or universal to distinguish them from the Pauline Epistles which were addressed to churches or persons.⁴ In their addresses (with the exception of 2 and 3 John) they were not limited to a single locality. As an illustration, James is addressed "*to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad,*" which is a designation for Believers everywhere (likely all Jewish Christians at that early date). Then 1 Peter is addressed "to those who reside as aliens (non-citizens), scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia," a designation to Believers in these various areas. The epistles of 2 and 3 John have also been included in this group even though they were addressed to specific individuals. Because of these differences, in this study these eight books are simply being called "The General Epistles." It should be noted that the Pauline Epistles are not titled according to their addressees, but, with the exception of Hebrews, all these epistles are titled according to the names of their authors.

In general, we may say that James and 1 Peter are ethical (in accordance with divine principles of right and wrong), calling Believers to a holy walk with the Savior. Second Peter and Jude are eschatological (prophetic), warning Believers against the presence of false teachers and calling them to contend for the faith. Hebrews and the Epistles of John are primarily Christological and ethical, calling Christians to abide in Christ as God's final revelation and fulfillment of the Old Testament covenant, to experience His life, and not go beyond the truth of the gospel.

⁴ Thiessen, p. 271.

These eight epistles exert an influence out of proportion to their length (less than 10 percent of the New Testament). They supplement the thirteen Pauline Epistles by offering different perspectives on the richness of Christian truth. Each of the five authors (James, Peter, John, Jude, and the author of Hebrews) has a distinctive contribution to make from his own point of view. Great as Paul's epistles are, the New Testament revelation after Acts would be severely limited by one apostolic perspective if the writings of these five men were not included.⁵

Hebrews**(Christ: The One Above All)****AUTHOR AND NAME OF BOOK**

For about 1,200 years (A.D. 400 to 1600) this book was commonly entitled, "The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews," but there was no agreement in the earliest centuries regarding its authorship. The oldest and most reliable title of this book is, "To Hebrews."

Many suggestions have been made and very detailed arguments put forth by scholars, but the fact is the author is nowhere named in the book and is in essence, like its place of writing, date, and even its readership, unknown.

This book was not anonymous to the original readers; they evidently knew the author (13:18-24). For some reason, however, early church tradition is divided over the identity of the author. Part of the church attributed it to Paul; others preferred Barnabas, Luke, or Clement; and some chose anonymity (to stay unknown). The spiritual depth and quality of Hebrews bore witness to its inspiration, despite its anonymity.

Since the recipients are not mentioned as in the Pauline Epistles, we might say a word about them. The very nature of the book with its many Old Testament quotations and the emphasis on the sacrificial system strongly suggests they were Hebrews. Zane C. Hodges says

The identity of the first readers of Hebrews, like the author, is unknown.

⁵ Wilkinson/Boa, p. 450.

Nevertheless they were evidently part of a particular community. This appears from several considerations. The readers had a definite history and the writer referred to their “earlier days” (Hebrews 10:32-34); he knew about their past and present generosity to other Christians (6:10); and he was able to be specific about their current spiritual condition (5:11-14). Moreover, the author had definite links with them and expressed his intention to visit them, perhaps with Timothy (13:19, 23). He also requested their prayers (13:18).

In all probability the readers were chiefly of Jewish background. Though this has sometimes been questioned, the contents of the epistle argue for it. Of course the ancient title “To the Hebrews” might be only a conjecture, but it is a natural one. When everything is said for a Gentile audience that can be said, the fact remains that the author’s heavy stress (emphasis) on Jewish prototypes and his earnest polemic (argument) against the permanence of the Levitical system are best explained if the audience was largely Jewish and inclined to be swayed back to their old faith. The heavy and extensive appeal to the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures also was most suitable to readers who had been brought up on them.⁶

DATE OF WRITING

A.D. 64-68

Several facts suggest a date sometime between A.D. 64-68. First, the book was quoted by Clement of Rome (a pastor in the early church) in A.D. 95 so it had to have been written before that time. Second, it seems quite apparent that the book was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 for the following reasons: (1) the author would have mentioned the temple’s destruction along with the end of the Jewish sacrificial system if such an event of this importance had occurred,

especially in view of the argument of this book; (2) the author speaks of the temple and the priestly activities in a manner which indicates that they were still going on (5:1-3; 7:23, 27; 8:3-5; 9:6-9, 13, 25; 10:1, 3-4, 8, 11; 13:10-11); (3) the author refers to Timothy’s recent release in 13:23, which, if in connection with his ministry to Paul in Rome, requires a date in the late 60s.

THEME AND PURPOSE

Clearly, the theme of Hebrews is the surpassing greatness of Christ or His superiority, and thus also that of Christianity to all of the Old Testament systems. Several words, better, perfect, and heavenly, are prominently used to demonstrate this. As his primary purpose, the author seeks to demonstrate five significant ways Christ is superior or better. He is: (1) superior to the Old Testament prophets (1:1-3); (2) to angels (1:4-2:18); (3) to Moses (3:1-6); (4) to Joshua (3:7-4:16); and, (5) to Aaron’s priesthood (5:1-10:18). The goal of this theme is to warn his readers against the dangers of giving up the substance of what they have in Christ for the temporary shadows of the Old Testament system (10:1). Thus, the readers are encouraged to go on to maturity and their reward as faithful Believers, fulfilling their heavenly calling. To do this, there are five warning passages inserted to challenge them to progress in their Christian faith (2:1-4; 3:1-4:13; 5:11-6:20; 10:26-39; 12:14-29).

CHRIST AS SEEN IN HEBREWS

In accomplishing the purpose of showing the superiority of Christ, Hebrews becomes the most Christological single book of the New Testament. Here He is declared as Son, as the very outshining and representation of the essence of God (1:3, 13), as the One who sat at God’s right hand (1:3), as the One declared by God the Father as God (1:8-9), as the eternal Creator (1:10-12), and as the eternal Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (7). Here Christ is presented as the divine-human Prophet, Priest, and King. He is seen as our Redeemer who, having been made like His brethren, has once and for all dealt with our sin and done that which the temporary sacrifices could never do. As such, He has now passed into the heavens as our Great High Priest as one who sympathizes with our weaknesses.

⁶ Walvoord/Zuck, electronic media.

OUTLINE**1. The Superiority Of Christ To Old Covenant Leaders. (1:1-7:28)**

A. Christ Is Superior To Old Testament Prophets. (1:1-3)

B. Christ Is Superior To The Angels. (1:4-2:18)

C. Christ Is Superior To Moses. (3:1-6)

D. Christ Is Superior To Joshua. (3:7-4:13)

E. Christ Is Superior To The Aaronic Priesthood. (4:14-7:28)

1). Exhortation To Hold Fast. (4:14-16)

2). Qualifications Of A Priest. (5:1-10)

3). Exhortation To Abandon Spiritual Laziness. (5:11-6:12)

4). Certainty Of God's Promise. (6:13-20)

5). Christ's Superior Priestly Order. (7:1-28)

2. The Superior Sacrificial Work As Our High Priest. (8:1-10:39)

A. A Better Covenant. (8:1-13)

B. A Better Sanctuary. (9:1-12)

C. A Better Sacrifice. (9:13-10:18)

D. Exhortations. (10:19-39)

3. Final Plea For Persevering Faith. (11:1-12:29)

A. Examples Of Past Heroes Of The Faith. (11:1-40)

B. Encouragement For Persevering Faith. (12:1-11)

C. Exhortations For Persevering Faith. (12:12-17)

D. Motivation For Persevering Faith. (12:18-29)

4. Conclusion. (13:1-25)

A. Practical Principles For The Christian Life. (13:1-17)

B. Request For Prayer. (13:18-19)

C. Benediction. (13:20-21)

D. Personal Remarks. (13:22-23)

E. Greetings And Final Benediction. (13:24-25)
