

Hebrews

Part 1: Introduction to the Letter

Author

The individual who wrote *Hebrews* is unknown. However, this is not unusual among the canonical scriptural writings. For example, the authors of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), and Acts are considered anonymous because the author's name is not explicitly stated anywhere within the text. Moreover, several of the Hebrew scriptural writings are also anonymous for the same reason, including *Joshua*, *Judges*, *Ruth*, *1 & 2 Samuel*, *1 & 2 Kings*, *1 & 2 Chronicles*, *Esther*, and *Job*.

However, the manner with which the author of *Hebrews* generally introduces an Old Testament quotation or allusion is unique. Quotations are introduced with phrases that emphasize God is speaking, without including a reference to the original author (Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.). He often uses present-tense verbs to highlight when God speaks. Part (1:1-2a) of the entire preamble (1:1-4) also serves to bind the Old Testament to the author's contemporary audience in light of the later revelation of the Son, highlighting the continuity of God's word.

I have listed below all the author's quotations and allusions to the Old Testament revelation.¹ Because the New Testament writers often borrow the language of the Old Testament (allusion) rather than quote verses directly, different scholars suggest different counts for the number of times the New Testament quotes or refers to the Old Testament.

Heb 1:5 For to which of the angels did <u>He</u> ever <u>say</u> , "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"? And again, "I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME"?	Psalms 2:7; 2Sam 7:14; 1Chr 17:13	quotation; quotation; allusion
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¹ A **quotation** is a word-for-word citation from the original source, often preceded by "He (Himself has) said," "it is written" or "saying". An **allusion** is a reference to the original source using the same key words or thoughts without quoting word for word. Moreover, quotations from the Septuagint (LXX) may appear to have somewhat different wording than the linked translation of the Hebrew text. And finally, the New American Standard Bible identifies Old Testament quotes in the New Testament with ALL CAPS.

Heb 1:6 And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, <u>He says</u> , “AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM.”	Deut 32:43 (LXX) Psalm 97:7	quotation
Heb 1:7 And of the angels <u>He says</u> , “WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS, AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE.”	Psalm 104:4	quotation
Heb 1:8 But of the Son <u>He says</u> , “YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM. Heb 1:9 “YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS.	Psalm 45:6-7	quotation
Heb 1:10 And, “YOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH, AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS; Heb 1:11 THEY WILL PERISH, BUT YOU REMAIN; AND THEY ALL WILL BECOME OLD LIKE A GARMENT, Heb 1:12 AND LIKE A MANTLE YOU WILL ROLL THEM UP; LIKE A GARMENT THEY WILL ALSO BE CHANGED. BUT YOU ARE THE SAME, AND YOUR YEARS WILL NOT COME TO AN END.”	Psalm 102:25-27	quotation
Heb 1:13 But to which of the angels has <u>He ever said</u> , “SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET”?	Psalm 110:1	quotation

Heb 2:6 But <u>one has testified somewhere</u>, saying, “WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIM?” Heb 2:7 “YOU HAVE MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS; YOU HAVE CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR, AND HAVE APPOINTED HIM OVER THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS; Heb 2:8 YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET.” For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.	Psalm 8:4-6	quotation
Heb 2:12 saying, “I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE.”	Psalm 22:22	quotation
Heb 2:13 And again, “I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM.” And again, “BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME.”	Isaiah 8:17-18	quotation
Heb 3:5 Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later;	Numbers 12:7	allusion
Heb 3:7 Therefore, just as the <u>Holy Spirit says</u>, “TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, Heb 3:8 DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, Heb 3:9 WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED Me BY TESTING Me, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS. Heb 3:10 “THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, ‘THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS’;	Psalm 95:7-11	quotation

Heb 3:15 while <u>it is said</u> , “TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME.”	Psalms 95:7-8	quotation
Heb 3:17 And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?	Numbers 14:29-32	allusion
Heb 4:3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as <u>He has said</u> , “AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,” although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. Heb 4:4 For <u>He has said somewhere</u> concerning the seventh day: “AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS”; Heb 4:5 and again in this passage, “THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.”	Psalms 95:11 Gen 2:2	quotation
Heb 4:7 <u>He</u> again fixes a certain day, “Today,” saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, “TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.”	Psalms 95:7-8	quotation
Heb 5:5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but <u>He who said</u> to Him, “YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU”;	Psalms 2:7	quotation
Heb 5:6 just as <u>He says</u> also in another passage, “YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.”	Psalms 110:4	quotation
Heb 6:13c-14 He swore by Himself, saying, “I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU.”	Genesis 22:17	quotation
Heb 7:1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, Heb 7:2 to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the	Genesis 14:17-24	allusion

translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace.		
Heb 7:17 For it is <u>attested of Him</u> , “YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.”	Ps 110:4	quotation
Heb 7:21 (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but <u>He with an oath</u> through the One who said to Him, “THE LORD HAS SWORN AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND, ‘YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER’”);	Ps 110:4	quotation
Heb 8:5 who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, “SEE,” <u>He says</u> , “THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN.”	Exodus 25:40	quotation
Heb 8:8 For finding fault with them, <u>He says</u> , “BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; Heb 8:9 NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. Heb 8:10 “FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. Heb 8:11 “AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND	Jeremiah 31:31-34	quotation

EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, ‘KNOW THE LORD,’ FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. Heb 8:12 “FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.”		
Heb 9:20 saying, “THIS IS THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT WHICH GOD COMMANDED YOU.”	Exodus 24:8	quotation
Heb 10:5 Therefore, when He comes into the world, <u>He says</u>, “SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME; Heb 10:6 IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND sacrifices FOR SIN YOU HAVE TAKEN NO PLEASURE. Heb 10:7 “THEN <u>I SAID</u>, ‘BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.’” Heb 10:8 After saying above, “SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND sacrifices FOR SIN YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE in them” (which are offered according to the Law), Heb 10:9 then <u>He said</u>, “BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL.” He takes away the first in order to establish the second.	Psalms 40:6-8	quotation
Heb 10:16 “THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM,” He then says, Heb 10:17 “AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.”	Jeremiah 31:31-34	quotation
Heb 10:30 For we know <u>Him who said</u>, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.” And again, “THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.”	Deuteronomy 32:35, 36	quotation

Heb 10:37 FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. Heb 10:38 BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.	Habakkuk 2:3-4	quotation
Heb 11:12 Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.	Genesis 22:17 Genesis 15:5	quotation allusion
Heb 11:18 it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED."	Genesis 21:12	quotation
Heb 12:5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; Heb 12:6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."	Proverbs 3:11-12	quotation
Heb 12:20 For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED."	Exodus 19:12-13	quotation
Heb 12:21 And so terrible was the sight, that <u>Moses said</u>, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling."	Deuteronomy 9:19	quotation
Heb 12:26 And His voice shook the earth then, but now <u>He has promised</u>, saying, "YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN."	Haggai 2:6	quotation
Heb 13:5 Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for <u>He Himself has said</u>, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"	Deuteronomy 31:6-8	quotation

Heb 13:6 so that we confidently say, “THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?”	Psalms 118:6	quotation
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Interesting Facts:

- The author quotes or alludes to the Old Testament more than any other New Testament author.
- The author’s references to the Old Testament are primarily drawn from the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) and Psalms, with Psalm 110 being the most often quoted.
- The author had an extraordinary mind that was marinated in the Old Testament. Like Apollos “he was mighty in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24). His thinking was saturated with Old Testament types, shadows and allusions. He has an easy familiarity with all the main characters of the Old Testament. There is hardly a verse where the Old Testament is not quoted, summarized, paraphrased or hinted at in some way. This makes the author’s use of the Old Testament a vast topic of study.
- In the original, *Hebrews* quotes a total 737 words, which amount to about 15% of its complete content.
- *Hebrews* quotes almost exclusively from the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. This translation was begun in the third century BC. Legend has it that seventy-two Jewish elders completed the work in seventy-two days. The story is probably apocryphal, but that’s where we get the inaccurate abbreviation LXX (the Roman numeral for seventy) which is commonly used to designate the Septuagint.

The precise origin of the Septuagint is still debated. The translation was probably made in Alexandria, Egypt where there was a large Jewish population. The canonical books of the Old Testament were probably

translated by the end of the second century BC. It is not difficult to imagine that the LXX soon became popular among Diaspora Jews in the Eastern Mediterranean region since the Diaspora Jews did not know Hebrew and Greek had become their mother tongue.

- So perhaps it's a slight irony that *Hebrews* never quotes the Hebrew but only the Greek version of the Old Testament. The writer is obviously very familiar with it and he may have expected his readers to have been familiar with it as well. Of the forty quotations from the Old Testament thirty-four agree word for word, or almost word for word, with the Septuagint as we know it.

Although we do not know who wrote this letter, we may gather from internal evidence that he was a knowledgeable person of the Greek Old Testament Scriptures and an eloquent writer in the Greek language.

A Masterpiece of Language and Eloquence

Hebrews is very well-known for its distinctive and polished literary style, which differs significantly from other NT writings. I have listed below a few examples of the author's astonishing literary style.

1. Polished Greek

The author demonstrates mastery of the Greek language by using a sophisticated vocabulary and crafting complex, flowing sentences. The letter represents the finest and most elegant Greek of the New Testament writings, exhibiting a high level of literary skill.

As to his sophisticated vocabulary, of the letter's 1,038 different words (a total of 4,942 for the letter), 169 words only occur in *Hebrews*, and of the 169 words, ten words cannot be found in Greek literature before *Hebrews*. Furthermore, ninety more words occur only one other time in the Greek New Testament outside of *Hebrews*. Because of the author's vocabularic range, this letter is often said to be the most difficult for New Testament Greek students to read, although I must say,

the vocabulary and syntax of 2 Peter 2 is actually the most difficult to read of all the Greek New Testament, and this is not because of Peter's literary skill!

2. Rhetorical Techniques

The author incorporates a variety of rhetorical devices to persuade and engage his audience to remain faithful to God. These rhetorical techniques include:

- a. Comparison and Contrast. The author's rhetoric establishes again and again Christ's superiority and the New Covenant over that of the Old Covenant and the Levitical priesthood through comparisons.
- b. Analogies. The author uses analogies from the Old Testament to explain the superiority of the Person and work of Christ.
- c. Exhortations and Warnings. The author utilizes a homiletical style, alternating between theological exposition and practical appeals to encourage his audience to remain faithful to God to the end.
- d. Repetition and Restatement. The author reinforces key themes and his arguments by repeating them from different perspectives.
- e. Rhetorical Questions. Rhetorical questions serve to reinforce the author's arguments and draw the reader into his frame of thinking. They are not meant to elicit literal answers but to prompt reflection and emphasize key points about faith, Jesus' superiority, and the consequences of not being faithful to God. For example, "For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU'? This rhetorical question emphasizes the unique and superior status of Jesus compared to the angels.
- f. Catchwords and Inclusion. Perhaps the best known of the formal rhetorical characteristics of *Hebrews* is his use of catchwords and inclusion to mark the beginning and end of larger portions of thought. Inclusio is a literary framing device that serves to highlight core messages, emphasize key themes, and create a unified structure for the text. By bracketing sections with similar or

related words/ideas at the beginning and end, the author draws attention to the overarching message and provides a sense of closure. Inclusio helps hearers and readers understand how the material within the brackets relates to the central theme and strengthens the author's overall argumentative presentations.

- g. Chiasmus. Related to inclusio is chiasmus. Chiasmus provides a balanced literary block, making sentences more memorable and impactful. It is also used to emphasize a concept by presenting it in a balanced but reversed or mirrored form. Chiasmus can also be used to show the relationship between contrasting ideas, often using catchwords or phrases that are related but not necessarily direct opposites.
- h. Alliteration. This rhetorical technique is important because it immediately grabs the readers' or listeners' attention. Alliteration is the repetition of the same letter or syllable, thus the same sound, at the beginning of two or more words in close succession. For example, the author in Hebrews 1:1 begins five words with the Greek letter π: πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι ὁ θεὸς λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις.

3. Old Testament Citations

As mentioned beforehand, the author of *Hebrews* introduces more quotations and allusions than any other New Testament writer. In so doing, he skillfully emphasizes how Christ fulfills and surpasses the shadows of the Old Covenant, and that we now live in biblical times of "the good things to come" (Hebrews 9:11).

4. Christology

Hebrews uniquely constitutes the highest order of Christology than any other biblical author. The letter presents a distinctive Christology by emphasizing Jesus' role as God's Son and ultimate high priest. As the Son, He dies a once-for-all sacrifice for sins. As the high priest, He mediates His own blood in the heavenly tabernacle by both cleansing the tabernacle, presently performing propitiation on behalf of His people 24/7, and mediates the New Covenant.

Furthermore, the theology of Hebrews is distinct in that it draws together so many of the greatest truths revealed in all of Scripture to address the deepest of His people's sins. He introduces us to the only high priest and mediator who can reconcile His sinful people to the infinitely holy God. The author displays the superiority of Jesus' priestly ministry and His once-for-all sacrifice of Himself, which, when we confess our sins, cleanses our consciences. He also orients us to the flow of God's agenda for history, alerting us to how His covenantal bond with His people structures the outworking of His redemptive plan. As the author unveils the connection between redemptive accomplishment and revelatory completion, this letter helps us to understand how to interpret the Old Testament as believers living "upon the last of these days" in which God has spoken and acted, climactically, in His Son.

Occasion

The recipients of *Hebrews* were likely Jewish Christians who were facing persecution and therefore tempted to return to their Jewish heritage, including following the laws and obsolete rituals of the Old Testament. The author's primary goal was to strengthen their faith in Jesus, who is presented as the final and ultimate of God's revelation. Throughout the treatise, the author makes a strong case for Jesus' superiority over everything Old Testament. He is presented as greater than angels, Moses, the earthly tabernacle, the priesthood, and the sacrificial system. Therefore, the author strongly encourages his audience to persevere in their faith in Jesus, even in the face of hardship, and not to abandon the New Covenant which God established through Him.

The author's letter itself informs us that both the author and his addressees had learned of Jesus by way of apostolic testimony (Hebrews 2:1, 3). Their own religious background had instilled in them a reverence for the covenant of Moses as mediated by angels (Hebrews 2:2; cf. Acts 7:53 and Galatians 3:19), an awareness of the Day of Atonement ritual (Hebrews 9:7), a concern for ceremonial washing (Hebrews 6:2; 9:10), and a hope in the coming Day of God's visitation (Hebrews 10:25). Furthermore, after believing in Jesus, the addressees had

suffered persecution, public abuse, confiscation of property, and perhaps even imprisonment; they accepted these torments joyfully for the sake of Christ (Hebrews 10:32-34). Now, however, the threat upon them was sufficient to make them neglect to meet together for fellowship (Hebrews 10:25).

A Working Thematic Statement for *Hebrews*

As God instructed His people long ago regarding the good things to come concerning salvation, He instructs us anew concerning His Son, who is the reality of those things, as He is the only means of a once-for-all sin-offering, and became the high priest-king of the New Covenant, by which we encourage one another properly to worship God, while offering our repentance and gratitude with acceptable service in fear and adoration, and thus by faith partaking in His enduring promise, the inheritance of the so great salvation.

Hebrews Part 1: Introduction

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