

The Epistle to the HEBREWS

GARETH LEE COCKERILL

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

It is with considerable mixed emotions that I (gladly) introduce this commentary to the reading public. On the one hand, this work represents a signal end of an era for this commentary series, since it is both replacing a commentary by the second general editor (F. F. Bruce) and is the final editorial task of the third general editor, whose onsetting bout with Alzheimer's disease has necessitated his relinquishing this task, even though a few additional replacement volumes are still in the mill, as it were. I have had the privilege of working with Gary Cockerill quite closely over the past several years, and am pleased heartily to commend this commentary to the primary intended readership of this series — the proverbial “busy pastor” and biblical students in colleges and seminaries. The reader will quickly recognize that the author is not only well acquainted with the secondary literature on this great biblical book, but has also brought his own deep love for the author of Hebrews and his work to the task so that it shines throughout these pages. I am glad to be able to commend it to one and all.

GORDON D. FEE

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Hebrews is a literary work from the first-century Hellenistic world. Yet the exposition that follows in this commentary does not treat this book at a distance as if it were a laboratory specimen. My intention is to do more than explicate an ancient document within its context and then draw some analogies for contemporary believers. I would enable modern readers to enter the Christian world of Hebrews and allow that world to reshape their hearts and minds. I hope this commentary will help those who approach this ancient but ever-relevant text to hear the word God has spoken in his Son, enter the divine presence through the cleansing he provides, and persevere through obedient faithfulness in fellowship with the people of God. Richard Hays has reminded the church that the purpose of biblical exposition is to enter the biblical narrative and allow it to transform the hearer's perspective and behavior.¹ There is no better book for carrying out this mandate than the Letter to the Hebrews.

In our initial conversations concerning this book Professor Gordon Fee asked me to justify issuing a new volume on Hebrews in this series. I suggested that developments over the past decades in the study of ancient rhetoric, in the analysis of Hebrews' structure (particularly through discourse analysis), and in intertextual studies warranted such a venture. I am grateful that he agreed. No NT book is more diligent in presenting the OT Scripture for its Christian hearers than this book, which begins by declaring: "God, who spoke in the prophets, . . . has now spoken in One who is Son." None of-

1. Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 173: "One of our fundamental pastoral tasks is to teach our congregations to find themselves in the stories of Israel and the early church. . . . Our pedagogy has failed miserably to teach this skill because we have usually tried too hard to make the text 'relevant.' Rather than seeking to make the text relevant, Paul seeks to draw his readers *into* the text in such a way that its world reshapes the norms and decisions of the community in the present. That is the task of biblical preaching."

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

fers a higher degree of rhetorical sophistication. One does not have to embrace all of the methodology advocated by various practitioners of these disciplines to be enriched by their work.

First of all, then, this commentary is based on a fresh analysis of the structure and rhetorical shape of Hebrews. Each individual passage is interpreted with sensitivity to the role it plays within the author's overall strategy for persuading his hearers to embrace the truth he presents and to act accordingly. I believe you will benefit significantly from engaging the full presentation of this structural analysis in the Introduction before proceeding to the exposition of your favorite passage. The opening paragraphs of each section and subsection of the exposition also situate the particular portion of the text under consideration in relation to the whole. It may seem audacious to present yet another structural analysis of Hebrews. I offer this analysis humbly, only after carefully listening to the text of Hebrews, and with deep appreciation for all that I have gained from other analyses. I ask you, the reader, to judge this analysis on the basis of its ability to enrich your understanding of individual passages and of Hebrews as a whole.

This commentary also offers fresh insight into Hebrews' use of the OT. The author of Hebrews understands the relationship between God's word in the Son and previous revelation as one of continuity and fulfillment. His approach has much that can enrich contemporary Christian biblical interpretation. My understanding of this subject as given in the Introduction to this commentary informs the exposition of the commentary proper.

When people discovered that I was writing a commentary on Hebrews they would almost invariably ask, "Well, who wrote it?" One certainly can and must study Hebrews within its first-century environment. In my judgment, however, the evidence available is insufficient to determine with certainty the name of the author or to be overly precise about the location, specific identity, and situation of the recipients. Thus those who base their interpretation on an unduly specific reconstruction of Hebrews' origin are likely to skew their understanding of the book in proportion to the idiosyncrasy of their proposal. Nevertheless, each proposal highlights some aspect of Hebrews. Thus we will survey various proposals in the Introduction not so much to determine which one is correct as to benefit from the insight each provides.

It is necessary to say something about translation, textual variants, and secondary sources. I have done my own translation of Hebrews so that I would not be under obligation to critique a particular version and so that I could make stylistic features and various emphases of the Greek text more readily accessible to the English reader. Many commentaries on Hebrews provide extensive analysis of textual variants. I have addressed textual issues only when they significantly impact interpretation and as part of the exposi-

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tion itself rather than in a separate section. Due to the increased volume of scholarly publication, one can no longer claim to have mastered all of the literature on Hebrews. I have tried to be as comprehensive as possible and to interact with the sources that seemed most helpful. I am glad that the fine commentary by Peter O'Brien appeared just in time for consideration. I regret that my friend David Allen's commentary came just a bit too late.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to many for their help and encouragement. First of all, I am indebted to Professor Fee for giving me this opportunity and especially for his clear feedback on my initial draft of the opening chapters. That feedback set the direction for the whole. I would be amiss to omit my appreciation for my doctoral mentor, Professor Mathias Rissi, although this is not the commentary on Hebrews that he would have written. He first sparked my academic interest in Hebrews and guided my study with both insight and encouragement. My thanks to Ron Smith and Ray Easley, former President and Dean, respectively, of Wesley Biblical Seminary, for arranging my schedule and providing other resources that facilitated this project. Dan Burnett, Director of Library Services for Wesley Biblical Seminary, has graciously responded to my many requests for interlibrary loans. I am especially grateful to Kenneth Elliott, Director of the Library at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi, and to John McCarty, the Circulation Director. They cheerfully provided me with bibliographical resources, with a research room that greatly facilitated the completion of this project, and with collegial camaraderie. Milt Essenburg, of Eerdmans Publishing, has given me the encouragement in these final months that he has given to so many other commentators before me.

I am profoundly grateful to my friend since graduate school days, Dave Steveline, without whose encouragement this book would never have been begun. I wish to thank my daughter Allene and two sons-in-law, Carey Vinzant and David O'Donnell. Carey not only read the manuscript of this commentary with the eye of both a stylist and a theologian but also prepared the indexes. Allene and David provided extensive help with the Bibliography. I am grateful to my three daughters, Allene, Ginny, and Kathy, for their encouragement over the years, and, most of all to my wife of more than forty years, Rosa, who has patiently, graciously, and lovingly lived these past years for the time "after commentary." It is to her, to our children by birth and by marriage, to our grandchildren, and to Dave that I would dedicate this volume.

GARETH LEE COCKERILL

ABBREVIATIONS

I. BIBLICAL TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

CEV	Contemporary English Version
ESV	English Standard Version
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint (Old Greek Old Testament)
MT	Masoretic Text (Standard Hebrew Old Testament)
NA ²⁷	<i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> . Nestle-Aland, 27th ed.
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
T/NIV	Today's New International Version/New International Version
TEV	Today's English Version
TNIV	Today's New International Version
UBS ⁴	<i>The Greek New Testament</i> . United Bible Societies, 4th ed.

II. JOURNALS

<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>Biblical Research</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>CurBS</i>	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>GTJ</i>	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NRTh</i>	<i>La nouvelle revue théologique</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>RevBib</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SPhilo</i>	<i>Studia philonica</i>
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

III. REFERENCE WORKS

BDAG	W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago, 1999
BDF	F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>DLNTD</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development</i> . Edited by R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997
L&N	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains</i> . Edited by J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida. 2nd ed. New York, 1989
LSJ	H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, H. S. Jones, and R. McKenzie, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i>
MHT	<i>A Grammar of New Testament Greek</i> , by J. H. Moulton (vol. 1), W. E. Howard (vol. 2), and N. Turner (vols. 3-4)
MM	J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, <i>The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament</i>
<i>OTP</i> <i>PG</i>	J. H. Charlesworth, ed., <i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Patrologia graeca</i> (= <i>Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca</i>). Edited by J.-P. Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1844-64
Str-B	H. Strack and P. Billerbeck, <i>Kommentar zum Neuen Testament</i>
<i>TCGNT</i>	B. M. Metzger, <i>A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76

IV. SERIES

AB	Anchor Bible
ACCS: NT	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANTC	Augsburg New Testament Commentary
BU	Biblische Untersuchungen
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Meyer-Kommentar)
LCL	Loeb Classic Library

ABBREVIATIONS

LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
MNTC	Moffatt New Testament Commentary
MTS	Marburger Theological Studies
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NIBCNT	New International Biblical Commentary: New Testament
RNT	Regensburger Neues Testament
SB	Sources bibliques
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

V. APOSTOLIC FATHERS

<i>Barn.</i>	<i>Barnabas</i>
<i>1-2 Clem.</i>	<i>1-2 Clement</i>
<i>Did.</i>	<i>Didache</i>
<i>Herm. Mand.</i>	<i>Shepherd of Hermas, Mandate</i>
<i>Herm. Sim.</i>	<i>Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude</i>
<i>Herm. Vis.</i>	<i>Shepherd of Hermas, Vision</i>
<i>Ign. Eph.</i>	<i>Ignatius, To the Ephesians</i>
<i>Ign. Magn.</i>	<i>Ignatius, To the Magnesians</i>
<i>Ign. Phld.</i>	<i>Ignatius, To the Philadelphians</i>
<i>Ign. Trall.</i>	<i>Ignatius, To the Trallians</i>
<i>Mart. Pol.</i>	<i>Martyrdom of Polycarp</i>
<i>Pol. Phil.</i>	<i>Polycarp, To the Philippians</i>

VI. CLASSICAL SOURCES

<i>Ann.</i>	Tacitus, <i>Annales</i>
<i>Claud.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Divus Claudius</i>
<i>Cyr.</i>	Xenophon, <i>Cyropaedia</i>
<i>Diatr.</i>	Epictetus, <i>Diatribai (Dissertationes)</i>
<i>Enn.</i>	Plotinus, <i>Enneades</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	Seneca, <i>Epistulae morales</i>
<i>Eth. Nic.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Nichomachean Ethics/Ethica nichomachea</i>
<i>Hist.</i>	Herodotus, <i>Histories/Historiae</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Inst.</i>	Quintilian, <i>Institutio oratoria</i>
<i>Inv.</i>	Cicero, <i>De inventione rhetorica</i>
<i>Mem.</i>	Xenophon, <i>Memorabilia</i>
<i>Mor.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Moralia</i>
<i>Off.</i>	Cicero, <i>De officiis</i>
<i>Onir.</i>	Artemidorus, <i>Onirocritica</i>
<i>Onom.</i>	Pollux, <i>Onomasticon</i>
<i>Rhet.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Rhetoric/Rhetorica</i>

VII. CHURCH FATHERS

<i>1 Apol.</i>	Justin Martyr, <i>1 Apology/Apologia I</i>
<i>Civ.</i>	Augustine, <i>The City of God/De civitate Dei</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	Justin Martyr, <i>Dialogue with Trypho/Dialogus cum Tryphone</i>
<i>Epist.</i>	Jerome, <i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Haer.</i>	Hippolytus, <i>Refutation of All Heresies/Refutatio omnium haeresium</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Ecclesiastical History/Historia ecclesiastica</i>
<i>Hom. Heb.</i>	Chrysostom, <i>Homiliae in epistulam ad Hebraeos</i>
<i>Mart.</i>	Tertullian, <i>To the Martyrs/Ad martyras</i>
<i>Pan.</i>	Epiphanius, <i>Refutation of All Heresies/Panarion (Adversus Haereses)</i>
<i>Peregr.</i>	Lucian, <i>The Passing of Peregrinus/De morte Peregrini</i>
<i>Pud.</i>	Tertullian, <i>Modesty/De pudicitia</i>
<i>Vir. ill.</i>	Jerome, <i>Lives of Illustrious Men/De viris illustribus</i>

VIII. JOSEPHUS

<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	<i>Against Apion/Contra Apionem</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities/Antiquitates judaicae</i>
<i>J.W.</i>	<i>Jewish War/Bellum judaicum</i>
<i>Life</i>	<i>The Life/Vita</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

IX. APOCRYPHA AND PSEUDEPIGRAPHA

Bar	Baruch
1-2 Esd	1-2 Esdras
1-4 Macc	1-4 Maccabees
Jdt	Judith
Sir	Sirach/Ecclesiasticus
Sus	Susanna
Tob	Tobit
Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
<i>Apos. Con.</i>	<i>Apostolic Constitutions and Canons</i>
<i>As. Mos.</i>	<i>Assumption of Moses</i>
<i>Ascen. Isa.</i>	<i>Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah 6–11</i>
<i>1 En.</i>	<i>1 Enoch (Ethiopic Apocalypse)</i>
<i>2 En.</i>	<i>2 Enoch (Slavonic Apocalypse)</i>
<i>3 En.</i>	<i>3 Enoch (Hebrew Apocalypse)</i>
<i>2 Bar.</i>	<i>2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse)</i>
<i>3 Bar.</i>	<i>3 Baruch (Greek Apocalypse)</i>
<i>4 Ezra</i>	<i>4 Ezra</i>
<i>Jos. Asen.</i>	<i>Joseph and Aseneth</i>
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
<i>L.A.B.</i>	<i>Liber antiquitatum biblicarum (Pseudo-Philo)</i>
<i>L.A.E.</i>	<i>Life of Adam and Eve</i>
<i>Let. Aris.</i>	<i>Letter of Aristeas</i>
<i>Liv. Pro.</i>	<i>Lives of the Prophets</i>
<i>Mart. Isa.</i>	<i>Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah 1–5</i>
<i>Mart. Pet. Paul</i>	<i>Martyrdom of Peter and Paul</i>
<i>Pss. Sol.</i>	<i>Psalms of Solomon</i>
<i>Sib. Or</i>	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>
<i>T. Benj.</i>	<i>Testament of Benjamin</i>
<i>T. Dan</i>	<i>Testament of Dan</i>
<i>T. Iss.</i>	<i>Testament of Issachar</i>
<i>T. Jos.</i>	<i>Testament of Joseph</i>
<i>T. Jud.</i>	<i>Testament of Judah</i>
<i>T. Levi</i>	<i>Testament of Levi</i>
<i>T. Mos.</i>	<i>Testament of Moses</i>
<i>T. Reu.</i>	<i>Testament of Reuben</i>
<i>T. Sim.</i>	<i>Testament of Simeon</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

X. PHILO

<i>Abraham</i>	<i>On the Life of Abraham/De Abrahamo</i>
<i>Agriculture</i>	<i>On Agriculture/De agricultura</i>
<i>Alleg. Interp.</i>	<i>Allegorical Interpretations/Legum allegoriae</i>
<i>Cherubim</i>	<i>On the Cherubim/De cherubim</i>
<i>Confusion</i>	<i>On the Confusion of Tongues/De confusione linguarum</i>
<i>Creation</i>	<i>On the Creation of the World/De opificio mundi</i>
<i>Decalogue</i>	<i>On the Decalogue/De decalogo</i>
<i>Dreams</i>	<i>On Dreams/De somniis</i>
<i>Drunkeness</i>	<i>On Drunkeness/De ebrietate</i>
<i>Embassy</i>	<i>On the Embassy to Gaius/Legatio ad Gaium</i>
<i>Eternity</i>	<i>On the Eternity of the World/De aeternitate mundi</i>
<i>Flaccus</i>	<i>Against Flaccus/In Flaccum</i>
<i>Flight</i>	<i>On Flight and Finding/De fuga et inventione</i>
<i>Giants</i>	<i>On Giants/De gigantibus</i>
<i>Good Person</i>	<i>That Every Good Person Is Free/Quod omnis probus liber sit</i>
<i>Heir</i>	<i>Who Is the Heir?/Quis rerum divinarum heres sit</i>
<i>Joseph</i>	<i>On the Life of Joseph/De Iosepho</i>
<i>Migration</i>	<i>On the Migration of Abraham/De migratione Abrahami</i>
<i>Moses</i>	<i>On the Life of Moses/De vita Mosis</i>
<i>Names</i>	<i>On the Change of Names/De mutatione nominum</i>
<i>Planting</i>	<i>On Planting/De plantatione</i>
<i>Posterity</i>	<i>On the Posterity of Cain/De posteritate Caini</i>
<i>Prelim. Studies</i>	<i>On the Preliminary Studies/De congressu eruditionis gratia</i>
<i>QE</i>	<i>Questions and Answers on Exodus/Questiones et solutiones in Exodum</i>
<i>QG</i>	<i>Questions and Answers on Genesis/Questiones et solutiones in Genesin</i>
<i>Rewards</i>	<i>On Rewards and Punishments/De praemiis et poenis</i>
<i>Sacrifices</i>	<i>On the Sacrifices of Cain and Abel/De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini</i>
<i>Sobriety</i>	<i>On Sobriety/De sobrietate</i>
<i>Spec. Laws</i>	<i>On the Special Laws/De specialibus legibus</i>
<i>Unchangeable</i>	<i>That God Is Unchangeable/Quod Deus sit immutabilis</i>
<i>Virtues</i>	<i>On the Virtues/De virtutibus</i>
<i>Worse</i>	<i>That the Worse Attacks the Better/Quod deterius potiori insidari soleat</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

XI. DEAD SEA SCROLLS

Gen. Apoc.	Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen ^{ar})
1QH	<i>Thanksgiving Hymns</i>
1QM	<i>War Scroll</i>
1QpHab	<i>Pesher Habakkuk</i>
1QS	<i>Rule of the Community</i>
1QSa	<i>Rule of the Congregation</i> (Appendix a to 1QS)
1Q Sb	<i>Rule of the Blessings</i> (Appendix b to 1QS)
4QAmram ^b	<i>4Q Visions of Amram^b</i> (4Q533)
4QBer ^f	<i>4QBlessings^f</i> (4Q280)
4QCatena ^a	<i>Midrash on Eschatology^a</i> (Catena)
4QDeut32	<i>4QDeuteronomy32</i> (4Q44)
4QFlor	<i>Midrash on Eschatology^b</i> (4QFlorilegium)
4QShirShabb ^{a-b}	<i>Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice^{a-b}</i> = 4Q400-4Q401
4QTest	<i>4QTestimonia</i>
11QMelch	11QMelchizedek (11Q13)
CD	Cairo Genizah copy of the <i>Damascus Document</i>

XII. RABBINIC LITERATURE (TARGUMS)

<i>Frg. Tg.</i>	<i>Fragmentary Targum</i>
<i>Gen. Rab.</i>	<i>Genesis Rabbah</i>
<i>Tg. Neof.</i>	<i>Targum Neofiti</i>
<i>Tg. Onq.</i>	<i>Targum Onqelos</i>
<i>Tg. Ps.-J.</i>	<i>Targum Pseudo-Jonathan</i>

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Introduction is to facilitate a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of Hebrews and of the commentary that follows. Part I, entitled “Hebrews in Its Environment,” is concerned with the origin of Hebrews and with relevant features of the cultural, linguistic, literary, and religious world in which it was written. Thus this first part begins with a section on the often-asked question concerning the author’s identity, entitled “The Pastor Who Wrote Hebrews.” Four sections follow: “The Pastor’s Sermon,” “The Pastor’s Congregation,” “The Pastor’s Worldview,” and “When Did the Pastor Write This Sermon?” Part I gives close attention to what Hebrews reveals about the skills, background, values, and goals of its author as well as the situation of its recipients and the nature of the author’s concern for them.

The four sections of Part II, “The Message of Hebrews,” are particularly crucial because they focus on Hebrews’ use of the OT, its rhetorical shape, and its abiding message. First, the section entitled “The Sermon’s Use of the Old Testament” argues that the author had a well-thought-out understanding of how Christ fulfilled the OT that continues to be relevant for modern Christians. The next section, entitled “The Sermon’s Rhetorically Effective Structure,” draws on the flourishing literature concerning Hebrews’ structure and relation to ancient rhetoric. It presents a comprehensive analysis of the way in which the author has structured Hebrews in order to inspire his readers/hearers to persevere in faith and obedience through the provision of Christ, their “Great High Priest” (4:14). The reader will receive particular benefit from perusing this section because the following commentary uses this structural analysis to elucidate each passage. The overviews at the beginning of each major section of the commentary are also helpful. Part II concludes with sections entitled “The Sermon’s Abiding Message” and “The Sermon’s Outline.” This final section distills the structural analysis already given into a clear outline that serves as a basis for the commentary that follows and thus as a helpful map for the reader.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

Use of terms like “pastor” and “sermon” in these titles reflects a certain understanding of Hebrews’ nature and purpose. This way of describing Hebrews has also been chosen with the hope that it will make this material more accessible to the modern reader. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to the many great interpreters who have preceded me in this task. I have sought to listen to them with care and have been immeasurably enriched by their insights. My desire is, by God’s grace, to pass on to the reader what insight has been given me.

I. HEBREWS IN ITS ENVIRONMENT

A. THE PASTOR WHO WROTE HEBREWS

Although the text of Hebrews does not disclose the name of the author, it does reveal much about his ability, his concerns, and his relationship to those he addresses.¹ He was a master of elegant Greek who understood the principles of rhetoric and oral persuasion as taught in the ancient world. He had a thorough knowledge of the OT and a clear understanding of how it should be interpreted in light of its fulfillment in Christ. He was well acquainted with the past history of the people to whom he was writing (2:3-4; 6:10; 10:32-34; 13:22-25) and was deeply concerned lest they fail to persevere in their devotion to and public confession of Christ (3:1; 4:14; 10:23). Thus he warns them against laxity or carelessness in their adherence to the Son of God (2:1-4; 5:10-14; 6:1-3), against the attractions of the unbelieving world (12:14-17), and especially against yielding to the social pressure of the larger society that did not accept Christ (3:7-4:11; 10:32-39; 12:1-13). Continued inattention to the Son of God coupled with acquiescence before ungodly opposition might lead to apostasy (6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:14-17). The full sufficiency of the Son of God as the effective High Priest of God’s people is the author’s antidote against these dangers. Through Christ’s definitive removal of sin God’s promise of a future eternal “City” is certain and his power for present perseverance is real (4:14-16; 10:19-25). The Son of God thus incarnate as Savior and High Priest is the final revelation of God (1:1-4), who fulfills all

1. The masculine pronoun will be used throughout for the author of Hebrews, not merely for convenience but because of the masculine participle διηγουμένον (“tell”) with which he describes himself in 11:32. Ruth Hoppin, *Priscilla’s Letter: Finding the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Fort Bragg, CA: Lost Coast Press, 1997), has tried unsuccessfully to revive Harnack’s proposal of Priscilla as author (Adolf von Harnack, “Probabilia über die Adresse und den Verfasser des Hebräerbriefes,” *ZNW* [1900]: 16-41). See Mitchell, 5.

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that the old order anticipated. The author does not claim direct apostolic authority but bases his appeal both on the Gospel as acknowledged by his hearers' own confession of faith and on the authority of the OT Scripture.² His deep concern for the spiritual welfare of his hearers, his preoccupation with the OT, and the sermonic shape of his book (see pp. 11-16 below) justify our referring to him as "the pastor."

Although, due to the paucity of evidence, attempts to identify the author of Hebrews with any NT person must be, at best, inconclusive, the discussion of this issue is not without significance.³ First, during the Patristic period the identity of the author was closely tied to the acceptance of Hebrews into the canon. A look, then, at the Patristic discussion is important in understanding Hebrews' place in the list of approved NT books. Second, the attempt to identify the author underscores the uniqueness of Hebrews among NT writings and thus reminds the modern reader of Hebrews' distinctive contribution to the church's understanding of the gospel.

1. *Authorship and Canonicity*

Hebrews appears between Romans and 1 Corinthians in \mathfrak{P}^{46} , a collection of Pauline epistles dated c. A.D. 200. It already bears the title "To (the) Hebrews" in this manuscript.⁴ In Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus, the great codices from the fourth and fifth centuries, Hebrews occurs after Paul's letters to churches but before his letters to individual persons.⁵ Beginning with the sixth-century Codex Claromontanus, Hebrews assumes the place it has in contemporary English Bibles after the other letters of Paul. In the minds of most contemporary Christians it is canonical but no longer Pauline. It has thus become the first of the "General Epistles" (James; 1 and 2 Peter; 1, 2, and 3 John; Jude). As will become evident below, these changes in location reflect the differences between East and West concerning authorship and canonicity.⁶

2. On the "confession" (3:1; 4:14; 10:23) of those receiving Hebrews see Scott D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (WUNT 223; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 226-29, and those cited on 227, n. 54; similarly Scott D. Mackie, "Confession of the Son of God in Hebrews," *NTS* 53 (2007): 125-28, esp. 126, n. 44.

3. Ellingworth, 3, lists a total of thirteen proposed authors.

4. This title may have been given to Hebrews by analogy with the titles of the Pauline letters (Bruce, 3). The letter conclusion in Heb 13:22-25 may have suggested association with Paul. Clement of Alexandria also seems to have known Hebrews by this title (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.3-4).

5. Also in manuscripts C, H, I, K, and P. In some manuscripts Hebrews also occurs between 2 Corinthians and Galatians. See Weiss, 117-18, esp. nn. 13, 14.

6. \mathfrak{P}^{46} , Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus come from the East; Claromontanus, from the West.

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They are also in accord with Hebrews' final acceptance in the list of canonical books, despite doubts about its Pauline authorship.⁷

The earliest known use of Hebrews was in the western Roman Empire, where it was quoted by and echoed in *1 Clement*, written from Rome around the end of the first century.⁸ There are echoes of Hebrews in Polycarp (c. A.D. 69-155), and it is quoted by Irenaeus (c. A.D. 180), Tertullian (c. A.D. 155-220), and Gaius of Rome (c. A.D. 200).⁹ None of these writers, however, cites Hebrews as canonical or attributes it to Paul. Nor is Hebrews included in the Muratorian Canon (c. A.D. 175?). Although Hippolytus (died c. A.D. 236) quotes Hebrews extensively in his *Commentary on Daniel*, he appears to deny its canonical status by excluding it from the thirteen recognized Pauline epistles.¹⁰ The only suggestion from these sources for the authorship of Hebrews comes from Tertullian, who attributes it to Barnabas.¹¹ This silence may indicate that the West knew that Hebrews was not Pauline and thus did not consider it apostolic and canonical.¹²

In the East, however, the situation was different. At the end of the second century Pantaenus (c. A.D. 180), the founder of the great catechetical school in Alexandria, Egypt, claimed that Hebrews was both Pauline and canonical. As noted above, this affirmation is supported by the way in which ¶⁴⁶ locates Hebrews between Romans and 1 Corinthians. Pantaenus, however, recognized the lack of a normal Pauline introduction as an impediment in need of explanation: Paul had not affixed his name because he was only the apostle to the Gentiles, while "the Lord" was the "apostle" (cf. Heb 3:1) to the Jews (*Hist. eccl.* 6.14.4).¹³ Pantaenus's successor, Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 200), continued to affirm the tradition of Pauline authorship and canonical status, though he expanded the explanation against possible objec-

7. For a helpful survey of the interpretation of Hebrews up to 1750 see Koester, 19-40.

8. See "When Did the Pastor Write This Sermon?" pp. 34-41 below.

9. In *Phil.* 12:2 Polycarp calls Christ "the eternal high priest" (cf. Heb 6:20; 7:3). For Irenaeus and Gaius of Rome's use of Hebrews see Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.26.3; 6.20.3. For Tertullian see *Pud.* 20. Cf. S. J. Kistemaker, "The Authorship of Hebrews," *Faith & Mission* 18/2 (2001): 58.

10. Kistemaker, "The Authorship of Hebrews," 58. See Hippolytus, *Haer.* 6.30.9.

11. In *Pud.* 20, Tertullian describes Barnabas as one who "learned his doctrine from apostles and taught with apostles" (Kistemaker, "The Authorship of Hebrews," 59). One does not hear of Barnabas's authorship again until Jerome, *Epist.* 129, *Vir. ill.* 5.59, mentions him as a suggestion made by some. For older commentaries who support Barnabas's authorship see Spicq, 1:199-200, n. 8.

12. David Alan Black, "Who Wrote Hebrews? The Internal and External Evidence Reexamined," *Faith & Mission* 18/2 (2001): 19; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Hebrews: A Guide* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 3.

13. Kistemaker, "The Authorship of Hebrews," 58.

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tions (*Hist. eccl.* 6.14.3). He attributed the omission of Paul's name to Paul's desire not to offend the Jews to whom he had addressed this epistle. Moreover, he said that Paul wrote in Hebrew and that Luke translated Hebrews into Greek. This claim appears to acknowledge not only the absence of a Pauline introduction but the significant difference between the style of Hebrews and that of the Pauline letters.

For several reasons it is worth quoting Origen (c. A.D. 185-254), Clement's successor, as recorded by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 6.25.11-14). First, he names two other persons whom some considered candidates for the authorship of Hebrews — Clement of Rome and Luke. Second, he expresses his own doubt concerning Pauline authorship without denying Hebrews' canonical status:

If I gave my opinion, I should say that the thoughts are those of the apostle, but the diction and phraseology are those of someone who remembered the apostolic teachings, and wrote . . . down at his leisure what had been said by his teacher. Therefore, if any church holds that this epistle is by Paul, let it be commended for this. . . . But who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows. The statement of some who have gone before us is that Clement, bishop of the Romans, wrote the epistle, and of others that Luke, the author of the Gospel and the Acts, wrote it.¹⁴

By the fourth century the West began to join the East in affirming both the Pauline authorship and the canonical authority of Hebrews. Heb 1:3 and 13:8, in particular, were widely used in the Arian controversy to substantiate orthodox Christology.¹⁵ Thus it is no surprise that Athanasius's influential festal letter of A.D. 367 included Hebrews, locating it between 2 Thesalonians and 2 Timothy, in accord with Codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers (c. A.D. 315-67), helped to bring the West into line with the East by affirming both the Pauline authorship and the canonicity of Hebrews.¹⁶ Both Augustine (A.D. 354-430) and Jerome (A.D. 342-420) lent their support to this movement.¹⁷ The councils of Hippo (A.D. 393) and Carthage (A.D. 397) included Hebrews, but listed it after the thirteen Pauline epistles as "one to the Hebrews." The fifth Council of Carthage (A.D. 419) in-

14. As quoted in D. L. Allen, "The Authorship of Hebrews: The Lukan Proposal," *Faith & Mission* 18/2 (2001): 27.

15. See Athanasius, *Four Discourses against the Arians* 1.4.12; 1.36; 2.48; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio in laudem Basilii* 38.1; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 12.17; Heen and Krey, 232-34; O'Brien, 3; Johnson, 6.

16. *De Trinitate* 4.11. See Kistemaker, "The Authorship of Hebrews," 58.

17. See Augustine, *Christian Instruction* 2.8.12-13; *Civ.* 10.5; 16.22; Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 5; *Epist.* 53.8; 129.3, 7.

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corporated Hebrews within the canon as the fourteenth epistle of Paul without further comment.¹⁸ As noted above, this is the place it occupies in the sixth-century Codex Claromontanus. Hebrews was recognized as apostolic and canonical, though hesitation over its Pauline authorship continued. To the quotation from Origen above one should add the witness of Jerome:

The Epistle which is inscribed to the Hebrews is received not only by the Churches of the East, but also by all Church writers of the Greek language before our days, as of Paul the apostle, though many think that it is from Barnabas or Clement. And it makes no difference whose it is, since it is from a churchman, and is celebrated in the daily readings of the Churches. (*Epist.* 129)¹⁹

Although Hebrews is first attested in the West (*1 Clement*), the West appears to have accepted it as Pauline and canonical only in the fourth century under the influence of the East. The significance of the silence of Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus concerning the authorship of Hebrews remains a mystery. They may have been ignorant of the author's identity, or they may have had a tradition that Hebrews was written by someone other than Paul. It is doubtful, however, if their failure to accept Hebrews as Pauline and canonical can be explained entirely in light of the Montanists, who used it to substantiate the impossibility of restoring those who renounced the faith under persecution. Even Tertullian (*Pud.* 20), who used Hebrews to oppose such restoration, claimed neither Pauline authorship nor canonical status. Thus, both the hesitancy of the West to accept Hebrews and the need felt in the East to posit an intermediate scribe or translator attest the un-Pauline character of this work. It is clear that Pauline authorship was defended in order to sustain Hebrews' canonical status. In the end, however, the greatest biblical scholars of the ancient church (Origen, Jerome) affirmed Hebrews' worth and canonical status despite doubts over Pauline authorship.

2. *Candidates for Authorship — A Review*

The distinct contribution of Hebrews stands out sharply when compared with the Pauline letters. In contrast to Paul, Hebrews' primary picture of the situation of its readers is as the people of God entering his presence and on pilgrimage to their eternal destiny. Furthermore, Hebrews' exposition of

18. Black, "Who Wrote Hebrews?" 19.

19. Kistemaker, "The Authorship of Hebrews," 59. In *Vir. ill.* 5.59, Jerome repeats the suggestion first made by Clement of Alexandria that Paul wrote Hebrews originally in Hebrew (Mitchell, 3). Aquinas also accepted Luke as the translator of an original Pauline Hebrew letter (Allen, "The Authorship of Hebrews," 28).

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Christ's high priesthood finds no parallel in Paul. Hebrews differs from Paul in its stress on Christ's work as cleansing/sanctifying the people of God so that they can enter God's presence.²⁰ Christ's high-priestly ministry provides the pilgrim people of God grace for endurance and assurance of final entrance. Hebrews' universal custom of introducing OT quotations with terms denoting speaking rather than writing creates a sense of the immediacy of God's word absent in Paul. While Paul and Hebrews both refer to the New Covenant (2 Cor 3:4-11; Heb 8:6-13; 10:15-18), Hebrews' comparison of the Old and New is distinct from the Pauline treatment of this subject.

These basic differences in perspective are further supported by differences in style. The pastor, for example, unlike Paul, interweaves exposition and exhortation in order to move the hearers to perseverance through appropriation of what is theirs in Christ.²¹ Whereas Paul may occasionally use the less-to-greater argument (Rom 5:12-21) since it was widespread in the contemporary world, this manner of argumentation is fundamental to the way Hebrews relates the Old and New Covenants.²² These major differences are supported by many differences in imagery (e.g., the ship in 2:1; the anchor in 6:19) and vocabulary (Hebrews uses 169 words that appear nowhere else in the NT).²³ Paul had not received the gospel from any human being (Gal 1:12). Both the author and recipients of Hebrews had received the good news from "those who heard" the Lord (Heb 2:3).²⁴ These many ways, therefore, in which Hebrews differs from the Pauline letters in style, vocabulary, and content all but rule out Pauline authorship.²⁵

Despite the striking differences between Paul and Hebrews, which he acknowledges, David Alan Black has contended for a modified version of Pauline authorship. He would explain these differences by arguing that Paul

20. O'Brien, 6.

21. Pace Black, "Who Wrote Hebrews?" 4; Rom 6:12-14 and Gal 4:12-20 afford no real parallel with the way this blending of exposition and exhortation forms the very body of Hebrews.

22. Pace Black, "Who Wrote Hebrews?" 4, who cites Rom 5:12-21 as parallel to Hebrews.

23. On the difference between the terminology of Hebrews and Paul see Ellingworth, 7-12; Attridge, 2-3.

24. Clare K. Rothschild, *Hebrews as Pseudepigraphon: The History and Significance of the Pauline Attribution of Hebrews* (WUNT 12/235; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), has claimed, on the basis of the letter ending and other similarities with the Pauline writings, that the late first-century author of Hebrews was presenting himself as Paul. However, the way in which the author refers to himself in 2:1-4 and his failure to claim or even allude to apostolic authority make Rothschild's contention untenable. For further criticism see Douglas Moo, Review of *Hebrews as Pseudepigraphon: The History and Significance of the Pauline Attribution of Hebrews*, *BBR* 20 (2010): 295-96.

25. Attridge, 2-3; Ellingworth, 7-12.

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dictated Hebrews to Luke, who was allowed considerable latitude in recording what Paul said.²⁶ He argues that the quotation from Origen above supports this theory: “But who wrote *down* the epistle, in truth, God knows.”²⁷ Thus, by “who wrote *down*,” Origen is not referring to the author but the penman who took dictation from Paul. It is not likely, however, that Origen was referring to a penman.²⁸ Origen says that some think Clement or Luke wrote Hebrews at a later time based on what they remembered of Paul’s teaching. It will be argued below that the pastor has used the principles of Hellenistic rhetoric with consummate skill to produce a well-crafted homily or sermon. Content and form have been so intimately wed by one brilliant mind that they cannot be separated.²⁹ Hebrews is not translation Greek. Differences in style, vocabulary, and theology render both direct and indirect Pauline authorship most unlikely.³⁰

1 Clement and Hebrews differ so vastly in style and content that one need give no further attention to the suggestion that Hebrews was written by Clement of Rome. A look at the way the two books use the OT and understand the Aaronic priesthood is sufficient to set them apart from one another.³¹ However, there have been contemporary advocates for both Luke, suggested by Origen, and Barnabas, suggested by Tertullian and mentioned by Jerome. There is little to commend Barnabas beyond the facts that he was

26. In order to mollify the many significant acknowledged differences between Paul and Hebrews, Black attempts to show similarities. Many of these similarities, however, are superficial or very general. There is, for instance, little commonality between “sword” as the word of God in Eph 6:17 and its use in Heb 4:12-13. In the former it is part of the armor that the believer should put on and use. In the latter it refers to God’s probing the depths of the human psyche (*pace* Black, “Who Wrote Hebrews?” 7). Nor is there much significance in the fact that both Paul and Hebrews use alpha-privative words and genitive absolutes (*pace* Black, “Who Wrote Hebrews?” 4-16).

27. Black, “Who Wrote Hebrews?” 20, cf. 18, translates the substantive participle ὁ γράψας not as “who wrote” but as “who wrote *down*.”

28. *Pace* Black, “Who Wrote Hebrews?” 20, the use of γράφω for Paul’s secretary Tertius in Rom 16:22 proves nothing except that this word could be used for a penman as well as for an author. In this regard it has the same range of meaning as the English word “write.” It is important also to note that Origen’s statement is found in Eusebius, who often prefers a compound form of γράφω when referring to a penman (see Mitchell, 2-4, for examples).

29. As Kistemaker (“The Authorship of Hebrews,” 61) has observed, Paul often breaks off in the middle of a sentence or follows a diversion. The pastor, however, has composed Hebrews so that “[e]very sentence . . . is complete and contributes to the flow of his argument.”

30. For a different attempt to revive Pauline authorship see E. Linnemann, “A Call for a Retrial in the Case of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *Faith & Mission* 19/2 (2002): 19-59.

31. Clement uses the Aaronic priesthood as a model for a Christian priestly hierarchy (see *1 Clem.* 40:5; cf. Ellingworth, 13).

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associated with the Pauline circle, that his name (meaning “son of consolation”) echoes the designation of Hebrews as a “word of consolation” (13:22), and that he was a Levite. There are, of course, no genuine writings of Barnabas with which one might compare Hebrews.

David Alan Black’s suggestion that Luke took dictation from Paul has been discussed above. David Allen, on the other hand, has vigorously defended direct Lucan authorship. The linguistic evidence he presents, however, is less than impressive. The fact that there are forty-nine words unique to Hebrews and the Lucan writings compared with fifty-six unique to Hebrews and Paul provides no support for Lucan authorship.³² The linguistic sophistication of both authors adequately accounts for the appearance of 67.6 percent of Hebrews’ vocabulary in Luke-Acts. While it is true, for example, that only Acts and Hebrews among NT writings call Jesus “Pioneer” (Acts 3:15; 5:31; Heb 2:10; 12:2),³³ this term occurs in the *sermons* that Luke has recorded and plays no further role in his presentation. Thus, none of Hebrews’ theme words are prominent in Luke and Acts. The literary form of Hebrews is a decisive argument against Lucan authorship. Hebrews is a masterful sermon. As noted above, Luke records the sermons of others, yet there is nothing in Luke-Acts to indicate that Luke himself had a significant preaching ministry.³⁴

The Church Fathers never identify Apollos as the author of Hebrews. Dissatisfaction with other possibilities, however, led Martin Luther to propose his candidacy.³⁵ The description of Apollos in Acts 18:24–19:1 is a description of the kind of person who wrote Hebrews. The superior education of the writer of Hebrews is evident from his rhetorical skill. Its writer was steeped in Scripture and a competent expositor of its meaning, just as was Apollos. The book of Hebrews is the work of a powerful preacher with a deep pastoral concern for his hearers. Apollos’s skill in demonstrating Christ’s messiahship from the OT is in accord with the pastor’s Christological exposition. Apollos’s ability to confound Jews who did not acknowledge Christ fits well with the apparent Jewish-Christian elements in the recipients’ background.³⁶ Though Apollos was from Alexandria, the home of

32. Allen, “The Authorship of Hebrews,” 29, says there are fifty-three words uniquely common to Hebrews and Luke. However, this fifty-three contains four proper names, whereas proper names have been excluded from the fifty-six words uniquely common to Hebrews and Paul.

33. In both Acts 5:31 and Heb 2:10 ἀρχηγός (“Pioneer”) is also connected with σωτηρία (“salvation”).

34. George H. Guthrie, “The Case for Apollos as the Author of Hebrews,” *Faith & Mission* 18/2 (2001): 50.

35. Guthrie, “The Case for Apollos as the Author of Hebrews,” 43-44.

36. Guthrie, “The Case for Apollos as the Author of Hebrews,” 50-52.

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Philo, his authorship is not dependent on the supposed neo-Platonic character of Hebrews.³⁷ The growing recognition of Hebrews' rhetorical sophistication has lent support to the case for Apollos's authorship.³⁸

The proposed authorship of Apollos requires a date for Hebrews before the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. In the NT Apollos is associated with Ephesus and Corinth. Thus those who assert Apollos's authorship often suggest these cities as either the destination or the place of origin. For example, Apollos wrote Hebrews from Rome after Paul's death to a group of wealthy Jews in the Ephesian church who had become discouraged due to persecution,³⁹ or Apollos wrote Hebrews from Ephesus to a Jewish faction in the Corinthian church,⁴⁰ or Apollos wrote Hebrews from Corinth to the Lycus valley in order to counter the same heresy addressed by Colossians,⁴¹ or Apollos wrote Hebrews to Rome after Paul's death but before the destruction of the Temple. That is why he relayed the greetings of "those from Italy" (13:24).⁴² The suggestion that Hebrews counters the heresy of the Lycus valley assumes an unlikely apologetic purpose for the comparison with the angels in 1:4-14. There is no other evidence of a wealthy Jewish minority in the Ephesian church. Hebrews addresses discouraged believers rather than the triumphalistic Corinthians who were fascinated with earthly wisdom and with spiritual gifts.⁴³ Nor is it likely that Heb 13:19 describes one who refused to go to Corinth (1 Cor 16:12). However, such speculations about destination do not negate the considerable evidence given above for Apollos's authorship. Of course his authorship cannot be confirmed.⁴⁴ The mere suggestion, however, that the person described in Acts 18:24-19:1 might have been Hebrews' author directs the reader's attention to the rhetorical skill and pastoral concern that have shaped this book. Thus we turn next to the literary genre of Hebrews.

37. None have argued more vigorously for Apollos on the basis of Hebrews relationship to Philo than Spicq, 1:209-19. This introduction will argue below that Hebrews does not share the neo-Platonic worldview of Philo. Nor does Hebrews practice the allegorical exegesis so characteristic of Philo's work.

38. Ellingworth, 21; Hagner, 23; and Pfitzner, 26.

39. F. W. Howard, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," *Int* 5 (1951): 80-91.

40. Francesco Lo Bue, "The Historical Background of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *JBL* 75 (1956): 52-57.

41. T. W. Manson, "The Problem of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 32 (1949-50): 1-17.

42. Guthrie, "The Case for Apollos as the Author of Hebrews," 44, lists Lenski, Lane, Ellingworth, Hagner, Pfitzner, and himself in support of a Roman destination.

43. L. D. Hurst, "Apollos, Hebrews, and Corinth: Bishop Montefiore's Theory Examined," *SJT* 38 (1985): 505-13.

44. Attridge, 4, objects that there may have been others like Apollos in the first-century church. More telling is the query raised by Bruce, 12: Would the church at Alexandria have forgotten that the Alexandrian Apollos was the author?

HEBREWS IN ITS ENVIRONMENT

B. THE PASTOR'S SERMON

One of the more fruitful endeavors of contemporary scholarship has been the attention given to the oral character of Hebrews.⁴⁵ Even the English reader can observe the lack of an epistolary introduction, the predominance of first person plural pronouns (we, our, us), and the prominence of verbs of saying and hearing (2:5; 5:11; 6:9; 8:1; 11:32). The pastor announces themes ahead of time in order to alert his hearers and build expectation before returning for their fuller development (e.g., Christ's high priesthood in 2:17-18). He weaves together exposition and exhortation in order to maintain his hearers' attention.⁴⁶ Recognition of this oral character has led many to compare Hebrews with Hellenistic rhetoric, as taught by Aristotle, Quintilian, and Cicero, and with what has been called the "synagogue homily."⁴⁷ Hebrews gives much evidence of exalted rhetorical style by its use of the following: grandly constructed periodic sentences (1:1-4; 2:1-4; 5:7-10; 7:26-28; 10:19-25), alliteration (e.g., the repeated "p" sound in the Greek text of 1:1; cf. 2:1-4; 4:10; 11:17), internal rhyme (5:8; 6:20), wordplays (5:8; 7:9; 9:16), and chiasmic structure in which the first and last elements of a passage balance one another (2:18; 3:4).⁴⁸ *Anaphora*, or the repetition of a term, such as the "by faith" of 11:1-31, is also an indicator of exalted speech.⁴⁹ In harmony with ancient oratory Hebrews is replete with legal (6:16; 7:7), athletic (12:1-2, 12-13), and pedagogical (5:11-14; 12:4-11) metaphors.⁵⁰ Its author also uses the language of logic, appropriateness, and necessity common in rhetorical argument.⁵¹ He was also wont, as were the orators of the day, to compare the one being extolled with the great of the past (1:1-14; 3:1-6; 4:14-5:10;

45. On the oral nature of Hebrews see David Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 212-14. See also Steve Stanley, "The Structure of Hebrews from Three Perspectives," *TynBul* 45 (1994): 248-50.

46. See O'Brien, 21; Johnson, 10.

47. C. Clifton Black II, "The Rhetorical Form of the Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian Sermon: A Response to Lawrence Wills," *HTR* 81 (1988): 5, cites Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.2.1358b; Cicero, *Inv.* 2.3.12-13; 2.51.155-58, 176; 2.58.176-77; and Quintilian, *Inst.* 3.4.12-16; 3.7.1-28; 3.8.1-6; 3.9.1.

48. Thompson, 6; Johnson, 8.

49. Thompson, 6.

50. Thompson, 6.

51. Hermut Löhr, "Reflections of Rhetorical Terminology in Hebrews," in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods — New Insights*, ed. Gabriella Gelardini (Biblical Interpretation Series 75; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 199-210, argues that the terms κεφάλιον ("main point," 8:1), ἀναγκαῖον ("necessary," 8:3); πρέπειν ("to be appropriate," 2:10; 7:26), ἀδύνατον ("impossible," 6:4; 10:4; 11:6), and λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως ("word of exhortation," 13:22), suggest that the author was influenced by the type of logical argument characteristic of ancient rhetoric.

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7:1–10:18) and to impress the hearers with appropriate example-lists from history (6:13-20; 11:1-38). It appears that Hebrews as a whole, like the oratory prized by the ancient world, was constructed to influence its hearers by reinforcing their perspective and values and/or by urging them to pursue a particular course of action.

Ancient rhetoric was normally divided into three categories: “judicial” was used to convince a jury that a past action was true or false, blame-worthy or commendable; “epideictic” was used for the praise of famous people on public occasions with the purpose of instilling or reinforcing certain virtues and values; and “deliberative” was used to persuade a legislative assembly to take a certain course of action.⁵² Some contend that Hebrews is closer to epideictic rhetoric; others argue that it favors deliberative rhetoric.⁵³ Identification as epideictic tends to put emphasis on the comparison of the Son of God with the heroes of old in the expository parts of Hebrews and thus on the book’s theological content.⁵⁴ Identification as deliberative rhetoric gives pride of place to the hortatory parts of Hebrews and thus to its practical appeal for perseverance. However, the debate between epideictic and deliberative rhetoric is misplaced.⁵⁵ One cannot force Hebrews into the context of public celebration appropriate for epideictic rhetoric or into the legislative assembly appropriate for deliberative rhetoric. Hebrews is best under-

52. On the types of rhetoric see Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.3.2-9; Quintilian, *Inst.* 3.4.1-16.

53. Attridge, 14; Harold W. Attridge, “Paraenesis in a Homily (λόγος παρακλήσεως): The Possible Location of, and Socialization in, the ‘Epistle to the Hebrews,’” *Semeia* 50 (1990): 214; Pfitzner, 8, 21-22; Pamela Eisenbaum, *The Jewish Heroes of Christian History: Hebrews 11 in Literary Context* (SBLDS 156; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 11-12, and others identify Hebrews as “epideictic” rhetoric; Barnabas Lindars, “The Rhetorical Structure of Hebrews,” *NTS* 35 (1989): 383; K. Nissilä, *Das Hohepriestermotiv im Hebräerbrief: Eine exegetische Untersuchung* (Schriften der Finnischen Exegetischen Gesellschaft 33; Helsinki: Oy Liiton Kirjapaino, 1979), 74-78, 143-47, 230-44; and esp. Walter G. Übelacker, *Der Hebräerbrief als Appell: Untersuchungen zu Exordium, Narratio und Postscriptum (Hebr 1–2 und 13,22–25)* (Coniectanea Neotestamentica or Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series 21; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1989), 214-29, are among those who consider Hebrews “deliberative” rhetoric. Johnson, 13, describes Hebrews as “deliberative rhetoric with epideictic features.”

54. Although Attridge calls Hebrews “epideictic,” he affirms the parenetic purpose of the whole (Attridge, “Paraenesis,” 223).

55. Koester, 52-54. Cf. Lane, 1:lxxxix; deSilva, 46; Johnson, 13; and George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (repr.; Leiden: Brill, 1994; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 32-33. See Thompson’s succinct statement: “Thus one can conclude that Hebrews has elements of both deliberative and epideictic rhetoric, for it contains both praise for the work of Christ and a call for action by the reader” (Thompson, 12).

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stood as an example of the kind of homily or sermon typical of the synagogue and thus used in early Christian worship.⁵⁶ Such homilies appear to have been characterized by both OT exposition and exhortation. After all, the purpose of a homily was to interpret an inspired and authoritative text, show its relevance for the present, and urge the hearers to obey its teaching.

Hebrews bonds exposition and exhortation to form a close-knit appeal. In fact, our author calls what he has written a “word of exhortation” (13:22). This is the same term used to describe Paul’s sermon or homily at the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:15). Beginning with Paul’s speech mentioned above, Wills contends that such synagogue homilies evidenced a tripartite structure: (1) an “exemplary section” that contained such material as Scriptural quotations, OT examples, and exposition; (2) a second section that drew conclusions from the first and showed its relevance for the hearers; (3) an exhortation, using the imperative and hortatory subjunctive, urging action appropriate in light of the first two sections.⁵⁷ He acknowledges that this pattern was often repeated in the same work and sometimes accompanied by various digressions as, in his opinion, it is in Hebrews.⁵⁸

56. Hartwig Thyen, *Der Stil der Jüdisch-Hellenistischen Homilie* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, n.s. 47; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1955), 10-23, 43-50, 62-72. Thyen bases his study on Philo’s commentary on Genesis, *1 Clement*, and 4 Maccabees; Stephen’s speech in Acts 7; *Barnabas*, Hermas, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Hebrews. Thyen refers to Hebrews’ use of first and second person pronouns, to the way it introduces OT quotations with words that denote “saying;” and to other rhetorical features. Joseph A. Swetnam, “On the Literary Genre of the ‘Epistle’ to the Hebrews,” *NovT* 11 (1969): 261-69, summarizes Thyen. See also Franz Joseph Schierse, *Verheissung und Heilsvollendung: Zur theologische Grundfrage des Hebräerbriefes* (Münich: Zink, 1955), esp. 207, and the earlier interpreters he cites who spoke of Hebrews as a sermon. Gabriella Gelardini, “Hebrews, an Ancient Synagogue Homily for *Tisha be-Av*: Its Function, Its Basis, Its Theological Interpretation,” in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods — New Insights*, ed. Gabriella Gelardini (Biblical Interpretation Series 75; Boston: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 107-27, identifies Hebrews as a synagogue homily for *Tisha be-Av* according to the Palestinian Triennial Cycle. See also Gabriella Gelardini, “*Verhärtet eure Herzen nicht*”: *Der Hebräer, eine Synagogenhomilie zu Tisha be-Av* (Biblical Interpretation Series 83; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007). Her proposal is interesting, but the evidence she cites from the Babylonian Talmud and the Mishnah is late (Mitchell, 16).

57. Lawrence Wills, “The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity,” *HTR* 77 (1984): 277-99, finds this threefold pattern in a variety of sources: *1 Clement* (283-85); the speeches in Acts (286-88); 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 (288); various Pauline passages (288-899); 1 and 2 Peter (289-91); Ignatius; and *Barnabas* (291-92). He also references Jewish sources such as Susanna, the Epistle of Jeremiah, and *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (293-96). Wills’s case is somewhat weakened by his own acknowledgment that this “form” appears to be flexible (Wills, “The Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism,” 279).

58. Wills, “The Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism,” 277-99.

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The sermons identified by Wills have adapted the resources of classical rhetoric to the new situation of the synagogue.⁵⁹ C. Clifton Black shows how the opening of Paul's speech at Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13:16b can be understood as the introduction or *exordium* of classical rhetoric. He finds three further parts of the classical oration in Wills's "exempla" section of this homily: the *narratio* or narrative statement of the facts (vv. 17-25); the *propositio* or proposition to be proved (v. 26); and the *probatio*, or proof of the proposition (vv. 27-37). These are then followed by an appropriate epilogue (vv. 38-40).⁶⁰ It should be no surprise that the synagogue developed the available rhetorical resources for the purpose of explaining and applying Scripture within the context of worship.⁶¹

Some are hesitant to describe the literary form of Hebrews as a "synagogue homily" even though they admit the features of the text described above.⁶² Nonetheless, these features seem to justify referring to this book as a sermon whatever their historical origin. The way Hebrews begins without epistolary introduction, the sustained exposition of Scripture, the repeated concern with, and weaving together of, exposition and exhortation, the oral character of the material, the way the author has skillfully arranged his material to persuade his hearers, and his deep pastoral concern all betray the presence of a master homiletician.

An immediate benefit of grasping the sermonic character and shape of Hebrews is a reinforcement of the close relationship between exposition and exhortation.⁶³ Thus the author's exposition of Christ's High Priesthood is no *ad hominem* argument. By this presentation he would confirm the finality of Christ in general and the continuing legitimacy of the OT as the word of God.⁶⁴ At the same time, he would use exhortation both to prepare his hearers

59. Black II, "Rhetorical Form," 1-18.

60. Black II, "Rhetorical Form," 7-11. See Black's summary on 15-16.

61. Black II, "Rhetorical Form," 5; Attridge, "Paraenesis," 217. Cf. Guthrie, *Structure*, 32-33.

62. For instance, Gordon, 22, acknowledges that Hebrews contains "homiletic features," but thinks that calling Hebrews a "homily" is an overstatement. Bénétreau, 1:26, still prefers the term "letter."

63. The discussion below, entitled "The Sermon's Rhetorically Effective Structure," will confirm this fact.

64. Note the statement by Ronald E. Clements, "The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 28 (1985): 37: "The whole theme and character of these quotations is designed to show how richly valuable the Old Testament remains for the Christian in order that the whole fullness of God's revelation may be known." Cf. G. B. Caird, "Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 5 (1959): 45. Graham Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics: The Epistle to the Hebrews as a New Testament Example of Biblical Interpretation* (SNTSMS 36; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 108, argues that the pastor had proba-

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to grasp this teaching and to urge them to act upon it. One cannot separate theological exposition from exhortation nor diminish one in favor of the other. Their integration is necessary to achieve the author's pastoral purpose.

It is not sufficient, however, to stop with the identification of Hebrews as a synagogue homily or to point out that it is exposition and application of Scripture. Hebrews is a Christian synagogue homily. The synagogue homily adapted ancient rhetoric for the purpose of interpreting and applying an inspired and authoritative Scriptural text. Hebrews, however, presents a Christological interpretation and application of that text. This Christological orientation has extended Hebrews' adaptation of rhetoric beyond both the Hellenistic world in general and the synagogue in particular. For instance, the Son of God is not merely praised by comparison with the greats of the past so that the hearers will imitate his virtue, as was the custom of epideictic rhetoric. Nor is Christ one more hero in the ongoing history of the people of God narrated in Jewish hero-lists.⁶⁵ He is shown to be the consummation and fulfillment of all God's previous saving work, and thus he surpasses the heroes of old not merely in degree but in kind. He is the "Pioneer and Perfecter of the faith" (12:2), who alone enables the faithful to persevere in obedience and finally to enter God's eternal blessing. The interpreter, then, must be sensitive to the way in which Hebrews has used the resources of Hellenistic rhetoric and of the synagogue without neglecting the particular shape given to those resources by the Christological orientation of this sermon.

The pastor did not begin this sermon with the typical letter-introduction found in Paul lest he diminish the full force of his oratory. The letter ending he has attached in 13:22-25, however, does nothing to dissipate this sermon's power. In light of this ending, many would call Hebrews a "homily" or "sermon" sent as a letter to be read in the assembled worship of

bly developed his understanding of how Christ fulfilled the OT before composing this sermon. In the sermon, however, he uses what he has already developed as motivation for appropriate action.

65. The differences we have suggested between Hebrews as a "Christian homily," the "synagogue homily," and Hellenistic rhetoric are reminiscent of the differences Eisenbaum has found between the example list in Hebrews 11:1-38, Jewish example lists, and the use of example lists in the Greco-Roman world (Eisenbaum, *Jewish Heroes, passim*, with her conclusions are on 225-27). Greco-Roman lists usually draw assorted examples from the recent past without regard for continuity between them. Since the Jewish works, like Ben Sirach 44-50, draw their examples from Scripture, those examples come from the ancient past and depict the historical continuity of Israel. In light of the fulfillment brought by Christ, however, the examples in Heb 11:1-38 depict the history not of ethnic "Israel" but of the people of God who have always anticipated his coming. See the comments on 11:1-40. In short, the Jewish lists differ from the Greco-Roman because they are interpreting Scripture; Heb 11:1-38 differs because it is interpreting Scripture in light of Scripture's fulfillment in Christ.

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the congregation about whom the pastor was concerned.⁶⁶ This understanding of Hebrews accounts for its careful composition as a written document, its oral character, and its letter ending.

C. THE PASTOR'S CONGREGATION

1. *What the Sermon Reveals about Its Hearers*

The hearers must have been followers of Christ who could appreciate the elegance of the pastor's Greek and thus were at home both linguistically and culturally within the Hellenistic world. The pastor's sending the greetings of "those from Italy" (13:24) confirms the fact that both he and his hearers moved in a circle that included people living outside Palestine. The pastor is obviously addressing a specific group of people. Yet he does not call them a "church" or designate the city in which they live. These features suggest that he is addressing a house church rather than all the believers of a particular locality. This possibility is substantiated by the way he exhorts his hearers to "greet" *all* their leaders (13:24) and to be concerned for "all the saints" (10:25).⁶⁷ The mention of "our brother Timothy," along with other features of the letter closing (13:22-25), suggests that the community addressed by Hebrews was closely connected with the Pauline circle and perhaps with other groups of first-century believers as well. The members of the congregation to which Hebrews is addressed were obviously well versed in the OT and had been followers of Jesus for some time (2:1-4; 5:11-14).

Yet they were also in danger of compromising their commitment to Christ. They appear to have suffered from lassitude and from a tendency to neglect the gospel they had received (2:1-4). They had become spiritually dull and thus slow to grasp the full significance of what Christ had done and of his continuing relevance as all-sufficient Savior (5:11-6:8). In fact, they were in danger of reverting to a spiritual immaturity totally inappropriate for experienced believers. The pastor fears that this lassitude, neglect, and regression might lead to apostasy from Christ (6:1-8; 10:26-31).⁶⁸

This lassitude and resulting danger of apostasy were clearly exacerbated by the resistance of the unbelieving world. Many, at least, in this con-

66. Koester, 81, lists Attridge, Grässer, Hagner, Lane, Long, Pfitzner, Übelacker, Backhaus, Cody, Vanhoye, and Wray in support of this position. See also Weiss, 40-41.

67. See Weiss, 75.

68. Ellingworth, 78-79, categorizes the dangers facing the addressees as passive (lassitude, neglect, immaturity), active (apostasy), and external (the pressure of ostracism and persecution). The present exposition assumes that these were not separate but related problems.

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gregation appear to have been intimidated by the disdain and marginalization that they suffered as a result of their loyalty to Christ (10:32-34; 11:1-40; 12:1-11). They had received the gospel from those who “heard” Christ (2:1-4) and had been believers long enough to have successfully braved an earlier time of persecution (10:32-34). That persecution had included public harassment, imprisonment, and the confiscation of property, but had fallen short of martyrdom (12:4). Now, however, in their discouraged state they shrink back from their Christian commitment due to present marginalization and to fear that more, perhaps life-threatening, persecution may soon come (10:36; 13:6).⁶⁹

Their anxiety at present marginalization, anticipated suffering, and perhaps impending martyrdom may have been exacerbated by disappointment that Christ had not yet returned (1:14; 10:36-39) or by their failure to realize and appropriate his full sufficiency as Savior. Thus some, at least, were neglecting to attend the community’s times of worship (10:24-25; cf. 3:13-14). Under these circumstances it was only natural for them to be attracted by the privileges and respect that would be theirs by abandoning their commitment to Christ and identifying with the unbelieving world (see 12:14-17 and comments).⁷⁰ The pastor is concerned that they persevere in the life of faith and obedience. He wants them to continue to live as if God’s promise for the future is certain and his power for the present is real (see on 11:1-6). Thus he would have them avail themselves of the cleansing from sin and access to God provided by the Son, their all-sufficient High Priest (4:14–10:25; esp. 10:19-25). This High Priest is also the “Pioneer” (12:2) through whom they can be certain of entering God’s future promised “rest,” the eternal “City” that has always been the destiny of the people of God (11:8-10, 13-16; 12:22-24).

In order to understand the context of the recipients’ situation more fully modern readers need to grasp the role of honor and shame in the first-century Hellenistic world.⁷¹ People received honor when they were given

69. R. W. Johnson, *Going outside the Camp: The Sociological Function of the Levitical Critique in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (JSNTSup 209; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), has attempted to determine the situation and purpose of Hebrews by using Mary Douglas’s group/gird analysis of societies. He concludes that the ideal society envisioned by Hebrews is one that would be willing to incorporate new people into their fellowship. As Lincoln, *A Guide*, 53, says, this proposal runs counter to the obvious concern of the author to promote perseverance in the face of opposition. Furthermore, the very evidence Johnson provides shows that Hebrews is “strong group”/“weak grid,” not “weak group”/“weak grid” as he proposes. An analysis of “strong group”/“weak grid” fits well with Hebrews’ concern for perseverance.

70. See the fine discussion of the recipients’ situation in Lincoln, *A Guide*, 52-68.

71. See the monograph by David A. deSilva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse*

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public recognition that their attitudes and conduct conformed to what was socially expected. Shame resulted from public rejection due to lack of conformity. It was crucial to have a sense of what was shameful since a person's identity and reputation were closely identified with the honor and recognition given one for appropriately fulfilling his or her place in society. Furthermore, one shared the honor — or shame — of one's social group. Thus it was honorable to act in such a way that one protected the honor and public approval of those groups to which one belonged. Moreover, a culture of honor and shame was carried out within a patron/client relationship. Patrons were those who were socially superior and who controlled the benefits of life through wealth and the ability to bestow position and influence. The socially inferior client looked to a patron for the necessary benefits of life. It was the honorable thing for the patron to generously grant these benefits and, correspondingly, for the client to be loyal to his or her patron by supporting them in various endeavors but most of all by praising them publicly and acknowledging their beneficence. It was the epitome of shamefulness for the patron to withhold generosity or for the client to be slack in public praise or to fail in supporting the patron in public matters. This relationship between patron and client was intended to be permanent. Furthermore, some people served as brokers mediating between clients and patrons, thus enabling clients to receive patronage and patrons, praise.

The past suffering, present marginalization, and possible future persecution of those addressed by Hebrews entailed a great loss of honor and a source of shame before the larger community. Heb 11:37-38 describes the epitome of disgrace through total exclusion of the faithful from human society. The pastor seeks to show his hearers that this very shame suffered at the hands of the unbelieving world is a mark of great honor before God, their ultimate Patron. This God has mediated to them the inestimable beneficence of eternal salvation through the brokerage of his Son and their Patron, Jesus Christ. Indeed, Jesus has provided these benefits through suffering the vilest of shame (12:1-3) and has thus been given the highest honor by God through being exalted to his right hand (8:1-2). They honor Father and Son both by persevering in loyalty and by their perpetual offer of praise and gratitude for the benefits they have received (12:28). By taking his place with the suffering and thus dishonored people of God, Moses (11:25-26) became an example of such behavior second only to the example of the Son of God himself (12:1-3). The Son assumed the shame of God's people (2:5-18) in order to bestow upon them the benefits of "such a great salvation" (2:3).

and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews (SBLDS 152; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), and his commentary in which he expounds Hebrews in terms of honor/shame and the patron/client relationship. See also the summary in Lincoln, *A Guide*, 48-51.

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2. *Were These Hearers Jewish or Gentile in Background?*

The above description of the recipients of Hebrews has not addressed the question of their Jewish background. Were they attracted to the practices of the synagogue as a means of escaping persecution and shame or of addressing some other felt need? One can understand Hebrews without identifying either the name of its author or the location of the recipients. One cannot, however, interpret Hebrews without taking a position as to whether the recipients were Jewish or Gentile believers.⁷² Were they ethnic Jewish followers of Christ who were either hesitant to make the necessary break with the synagogue or in danger of a relapse into Judaism? If so, they may have feared disgrace at the hands of their fellow Jews or been concerned about rejection by the larger community at the loss of the protection afforded by the synagogue.⁷³ The Roman historian Tacitus would call Christianity, which he distinguished from Judaism, a “pernicious superstition” (*Ann.* 15).

Attraction to the synagogue may also have been the result of a felt spiritual need or of an inadequate theology. Lindars, for instance, argues that they were attracted to the synagogue meals associated with the sacrificial ministry of the Temple in order to find continuous cleansing for post-baptismal sin.⁷⁴ Goulder suggests that the whole of Hebrews’ Christology is an apologetic against an Ebionite Christianity that took Christ as no more than an archangel (cf. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.16.3-4). The proponents of this diminished view of Christ of necessity looked to Jewish rituals for fulfillment of spiritual needs.⁷⁵ Others have proposed that Hebrews presents the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice in order to address a lack felt due to the destruction of the Temple.⁷⁶ Or, on the other hand, was the pastor addressing a mixed or Gentile audience fatigued from the length of the road, marginalized by unbelieving society, and beginning to lose confidence in Christ? Perhaps they were disaffected by the delay of Christ’s return.⁷⁷

72. The recent popular commentary by Fudge demonstrates the fallacy of attempting to avoid this question. His refusal to address this issue becomes a de facto decision to interpret Hebrews as if it were *not* written to Jewish believers.

73. Bruce, 382; Ellingworth, 78-80; Bénétreau, 1:28-29; W. R. G. Loader, *Sohn und Hoherpriester: Eine Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Christologie des Hebräerbriefes* (Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 53; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981), 258. Koester, 71, however, thinks that identification with the synagogue may not have provided much protection.

74. Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, ed. J. D. G. Dunn (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 4-15; cf. Bruce, 382; Ellingworth, 78-80; Donald G. Guthrie, 31-38.

75. M. Goulder, “Hebrews and the Ebionites,” *NTS* 49 (2003): 393-406.

76. Cf. Mitchell, 9, 11.

77. Gordon, 15.

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Several important considerations are often overlooked when examining this issue. First, Hebrews is completely free from any kind of ethnic distinction.⁷⁸ The author never differentiates Jews from Gentiles or Greeks from barbarians. Thus when interpreters take the term “Jewish Christian” in an ethnic sense, they immediately introduce confusion. If one is going to use the term, it must be understood in a religious sense: “Jewish Christian” means those followers of Christ who have been acculturated into and continue to be attracted by Jewish religious practices regardless of their ethnicity.⁷⁹ Such acculturation may have happened to Gentiles after their conversion since many of their fellow followers of Jesus were Jewish. It may have occurred by identification with the synagogue as proselytes or God-fearers before their conversion to Christ. In any case, “Jewish Christian” describes both Jews and Gentiles who give allegiance to Christ while insisting on or feeling the need of various Jewish associations or practices.⁸⁰

Second, there is no direct polemic in the first twelve chapters of He-

78. Clark M. Williamson, “Anti-Judaism in Hebrews?” *Int* 57 (2003): 276, anachronistically introduces ethnic distinctions foreign to Hebrews when he says, “Hebrews gives no indication that the renewed people of God is anyone other than Israelites.” There is nothing in Hebrews that either overtly or implicitly defines the people of God in terms of ethnicity. Furthermore, Williamson’s further affirmation that “the sacrificial system” was “the only issue of the old covenant that was superseded” is misleading. This assertion appears to be based on a faulty interpretation of Heb 7:11-14. Moreover, it minimizes the difference that this change entails. The reality of cleansing from sin and access to God anticipated by the Old Covenant has now come to fruition in Christ.

79. See Goulder, “Ebionites,” 395, n. 6. Cf. Koester, 48, who emphasizes that the hearers’ relationship to Greco-Roman culture, to the Jewish subculture, and to the Christian community is more important than ethnicity.

80. Some argue that the “parting of the ways” between Judaism and Christianity had not yet occurred when Hebrews was written. See Susan E. Docherty, *The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews: A Case Study in Early Jewish Bible Interpretation* (WUNT 2/260; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 1, and the sources cited in her note 1. Thus, according to this view, it is anachronistic to speak as if Christianity and Judaism were understood as separate religions at that time. Assuming, for the moment, that the recipients of Hebrews were “Jewish Christians” as defined above, they may not have thought of themselves as “Christians” of Jewish background but simply as followers of the Jewish religion who acknowledged Christ. In the final analysis, however, this distinction is not as significant for the interpretation of Hebrews as some would claim. The whole burden of Hebrews is that fulfillment in Christ reveals the true purpose of the Old Covenant — a purpose very different from that embraced by practicing Jews who did not believe in Christ. Thus, even if the recipients thought of themselves as adherents of the Jewish religion who followed Christ, they would still be sharply distinguished from other Jews in both belief and practice. This situation might lead to ostracism and persecution or to felt need and nostalgia for former practices just as much as if the recipients thought of themselves as “Christians” who had formerly practiced Judaism.

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brews. This situation casts doubt on any comprehensive interpretation of Hebrews that rests primarily on opposition to false teaching.⁸¹ In these chapters the pastor never compares Christ with contemporary Judaism but only with the institutions of the Old Covenant and priestly system as described in the Pentateuch.⁸² Christ stands in continuity with this system by fulfilling it. Third, from the beginning the writer envisions one people of God spread out through history. Those who have responded to God's call by faith have always been his people (though it has always been possible to fall through unbelief).⁸³ The faithful of old and the faithful since Christ belong to this one people.⁸⁴ Those God addressed in the "prophets" are the "fathers" of those he has now addressed in "one who is Son" (1:1). Contrary to what many suggest, Hebrews envisions no "break" in salvation history.⁸⁵ Christ has fulfilled what those OT institutions always foreshadowed and has provided what was needed to bring the faithful people of God — whether they lived before or after his coming — to their God-intended goal (11:39-40).

In Heb 13:9-10, however, the pastor contrasts himself and his hearers (the "we" is inclusive) with "those who serve in the Tent." As argued in the commentary on these verses, this phrase is not a reference to OT people but to contemporaries who lived according to the old order after the coming of Christ. Thus here, at last, the pastor appears to tip his hand. The purpose of his long discourse on how the all-sufficient Son of God has fulfilled and thus demonstrated the merely typological nature of the old is revealed. The pastor's intention has been to encourage his hearers clearly to distinguish themselves from those who still live by the provisions of that former order. To go "outside the camp" (13:13) is to separate from these people. There are features of the earlier chapters, particularly the section dealing with Christ's high priesthood (4:14–10:18), that provide supporting evidence. It is true that any follower of Christ who accepted the OT would eventually be forced to inquire concerning the continuing role of the Aaronic priesthood. However, the

81. Weiss, 56-57. Pace Goulder, "Ebionites," 393-406.

82. Pace Iutisone Salevao, *Legitimation in the Letter to the Hebrews: The Construction and Maintenance of a Symbolic Universe* (JSNTSup 219; New York and London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), who often argues as if the pastor's interaction with the OT was direct interaction with contemporary Judaism.

83. See pp. 43-45, "Fundamental Assumptions," under "The Sermon's Use of the Old Testament" below.

84. Eisenbaum, *Jewish Heroes*, 3, 142, *passim*, contends that the pastor has "de-nationalized" OT history so that it no longer refers to Israel but to the people of God in general who find fulfillment in Christ. Her position assumes that the pastor began with something like the nationalistic hero list of Sirach 45–50. If so, this supposed process of "de-nationalization" occurs completely outside the text of Hebrews.

85. Pace Salevao, *Legitimation*, 404.