

Introduction to Hebrews

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Scholars disagree about who wrote this letter, as the author never identifies himself. Many consider Paul to be the author, however, other authors have been suggested as well. There are many arguments to be made for Paul as the author of Hebrews. Several sections of verses of the letter have very similar phrasing to other letters Paul authored. Scholars point to the following comparisons with verses in Hebrews and other letters from Paul:

- [Hebrews 1:1, 3](#) with [2 Corinthians 4:4](#) and [Colossians 1:15, 16](#)
- [Hebrews 1:4](#) and [2:9](#) with [Philippians 2:8, 9](#)
- [Hebrews 2:14](#) with [1 Corinthians 15:54, 57](#)
- [Hebrews 7:16, 18, 19](#) with [Romans 2:29](#) and [Galatians 3:3, 24](#)
- [Hebrews 7:26](#) with [Ephesians 4:10](#) Compare [Hebrews 8:5](#) and [10:1](#) with [Colossians 2:17](#)
- [Hebrews 10:12, 13](#) with [1 Corinthians 15:25](#)

The letter could have been written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome. Based on [Hebrews 13:24](#) this letter was likely written from Italy which supports Paul's authorship. The author also mentions Timothy (13:23) who was a close companion of Paul. It is certainly possible that Paul wrote this letter, and in many ways, it seems likely.

The specific identity of the original audience of Hebrews is unknown. Based on comments throughout the book on specific occurrences and characteristics of the audience, it seems this letter was written to a specific community with which *Paul was familiar. This letter makes it clear that the original recipients were considered by Paul to be Jews who believed in Jesus as their Messiah. It is important to remember that Jewish believers did not stop being Jews, and continued to follow Jewish practices.

[Acts 15](#) records a vital decision in the early Christian church. Paul, Peter, and other leaders at the time came together in Jerusalem to discuss the issue of the differences between Jews and Gentiles. A group of Jews was claiming that in order to be righteous before God, Gentiles needed to follow the law. Peter boldly proclaimed at this council that salvation from God had come to the Gentiles and the Jews the same way, by faith. He also pointed out that no one was able to keep the whole law, and the burden of following Jewish religious practices should not be placed on the Gentiles. The council agreed

that Jews could keep following circumcision and related rules but Gentiles would not be required to follow these rules. The Gentile believers were only asked to remember the poor and abstain from certain dietary practices that would estrange their fellowship with believing Jews.

Paul did not write this letter to his fellow Hebrews to tell them to stop practicing Judaism. In fact, throughout his ministry Paul himself maintained Jewish practice. This can be seen in [Acts 28:17](#) when Paul arrives at Rome, calls the “leading men of the Jews” together, and tells them he has “done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers.” This statement comes toward the end of Paul’s ministry in Rome, perhaps shortly prior to him penning this letter to his Jewish friends. It demonstrates his continued love for his fellow Jews. It also demonstrates how faithfully he had honored the agreement reached in [Acts 15](#).

Paul honored Jewish customs while vigorously insisting the Gentiles should not adopt these customs as a necessity for righteousness, but should live by faith. Paul wrote this letter to a group of his Jewish believing friends asking them to stay strong in their faith and pursue obedience to Christ. Religious practice is fine, so long as it is not a substitution for a walk of faith. Paul is clearly concerned that his believing Jewish friends have stopped focusing on walking by faith and are instead focusing on their Jewish customs.

It is also important to take note that the audience of Hebrews is a group of believers, which means they have trusted Christ’s work on the cross for their salvation and they are justified (made right) before God. It is clear this group of Jews were believers because throughout the letter Paul continually refers to them as brothers who he encourages and reprimands to stay strong in their faith. It would not make sense to write a letter reminding the audience to stay strong in their faith, hold firm until the end, and to have hope if they had not already trusted Christ and been made right (justified) before God.

The salvation, or deliverance, spoken of in Hebrews is, for the most part, not about being delivered from hell to heaven by being born into God’s family, the recipients of Hebrews were already believers. It is about being delivered from the weight of sin in our daily walk that can encumber us from fulfilling the mission God has appointed us to as his children; the same mission Jesus followed and exhorts us to follow. And, astonishingly, if we follow this path we will receive the same rewards Jesus received.