

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

Hebrews 1:1–4:13

God Has Spoken Through His Son

1:1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,
 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;
 3 Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; [cf. [Ps 110:1](#)]
 4 Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

Superiority of the Son to the Angels

5 For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? [[Ps 2:7](#)] And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? [[2 Sam 7:14](#)]
 6 And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. [[Deut 32:43](#) (LXX)]
 7 And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. [[Ps 104:4](#) (LXX 103:4)]
 8 But unto the Son *he saith*, Thy throne, O God, *is* for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness *is* the scepter of thy kingdom.
 9 Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, *even* thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. [[Ps 45:6–7](#) (LXX 44:7–8)]
 10 And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands:
 11 They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment;
 12 And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail. [[Ps 102:25–27](#)]
 13 But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? [[Ps 110:1](#)]
 14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

First Warning—The Danger of Drifting

2:1 Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let *them* slip.
 2 For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward;
 3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard *him*;
 4 God also bearing *them* witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?

Superiority of Jesus to the Angels

5 For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.
 6 But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?
 7 Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands:
 8 Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing *that is* not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. [[Ps 8:4–6](#)]
 9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.
 10 For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.
 11 For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified *are* all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren,
 12 Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. [[Ps 22:22](#) (LXX 21:23)]
 13 And again, I will put my trust in him. [[Isa 8:17b](#) (LXX)] And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me. [[Isa 8:18](#) (LXX)]
 14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;
 15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.
 16 For verily he took not on *him the nature of* angels; but he took on *him* the seed of Abraham.
 17 Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto *his* brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.
 18 For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.

Superiority of Jesus to Moses

3:1 Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;

2 Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses *was faithful* in all his house.

3 For this *man* was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honor than the house.

4 For every house is builded by some *man*; but he that built all things *is* God.

5 And Moses verily *was* faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; [[Num 12:7b](#) (LXX)]

6 But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

Second Warning—The Danger of Unbelief

7 Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice,

8 Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness:

9 When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years.

10 Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in *their* heart; and they have not known my ways.

11 So I swore in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) [[Ps 95:7b–11](#) (LXX 94:7b–11)]

12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

14 For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;

15 While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.

16 For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses.

17 But with whom was he grieved forty years? *was it* not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?

18 And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?

19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

“Let us fear”—Unbelief Will Keep You From Entering God’s Rest

4:1 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left *us* of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*.

3 For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

4 For he spake in a certain place of the seventh *day* on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. [[Gen 2:3](#)]

5 And in this *place* again, If they shall enter into my rest.

6 Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief:

7 Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

8 For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.

9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God *did* from his.

11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

12 For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Scripture quotations are from The King James Version (KJV). The KJV is in the public domain.

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).¹

- (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.²
- (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 100.³
- (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 is that the writer of Hebrews refers to cultic⁴ 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.⁵ This argument, however, fails to consider four key observations:⁶
 - (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 140.⁷

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.

¹ Lane, 1:lxii.

² Guthrie, 22–23.

³ Merrill C. Tenney, “A New Approach to the Book of Hebrews,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:491 (Jul 66): 231.

⁴ 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.

⁵ Lane, 1:lxiii.

⁶ Griffith, 240.

⁷ Lane, 1:lxii.