

## Introduction To Hebrews

The book of Hebrews is the nineteenth book of the New Testament, appearing at the conclusion of thirteen letters inscribed by Paul to individuals, single congregations or a combination of them. The order of its appearance serves to show the general feeling, but tinged with a bit of doubt, that the letter also was written by Paul.

There is no superscription in the outset of the epistle of those for whom it was intended. Very early, perhaps by 150 A.D., the headings were found at the letter's conclusion: "*to the Hebrews.*" This is one of the arguments made against Paul being the author: all previous thirteen letters included both names of those for whom the letter was intended, as well as Paul's signature. It does seem strange that if Paul is the author, that he would not identify himself since he did universally otherwise. Still, although the letter, in its body, does not address itself to the Hebrews, it was universally agreed by early eastern churches by the middle of the second century that the letter was written to Hebrews.

And, equally as conclusive, is the fact that these were not just Hebrews; these were Hebrew Christians. It is quite possible that the letter was intended for Jerusalem Christians; certainly it was intended for those in Palestine. It may have been a specific letter to Jerusalem Christians, or a general letter to churches in Palestine, just as Galatians was written to the "*churches of Galatia,*" but it is evident that the letter was designed for Jewish converts in the land of Palestine. And why not? Since various regions of the Roman world letters written to them, why should not at least one letter be directed to Jews from whence came Jesus? While the doubts that Paul is the author of this letter have already been touched upon, it appears to this writer that anyone familiar with other writings of Paul would "see" and "hear" Paul in the different parts of the letter. Yet it must be acknowledged that while this seems strong evidence of his authorship; it is not conclusive. There are some portions of Paul's letters which "sound" like Peter, and vice versa. Thus, one cannot be dogmatic about the author of the letter, however strong his convictions may be. After all, the letter does not say and any conclusions reached are conclusions that are drawn inferences which are not necessary ones.

Whatever doubt may exist about the composer of the letter, the design of the letter is clear. It is written to show the superior nature of the system of Christ over that of Moses and to warn those who were Christians not to return to something inferior to what they possessed in Christ. It is a letter worthy of examination and comment, and so we begin.

Jim McDonald