

**Anonymous Letter to the Christian Community in Rome – Part 1 (c. 63–64)**

## Hebrews 1

**God Has Spoken Through His Son**

- 1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,  
2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.  
3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, [cf. [Ps 110:1](#)]  
4 having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

**Superiority of the Son to the Angels**

- 5 For to which of the angels did He ever say,

“YOU ARE MY SON,  
TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU”? [[Ps 2:7](#); cf. [Acts 13:32–33](#)]

And again,

“I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM  
AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME”? [[2 Sam 7:14](#)]

- 6 And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says,

“AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM.” [[Deut 32:43](#)] (LXX)

- 7 And of the angels He says,

“WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS,  
AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE.” [[Ps 104:4](#)] (LXX 103:4)

- 8 But of the Son *He says*,

“YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER,  
AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM.

- 9 “YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS;  
THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU  
WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS.” [[Ps 45:6–7](#)] (LXX 44:7–8)

- 10 And,

“YOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH,  
AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS;

- 11 THEY WILL PERISH, BUT YOU REMAIN;  
AND THEY ALL WILL BECOME OLD LIKE A GARMENT,  
12 AND LIKE A MANTLE YOU WILL ROLL THEM UP;  
LIKE A GARMENT THEY WILL ALSO BE CHANGED.  
BUT YOU ARE THE SAME,

AND YOUR YEARS WILL NOT COME TO AN END.” [Ps 102:25–27]

13 But to which of the angels has He ever said,

“SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,  
UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES  
A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET”? [Ps 110:1]

14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

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## **Chronological Notes**

### 1) Dating Hebrews.

#### A) Internal Evidence.

- (1) The audience had come to faith indirectly through those who were eyewitnesses of Christ’s ministry (2:3–4). The exhortation to remember those who first led them and “spoke the word of God” to them implies that some of their leaders had died (13:7). The expectation that “by this time [they] ought to be teachers” (5:12) indicates additional time had passed. The earliest date that could account for these factors would seem to be AD 60 (some 27 years after Christ’s resurrection).<sup>1</sup>
- (2) According to 10:32–34, the audience had persevered in a time of persecution in the past. They had not yet faced martyrdom (12:4), but a more severe time of trial was coming (11:35–12:3; 12:7; 13:3, 12–13) and some had begun to abandon group meetings (10:25). The situation indicated by the data above suggests a date in the mid-60s AD, just prior to the extreme persecution of the Roman church under Nero. At this point the Roman church had been in existence for about three decades. The expulsion of the Jews by Claudius (Acts 18:2) in AD 49 would account for the earlier time of testing experienced by this community. Also, Nero’s rising threat to the church accounts for the fear of death and the warning of commitment indicated in Hebrews.<sup>2</sup>
- (3) The allusion to “Timothy” in Hebrews 13:23 leads to the assumption that this Timothy is the same person known to us through Paul’s letters. Although the exact span of Timothy’s life is not known (he joined Paul in ministry in the summer of AD 49; Acts 16:1–5), it could scarcely have outlasted the century. If Hebrews was written within Timothy’s lifetime, it could not be dated later than AD 100.<sup>3</sup>
- (4) It has been argued that an upper limit of the date for Hebrews can be set confidently at AD 70, the year in which the temple of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. The basis for this confidence

<sup>1</sup> Lane, 1:lxii.

<sup>2</sup> Guthrie, 22–23.

<sup>3</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, “A New Approach to the Book of Hebrews,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:491 (July 1966): 231.

is that the writer of Hebrews refers to cultic<sup>4</sup> activity in the present tense (e.g., 7:27–28; 8:3–5; 9:7–8, 25; 10:1–3, 8; 13:10–11), presumably reflecting contemporary cultic practice in Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> This argument, however, fails to consider four key observations:<sup>6</sup>

- (a) The focus of the author’s comparisons with the sacrificial work of Christ is not the Jewish temple but the Israelite tabernacle.
- (b) Present tense indicative in the Greek does not necessarily refer to present time (recall the “historic present” in Greek).
- (c) Skilled rhetoricians frequently use the present tense as a literary device designed to persuade their audiences by emphasizing the timeless nature of their subjects.
- (d) Other authors, including Josephus and Clement of Rome, use the present tense to discuss the tabernacle long after the destruction of the temple.

## B) External Evidence.

- (1) An upper limit in the range for a date is established by the fact that Hebrews was already being appropriated without explicit quotation in *1 Clement* (cf. *1 Clem* 17:1 with Heb 11:37; *1 Clem* 36:2–6 with Heb 1:3–5,7; *1 Clem* 36:3 with Heb 1:7). Although some argue that Hebrews and *1 Clement* simply share a common tradition, it is broadly recognized that Clement was, in fact, literarily dependent upon Hebrews. A conventional date of AD 95–96 has been assigned to *1 Clement*, but on insufficient grounds. Internal evidence and external attestation indicate *1 Clement* was composed at some point between AD 80 and 140.<sup>7</sup>

## C) Summary.

- (1) Most contemporary scholars date Hebrews somewhere between AD 60 and 100, and are unwilling to try to pinpoint the date more precisely. I personally favor c. 63–64 AD.

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<sup>4</sup> The term “cult” stems from the Latin word *cultus*, which carried the meaning of worship or praise-adoration. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines it, among other ways, as “a system of religious worship especially as expressed in ceremonies; devotion to or homage to a person or thing.” It is often used in theological and religious scholarship to refer to the sacrificial system and ceremonies that were part of the Mosaic Covenant.

<sup>5</sup> Lane, 1:lxiii.

<sup>6</sup> Griffith, 240.

<sup>7</sup> Lane, 1:lxii.