

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 *Although* God spoke long ago in many parts and in many ways to the fathers by the prophets,
 2 in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all *things*, through whom also he made the world,
 3 who is the radiance of his glory and the representation of his essence, sustaining all *things* by the word of power. *When he* had made purification for sins through him, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, [cf. [Ps 110:1](#)]
 4 having become by so much better than the angels, by as much as he has inherited a more excellent name than theirs.

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,” [\[Ps 2:7\]](#)

and again,

“I will be his father,
 and he will be my son”? [\[2 Sam 7:14\]](#)

6 And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,

“And let all *the* angels of God worship him.” [\[Deut 32:43\]](#) (LXX)]

7 And concerning the angels he says,

“The one who makes his angels winds,
 and his servants a flame of fire,” [\[Ps 104:4\]](#) (LXX 103:4)]

8 but concerning the Son,

“Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever,
 and the scepter of righteous *is the* scepter of your kingdom.

9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;
 because of this God, your God, has anointed you
 with the olive oil of joy more than your companions. [\[Ps 45:6–7\]](#) (LXX 44:7–8)]

10 And,

“You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning,
 and the heavens are the works of your hands;

11 they will perish, but you continue,
 and they will all become old like a garment,
 12 and like a robe you will roll them up,
 and like a garment they will be changed;
 but you are the same, and your years will not run out.” [\[Ps 102:25–27\]](#)

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

“Sit down at my right hand,
 until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” [\[Ps 110:1\]](#)

14 Are they not all spirits engaged in special service, sent on assignment for the sake of those who are going to inherit salvation?

First Warning—The Danger of Drifting

2:1 Because of this, *it is* all the more necessary *that* we pay attention to the *things* we have heard, lest we drift away.
 2 For if the word spoken through angels was binding and every transgression and act of disobedience received a just penalty,
 3 how will we escape *if we* neglect so great a salvation which had *its* beginning *when it* was spoken through the Lord *and* was

confirmed to us by those who heard,

4 *while* God was testifying at the same time by signs and wonders and various miracles and distributions of the Holy Spirit according to his will.

Superiority of Jesus to the Angels

5 For he did not subject to angels the world to come, about which we are speaking.

6 But someone testified somewhere, saying,

“What is man, that you remember him,
or the son of man, that you care for him?

7 You made him for a short *time* lower than the angels;
you crowned him with glory and honor;

8 you subjected all *things* under his feet. [[Ps 8:4–6](#)]

For in subjecting all *things*, he left nothing *that was* not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all *things* subjected to him,
9 but we see Jesus, for a short *time* made lower than the angels, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that apart from God he might taste death on behalf of everyone.

10 For it was fitting for him for whom *are* all *things* and through whom *are* all *things* in bringing many sons to glory to perfect the originator of their salvation through sufferings.

11 For both the one who sanctifies and the ones who are sanctified *are* all from one, for which reason he is not ashamed to call them brothers,

12 saying,

“I will proclaim your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the assembly I will sing in praise of you.” [[Ps 22:22](#) (LXX 21:23)]

13 And again,

“I will trust in him.” [[Isa 8:17b](#) (LXX)]

And again,

“Behold, I and the children God has given me.” [[Isa 8:18](#) (LXX)]

14 Therefore, since the children share in blood and flesh, he also in like manner shared in these *same things*, in order that through death he could destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,

15 and could set free these who through fear of death were subject to slavery throughout all their lives.

16 For surely he is not concerned with angels, but he is concerned with the descendants of Abraham.

17 Therefore he was obligated to be made like his brothers in all *respects*, in order that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in the things relating to God, in order to make atonement for the sins of the people.

18 For in that which he himself suffered *when he was* tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

Superiority of Jesus to Moses

3:1 Therefore, holy brothers, sharers in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession,

2 who was faithful to the one who appointed him, as Moses also *was* in his household.

3 For this one is considered worthy of greater glory than Moses, inasmuch as the one who builds it has greater honor than the house.

4 For every house is built by someone, but the one who built all *things is* God.

5 And Moses *was* faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony to the things that would be spoken, [[Num 12:7b](#) (LXX)]

6 but Christ *was faithful* as a son over his house, whose house we are, if we hold fast to our confidence and the hope we can be proud of.

Second Warning—The Danger of Unbelief

7 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says,

“Today, if you hear his voice,

8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
in the day of testing in the wilderness,

9 where your fathers tested *me* by trial
and saw my works 10 *for* forty years.
Therefore I was angry with this generation,
and I said, ‘They always go astray in their heart,
and they do not know my ways.’

11 As I swore in my anger,
‘They will never enter into my rest.’” [Ps 95:7b–11 (LXX 94:7b–11)]

12 Watch out, brothers, lest there be in some of you an evil, unbelieving heart, *with the result that you* fall away from the living God.
13 But encourage one another day by day, as long as it is called “today,” so that none of you become hardened by the deception of sin.

14 For we have become partners of Christ, if indeed we hold fast the beginning of *our* commitment steadfast until the end,
15 while it is said,

“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

16 For who, *when they* heard *it*, were disobedient? Surely *it was* not all who went out from Egypt through Moses?
17 And with whom was he angry *for* forty years? *Was it* not with those who sinned, whose dead bodies fell in the wilderness?
18 And to whom did he swear *they would* not enter into his rest, except those who were disobedient?
19 And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

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

4:1 Therefore let us fear, *while there* remains a promise of entering into his rest, that none of you appear to fall short of *it*.
2 For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as those also *did*, but the message they heard did not benefit them, *because they* were not united with those who heard *it* in faith.
3 For we who have believed enter into rest, just as he has said,

“As I swore in my anger,
‘They will never enter into my rest.’”

And yet these works have been accomplished from the foundation of the world.

4 For he has spoken somewhere about the seventh *day* in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works,” [Gen 2:3]

5 and in this *passage* again, ‘They will never enter into my rest.’”

6 Since therefore it remains *for* some to enter into it, and the ones to whom the good news was proclaimed previously did not enter because of disobedience,

7 again he ordains a certain day, today, speaking by David after so long a time, just as had been said before,

“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts.”

8 For if Joshua had caused them to rest, he would not have spoken about another day after these *things*.

9 Consequently a sabbath rest remains for the people of God.

10 For the one who has entered into his rest has also himself rested from his works, just as God *did* from his own *works*.

11 Therefore, let us make every effort to enter into that rest, in order that no one may fall in the same pattern of disobedience.

12 For the word of God *is* living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, both joints and marrow, and able to judge the reflections and thoughts of the heart.

13 And no creature is hidden in the sight of him, but all *things are* naked and laid bare to the eyes of him to whom we must give our account.

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

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.

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.

⁷ Lane, 1:lxii.