

“An Essay on the Authorship of the Book of Hebrews”

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INTRODUCTION

The topic of author of has been the subject of great debate, there is no name within the text so this has led to much speculation. The authorship of *Hebrews* is important to several contemporary issues of theology, particularly regarding the "Eternal Security" debate as well as the "Law/Grace" debate. The purpose of the Epistle to the Hebrews was to encourage the group of Jewish believers and seekers, to continue in their walk and to persevere in their quest. The Epistle of Hebrews answers questions the Jewish believers struggled with in the first century. They needed to understand the relationship between the Old & the New Covenants. Why Jesus was superior to Moses? Why Jesus' death eliminated the need for the Levitical System? What is the relationship between the Tabernacle and Jesus? Is there another way to attain salvation? Can you loose your salvation? Along with the Apostle Paul, there have been numerous individuals named through the years that have been attributed to authorship, such as Luke, Clement of Rome, Barnabas, Priscilla, Apollos, Philip, Silas and Epaphras, just to name a few. The reasons for suggesting the aforementioned names as authors are varied and copious. However, the argument for Pauline Authorship has the greatest Biblical weight. I intend in this essay to juxtapose scriptures while demonstrating & refuting evidence why many individuals were chosen as possible authors to the Book of Hebrews. Even though the last major defense of Pauline Authorship was more than 50 years ago¹, I will couple evidence of Pauline Authorship while simultaneously refuting other possible authors.

1 – Leonard W. The Authorship of the Book of Hebrews (Rome: Vatican Polygot Press, 1939)

LIMITED REASONS FOR VARIED AUTHORSHIP

Although there are numerous authors suggested for The Book of Hebrews, the number of reasons suggested are far, far less than the number of names suggested.

Lukan Authorship is attributed because of the style of the Letter and Luke's contribution of translating from Hebrew to Greek.² Moreover, Luke was Paul's companion on his journeys according to Acts and the Greek style of Hebrews is indistinguishable from Luke's other works...The Gospel According to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.

Barnabas is suggested as an author due to his association as Paul's missionary companion and his presumed familiarity with one of the major themes of Hebrews, the Levitical System, since Barnabas is a Levite (Acts 4:36).³ Also, Tertullian (200 A.D.) quotes from Hebrews and calls it the "Epistle of Barnabas".

As pertaining to Clement of Rome, his authorship stems from the fact that he was in Rome at the time of Paul's imprisonment and that he also wrote his Epistle to the Corinthians (I Clement) after Paul's death, and quoted from *Hebrews* frequently.⁴

Apollos is attributed as the author by Martin Luther based on his assessment of *Hebrews* 2:3, which states in part... "*was confirmed to us by those who heard Him*". This would indicate that the writer never heard the Lord himself but had contact with those who did. Luther surmises that since Paul was one of "*those who heard*" it follows

2 – Hughes, P. E. A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) pp.19-22.

3 – Hodges, Z. The Bible Knowledge Commentary (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983)

4 – Douglas, J.D. Tenney, M. New International Bible Dictionary (Zondervan Publishing, 1987) p.427

that he would not have written this. Both the highly influential Luther and Calvin both held that Paul was not the author, thus, gaining a fair bit of support.⁵ Further, some declare that since Apollos was close to Paul, this would account for the similarities with Paul's writings. He was known to be eloquent, which may account for the advanced style of Hebrews.

Priscilla has been suggested as an author solely based on a minor role with her Husband.⁶

ARGUMENTS AGAINST PAULINE AUTHORSHIP

First, the writing style of the Book of Hebrews differs from Paul's other Epistles. While Paul's other Epistles are less refined, *Hebrews* is a very polished and eloquent Greek. Moreover, Paul rarely wrote his own Epistles. In fact, the only one he actually wrote himself was *Galatians*. Many believe that the "thorn in the flesh" referred to in 2 *Corinthians* is a reference to Paul's poor eyesight. Paul almost always had a companion with him and sometimes used his companion to transcribe his dictated Epistles as exemplified in the following scripture... "*I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord, Rom 16:22*". However, for some reason, Paul wrote the entire book of *Galatians* himself, perhaps so that the *Galatians* would understand that he was very serious, and that the Epistle was not a forgery... "*Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with my own hand, Gal 6:11*". The original manuscript of *Galatians* was written in very large print, maybe due to Paul's extremely poor eyesight... "*Ye know that*

5 – Attridge, H. *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989)

6 – Hoppin, R. *Priscilla: Author of the Book of Hebrews* (New York, Exposition, 1969)

how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first, And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus, Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? For I bear ye record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and had given them to me, Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth Gal 4:13-16”? In addition to the above reasoning, the writing styles are different, thus, some believe that different people may have wrote the different Epistles of Paul.

Second, the common usage of many Anti-Pauline Authorship pundits is part of *Heb 2:3... ”and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him.”* The objection to Pauline Authorship is that the writer seems to speak as though his knowledge is second-hand. Pundits claim that Paul would not have spoken in this way, since he seen Jesus on the Damascus road, was sent by Jesus and given special revelation by the Spirit. Also, according to (*Acts 15*) & (*Gal. 2:1-9*), Paul's mission was to the Gentiles, and Peter retained the title of "Apostle of the Circumcision". The original Apostles were seen as the spiritual authority for the Jewish believers. As a result, some believe that Paul carried no authority over the Jewish believers. When he went up to Jerusalem, Paul submitted himself to the leadership of the Apostles and elders regarding the Jerusalem church (*Acts 21:18-26*). When Paul confronted the Judaizers who threatened his ministry among the Gentiles, Paul appealed to the Apostles and elders in the Jerusalem church to rein in the Messianic "Judaizers" who were creating the problem (*Acts 15*). Many assert that the 11 Apostles were the conduits of the proclamation of the Gospel to the Jews, not Paul.

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE OF PAULINE AUTHORSHIP

The Chester Beatty Papyrus numbered P⁴⁶, dated prior to 200AD⁷ contains a collection of Paul's epistles and includes Hebrews among them. Eusebius, holding to Pauline authorship suggests that Paul omitted his name because he, the apostle to the Gentiles, was writing to the Jews who would have likely dismissed the letter if they had known the source.

For those that have attributed Clement of Rome as the author, a thorough view of Clement's other writings show that his theology differs widely from the author of Hebrews and none of his other writings show such "creative contributions to Christian theology" as does Hebrews.⁸

Clement of Alexandria argues that Luke's style of Greek writing (from Acts) is evident in Hebrews, which he attributes to Paul. *"As Luke also may be recognized by the style, both to have composed the Acts of the Apostles, and to have translated Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews."* [Clement, Fragments from the Latin of Cassiodorus, I]

Eusebius, the fourth century Christian historian said this about the authorship of Hebrews. *"But it is highly probable that the works of the ancients, which he says they had, were the Gospels and the writings of the apostles, and probably some expositions of the ancient prophets, such as are contained in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and in many others of Paul's Epistles."* [Eusebius, Book II, ch. XVII]. Furthermore, *"Paul's fourteen epistles are well known and undisputed. It is not indeed right to overlook the fact that*

7 – Young, K. "Palaeographical Dating of P⁴⁶ to the Later First Century," *Biblica*, 69, (1988) p. 248.

8 – Guthrie, D. *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1990), p. 678.

some have rejected the Epistle to the Hebrews, saying that it is disputed by the church of Rome, on the ground that it was not written by Paul. But what has been said concerning this epistle by those who lived before our time I shall quote in the proper place."

[Eusebius, Book III, ch. III] More telling, are the following support statements which underscore the aforementioned statements *and* refutes the reasoning that even though many hold that the Greek Style points to Lukan Authorship, the Greek Style actually points to "Lukan stenography on behalf of Pauline dictation, resulting in Pauline Authorship". Referring to Clement of Rome, Paul's acquaintance (*Phil. 4:3*) who wrote one of his own epistles (I Clement), Eusebius wrote the following: *"In this epistle he gives many thoughts drawn from the Epistle to the Hebrews, and also quotes verbally some of its expressions, thus showing most plainly that it is not a recent production. Wherefore it has seemed reasonable to reckon it with the other writings of the apostle. For as Paul had written to the Hebrews in his native tongue, some say that the evangelist Luke, others that this Clement himself, translated the epistle."* [Eusebius, Book III, ch. XXXVIII] Eusebius' conclusion is that Hebrews was known to Clement in the mid-first century, so it can be traced back to Rome about Paul's time. He concludes that it is not a more recent epistle, as the detractors claimed. Speaking of Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius wrote; *"He says that the Epistle to the Hebrews is the work of Paul, and that it was written to the Hebrews in the Hebrew language; but that Luke translated it carefully and published it for the Greeks, and hence the same style of expression is found in this epistle and in the Acts. But he says that the words, Paul the Apostle, were probably not prefixed, because, in sending it to the Hebrews, who were prejudiced and suspicious of*

him, he wisely did not wish to repel them at the very beginning by giving his name. Farther on he says: "But now, as the blessed presbyter said, since the Lord being the apostle of the Almighty, was sent to the Hebrews, Paul, as sent to the Gentiles, on account of his modesty did not subscribe himself an apostle of the Hebrews, through respect for the Lord, and because being a herald and apostle of the Gentiles he wrote to the Hebrews out of his superabundance." [Eusebius, book VI, ch. XIV]

In addition, the following evidence is cumulatively overwhelming. The inscription "The *Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*" is found on nearly all existing Greek manuscripts, including the Peshito, which is the Aramaic translation.

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 180) says Paul wrote to the Hebrews and this was the opinion of Pantaenus, who was the head of the celebrated school at Alexandria. Pantaenus lived near Palestine, and he would have been familiar with the prevailing opinion.

Origen, (A.D. 185) also of Alexandria ascribed the epistle to Paul. Origen was one of the most learned of early church fathers. Authorship was ascribed to Paul in the Aramaic (Syriac) translation dating to the early second century.

Justin Martyr attributes it to Paul and quotes from it about A.D. 140.

Jacob, bishop of Nisibis, also (A.D. 325) quotes it as a production of Paul.

Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, Early Church historian (A.D. 325) ascribed authorship to Paul.

Church Fathers such as Ambrose of Milan (A.D. 360), Jerome, translator of the Latin Vulgate (A.D.400), as well as Augustine argued Pauline Authorship.

The Councils of Laodicea A.D. 363, Hippo A.D. 393 and Carthage A.D. 397 declared Hebrews to be the Epistle of Paul.

INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF PAULINE AUTHORSHIP

Even though some claim that the ‘present tense’ Greek may not categorically mean ‘present time’, but may be morphological, the time of the writing may still be used as an important piece of evidence. Referring to the manifold quotations of *Hebrews* used in I Clement coupled with the current climate of persecution yet to be on the doorstep, the time of this book can probably be dated between 60-70 A.D. The letter was written before the persecution of 64 A.D. with Christians dying for their faith, as supported in *Hebrews 12:4...* “*You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin*”. Moreover, the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70 and there is no mention of this fact in *Hebrews*. Of great note is Paul’s mentioning of his companion, Timothy. Timothy is referred to over 23 times in his relationship to Paul and the ministry. No other writer of the Epistles mentions Timothy. “*Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly*” *Heb 13:23-25*. Timothy was Paul representative to the Churches. He speaks about returning to the “Hebrews” with Timothy. Moreover, when Paul mentions Timothy to others, he always calls him brother, as stated in *II Cor 1:1*, *Col 1:1* and *I The 3:2*.

The writer is writing from Italy and is/was a prisoner (*Hebrews 10:34*). Paul was a prisoner at one point for 2 years (*Acts 24:27*). The salutation, “*Those from Italy greet*

9 – Porter, S. Verbal Aspects in the Greek of the New Testament (Bern: Peter Lang 1989)

you”, agrees with Paul’s situation of being in Rome as a prisoner.

Many contend that Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, would not write to the Jews. However, Peter, the Apostle to the Jews, confirmed the fact that Paul wrote an Epistle to the Jews, as stated in (*II Peter 3:15-16*). Pink also quotes *II Peter* to make his claim of Pauline Authorship. Arthur Pink supports his claim in his ‘Exposition of Hebrews’¹⁰.

Paul was a Pharisee and had knowledge of the Old Covenant. He would have been thoroughly familiar with the Levitical System and Laws, not just Barnabas. Paul gave teaching on the Covenants in the Epistle to the *Galatians* that companions the teaching in *Hebrews*, as stated in (*Gal 4:19-5:4*) compared with (*Heb 8:6-13*). *Hebrews* is the companion book to *Galatians*, written to the Messianic believers rather than to Gentiles.

Paul indicated that there were some forged epistles in circulation, which were attributed to Paul (*II Thess 2:2*), yet were not written by him. Most likely, they were written by some of the Judaizers who were promulgating false doctrines. Paul had to let it be known which Epistles would come from him. He would write in his own handwriting (using the large letters) statements like, "grace to you." Paul's Gospel was all about grace and he signed each letter with a note to the readers, about the grace of God. In the second Epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote the last two verses in his own unique handwriting...*”The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is the token every epistle: so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen II Thess 3:17-18”*. Notice the copious Pauline examples. *“And the God of peace*

10 – Exposition of Hebrews, Arthur Pink, Baker Books

shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen, Rom 16:20, The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you, 1 Cor 16:23, The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen. 2 Cor 13:14, Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Gal 6:18, Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen. Eph 6:24, The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. Phil 4:23, The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen. Col 4:18, The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen. 1 Thess 5:28, The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. II Thess 3:18, Which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee. Amen. 1 Tim 6:21, The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen. 2 Tim 4:22, All that are with me salute thee. Greet them that love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen. Titus 3:15, The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Philemon 1:25, Grace be with you all. Amen. Heb 13:25

Paul was the only N.T. writer who wrote from prison and expected to be released. Notice the comparisons of *Hebrews 13:19/23* with *Phil 1:7-8*...*"But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner, Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you" ...and... "Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace. For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. Phil 1:7-8*

Paul was the only N.T. writer who requested prayer for himself, as we see *Hebrews 13:18* with *II The 3:1* ... “*Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly...and ...*”*Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you*”

Paul anticipates to visit the recipients as witnessed in *Hebrews 13:19* with *Galatians 4:20*... “*But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner...and...*” *I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.*” Lastly, many exhortations of Paul in other Epistles can be verified by honest comparisons, such as...(*Heb 12:3* with *Gal 6:9*) and (*Heb 12:14* with *Rom 12:18*) and (*Heb 13:1-3* with *Eph 5:2-4*) and (*Heb 13:16* with *Phil 4:18*) and (*Heb13:20-21* with *Rom 15:33*).

CONCLUSION

There is no proof whatsoever, that any one else besides Paul was the author of the Book of Hebrews. There is only conjecture to support authorship other than Paul. This essay gave varied arguments on who may be the author of the Book of Hebrews. Nonetheless, in addition to all the examples given, a strong refute was given to nullify the strength of their argument and dilute the potency of their evidence. Scripture was also used clearly and concisely to give validation and weight on the premise that Paul is the author of the Book of Hebrews. In addition, it would seem that those that contend the Epistle to the Hebrews was written by anyone other than Paul, seems to suggest an exercise in egocentric intelligence to conjure up a myriad of individuals & a myriad of hypotheses to justify choosing them...rather than submitting to the humbling power of

the Holy Spirit and finding solace in the Holy Scriptures. Hence, with all the Scriptural Evidence, Internal Evidence, External Evidence & Contextual Evidence, we are justified in concluding that authorship of the Book of Hebrews strongly favors the Apostle Paul.

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