

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, 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?

First Warning—The Danger of Drifting

2:1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it*.

2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty,
3 how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,

4 God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

Superiority of Jesus to the Angels

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

6 But one has testified somewhere, saying,

“WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM?

OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIM?

7 “YOU HAVE MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS;

YOU HAVE CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR,

AND HAVE APPOINTED HIM OVER THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS;

8 YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET.” [[Ps 8:4–6](#); cf. [1 Cor 15:20–28](#); [Eph 1:22](#)]

For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.

9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for 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 author of their salvation through sufferings.

11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

12 saying,

“I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN,

IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE.” [[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 WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME.” [[Isa 8:18](#)] (LXX)

14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.

17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Superiority of Jesus to Moses

3:1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession;

2 He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house.

3 For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house.

4 For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.

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

6 but Christ *was faithful* as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

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 WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME,
 AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS,
 9 WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED *Me* BY TESTING *Me*,
 AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS.
 10 “THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION,
 AND SAID, ‘THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART,
 AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS’;
 11 AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH,
 ‘THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.’” [Ps 95:7b–11] (LXX 94:7b–11)

12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.
 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.
 14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,
 15 while it is said,

“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,
 DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME.”

16 For who provoked *Him* when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt *led* by Moses?
 17 And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?
 18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?
 19 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 if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.
 2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.
 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said,

“AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH,
 THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,”

although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.

4 For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh *day*: “AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS”; [Gen 2:3]
 5 and again in this *passage*, “THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.”
 6 Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience,
 7 He again fixes a certain day, “Today,” saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before,

“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,
 DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.”

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.
 9 So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.
 10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.
 11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience.
 12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

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 (July 1966): 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.