



A SUPERIOR HIGH PRIEST

A Concise Commentary on the Epistle
to the Hebrews

L. S. WATKINS

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on the
Epistle to the Hebrews

By
L. S. Watkins

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All Scripture quotes are from the King James Bible except those verses compared and then the source is identified.

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DEDICATION

To my beautiful wife and children, my first pastor and spiritual father, Dr. Allen Jones, and to all who show up to hear my ramblings week after week.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

The author wishes to thank God for His innumerable blessings and for revealing any Scriptural truth that can be found within these pages. Thanks go to the author's wife, Jessie, for sparing time and offering much support, encouragement, and valuable criticism (Pro. 31:10). Thanks also to Pastor William Burrows for many things, but especially the support and suggestion of Dr. Jones for the Foreword. Dr. Jones is to be thanked for having written such a complimentary Foreword despite his intense schedule. Thanks to Pastor Stephen Chronister for all the time on the phone and for making this author find the answers instead of handing them out. Thank you to Eunice Brown for her excellent and tireless work on the project. Thanks to all those who encouraged the writing of this monograph, including, but not limited to, Claudia Watkins (Mom) and Jeremy Stevens. Finally, thank you to Dr. H.D. Williams and his wife for all the hard work and long hours and for following the Lord in founding and operating T.O.P., and to Dr. Steve Combs for sending me in their direction.

SAMPLE PAGES

FOREWORD

Brother Lucas S. Watkins has certainly done a spectacular job in his A Superior High Priest. In the opening portion of his work, he stated his purpose to disclose Christ as better or Christ as superior. This purpose is adhered to throughout the book as he not only writes of Christ's finished work excelling the transactions of the Mosaic Law, but the "finished" meaning exactly that. The Law, no matter how strictly it was carried out, could never reach the plateau of acceptance with God for salvation as the author proves over and over with scriptural evidence. When Christ said, "*It is finished*" (Jn. 19:30), this is precisely what took place. All the Law could do was keep those under it reminded of their sins as they were to continue coming with the sacrifices demanded. The author does well in pointing this out in contrast to Christ's entering "*...once in the holy place...*" (Heb. 9:12), never to be repeated. He also shows how Christ "*...after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down...*" (Heb. 10:12), something the priest of the Old Testament was never privileged to do because his work was never completed.

Many other contrasts the author makes to reveal the superiority of Christ. These consist of Christ's words, His way, His worth and much more. He reveals Christ to be the example believers should follow in taking up their cross daily and following Him. The author portrays Christ's prayer life and His yielding to God's will; that even though as man He had a will and that man's will must yield to God's.

His emphasis on the blood is very important. He shows the fallacy of discounting the value of Christ's blood and embracing His death over it. To the Israelites in Egypt, God did not give the message, "When I see the slain carcasses of the animals, I will pass over you, but *"...when I see the blood, I will pass over you..."* (Ex. 12:13). The word "blood" is found more times in Hebrews than any other book in the New Testament.

The author is to be commended for his grasp on the purpose for the letter to the Hebrews. Dr. Carpenter, my most revered professor, said one day in Bible class, "Paul wrote to the Hebrews to tell them to stop being Hebrews." My study of Hebrews convinced me, the key thought is *"Let us go on to perfection..."* (Heb. 6:1). Brother Watkins even though he pursues his quest of the Superior Christ, never veers from the need for maturity of the Hebrew believers. This undoubtedly is, if not the major problem in our churches, one that is very high on the list. The work of the Superior Christ has made available to the believer all that is necessary for his maturity.

Brother Watkins resolutely refutes false concepts and addresses misunderstandings of biblical truths in the kindest manner while never approaching either apart from scriptural support or scholarly input as his bibliography reveals. Having been in the ministry for fifty plus years, easily comprehended is the manner of his time in the study and time spent in prayer. Be sure and read his Excurses 1 and 2. They seal much of the truths found in this work.

FOREWORD

Brother Watkins is my junior in ministry, age, and experience in excess of forty years; however, I am reminded of a comment given by Dr. Grant Carter in one of our Bible classes at the International Baptist Bible Institute, "Truth is truth, no matter who says it or where it is found." There is quite a difference in truth from the Bible and a Bible truth. Truth from the Bible can and is given many times out of context. A Bible truth is keeping that truth in context, or in other words, "rightly divided" in what the Scripture teaches elsewhere on the subject.

There are more than forty works on the book of Hebrews in my library, counting the single volumes, plus commentaries. This work by Lucas Watkins is valued among the best of them.

James Jones, Jr.
Harriman, Tennessee
12/09/23

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INTRODUCTION

“If you do not attempt to imitate Paul in anything else as to preaching, be sure to follow his example in this—that you try to adapt every sermon to that time, that place, that people;...”¹

The book of Hebrews has been described as “the document of faith,”² by G. Campbell Morgan, and “the sweet harmony of both Testaments,”³ by John Flavel, and is said to “set forth the finality of Christ’s salvation. . .,”⁴ by Dr. Merrill Unger. Albert Barnes called it “the most important part of the New Testament.”⁵ According to William Barclay, “there is no book in the New Testament which is more worth the effort to understand.”⁶

It is also one of the most disputed. Because they are not mentioned directly in the book itself, some items in dispute have been and are:

- (1) authorship,
- (2) time of writing,
- (3) place of writing,

¹ Broadus, John A. *The History of Preaching* (A.C. Armstrong & Son, 1889), p. 41.

² Morgan, G. Campbell *The Triumph of Faith* (Revell, 1944), p. 15.

³ Flavel, John, *The Fountain of Life* (American Tract Society), p. 11.

⁴ Unger, Merrill F., *Unger’s Bible Handbook* (Moody Press, 1966), p. 747.

⁵ Barnes, Albert, *Notes on the New Testament-Hebrews* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1951), 3.

⁶ Barclay, William, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1957), ix of the foreword.

- (4) to whom it was written specifically,
- (5) the original language in which it was written,
- (6) its purpose, and
- (7) its canonicity, i.e., does it belong in Scripture?

We will briefly look at some evidence for the more important questions: Authorship, time of writing, and purpose, and will take it for granted that it belongs in the canon of Scripture.

Authorship

The authorship of the book of Hebrews has been in dispute since the earliest times. Those who would know (the 1st c. Jews to whom it was written) remain tight-lipped...

Some guesses as to authorship are: the disciple Luke, the apostle Paul, not Paul (Jerome, Augustine, Calvin), Apollos (Luther), Barnabas (Tertullian), Priscilla and/or Aquila (Harnack), Peter, Clement of Rome, etc. Any candidate for the author (as he shall be called throughout this book, except in some quotations) must meet these requirements:

- (1) Was a male.⁷
- (2) Was highly educated in Jewish religion, scripture (O.T.), and history. One might say a 'Hebrew of Hebrews.'
- (3) Was Jewish himself (1:2).
- (4) Had an immense burden for his Jewish brethren.

⁷ Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G., *Ariel's Bible Commentary-The Messianic Jewish Epistles* (Ariel Ministries, 2005), p. 165.

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- (5) Was a companion of Timothy (13:23).
- (6) Was alive while the Temple still functioned (10:11), so between Christ's ascension and the Temple's destruction in A.D. 70.⁸
- (7) Suffered imprisonment for his Christian witness (10:34).
- (8) Some fair and early extra-Biblical support regarding authorship. The testimony from the earliest Greek 'fathers' should carry more weight than the Alexandrian or Latin ones. Sir Robert Anderson writes:

“Due weight has never been given to this fact in estimating the value of the general testimony of the Greek Fathers that the writer was the Apostle Paul. To attribute equal value to the statements of certain Latin Fathers of a later date betrays ignorance of the science of evidence.”⁹

He also points out that there exists a certain hermeneutical(interpretational) bias that caused many Roman Catholic 'fathers' to cast doubt on the authenticity of the book of Hebrews.¹⁰ This bias is still held today by the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church as well as many 'Protestant' churches and its most popular iteration is found in the 'Replacement theology' of many Reformed churches. This will be examined in some detail, but

⁸ Wuest, Kenneth S., *Hebrews in the Greek New Testament* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947), p. 14.

⁹ Anderson, Sir Robert, *Types In Hebrews* (Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, 1978), p. 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 2-3.

for now, understand that the men who hold this view believe that the 'Church' has replaced Israel in God's program of events, and that God has forsaken Israel. Why then would the Holy Spirit inspire an entire book to Hebrews that says anything but "God has forsaken you, sorry about your luck!"?

- (9) It would also be really helpful if there was some hint somewhere in the Bible itself that a writing full of wisdom had been sent to Jewish Christians, especially if it were to name the author of such a work by name (See 2 Peter 3:15)!

By now it should be clear that Paul the apostle is the clear favorite. So, does Paul himself give us any clue? Paul said that his 'epistles' had a special mark, a token:

"The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

II Thessalonians 3:17-18

Paul says here that his letters bear a mark or 'token' as evidence of his authorship.

Because we are used to the western style of correspondence, our 'salutation' occurs at the very beginning of our letters. Modern writers see that Paul does not identify himself at the beginning of Hebrews and say "Aha!" but it should be noticed that Paul's letters always *end* with salutations (Romans 16, 1 Corinthians 16, etc., etc.).

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Without exception, some form of “grace be with you.” occurs at the end of every Pauline epistle, and at the end of Hebrews.

Consider also the heart-wrenching burden Paul had for his brethren, the Jews. In Romans 9:33 we read:

“For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”

He also ends up ignoring the Holy Spirit’s warning against going to Jerusalem in Acts 19-21, his burden being so heavy.

Some have objected to Paul’s authorship of Hebrews on the basis of style. A careful reading of Acts, however, will show that Paul tailored his oratorical style based on his audience.

These speeches in Acts sound much like Hebrews because Paul is addressing Hebrews.

“For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward;” 2:2

“Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.”

“God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second

psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” Acts 13:26,33.

Many believe the thirteenth chapter could have been written by Paul, even if the rest wasn't.¹¹ Some have suggested that he wrote the first twelve chapters early on, and the thirteenth later. This argument is based, not only on style, but a certain private interpretation they hold which will be addressed later (See Excursus 1).

If Paul did indeed write the book of Hebrews, why would he not identify himself right out of the gate like he did in the Pauline epistles? Here are some possibilities:

- (1) This book is not a letter like the other epistles, but a theological treatise.
- (2) The treatise had to be carried into dangerous territory, as Paul's preaching had caused civil unrest in the empire, and tensions between Rome and both the Jews and Christians were reaching a crescendo. A message bearing his name might have been confiscated or might even put the carrier at great peril.
- (3) The letter and carrier would have faced danger from the non-believing Jews as well, who still taught Christ to be a heretic.¹²
- (4) He may not have carried the same clout with Jews as he did elsewhere as he was the

¹¹ Ruckman, Peter S., *The Book of Hebrews* (self-published, 1986), preface, xvii.

¹² Gaebelain, A.C., *The Annotated Bible: Phil-Hebrews* (Our Hope, 1917), p. 229.

'Apostle to the Gentiles' (Romans 11:13). His name may have been an immediate turn-off.

- (5) Perhaps Paul wanted rather to emphasize the One Whose name *does* appear at the beginning: God (1:1).

All this being said, complete certainty cannot be maintained. Both Barnabas and Apollos also meet many of the criteria mentioned above (Jewish, mighty in Scripture, etc.). The most conservative commentators tend toward Paul, while the more liberal seem completely averse. One thing is absolutely certain: the Holy Spirit is truly the Author, and the human author was the instrument.

II Timothy 3:16:

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God..."

Setting

Because the addressees are not named anywhere in the body of this book, there is a question as to whom exactly it is written. It is, however, undeniably clear that it is written to Jewish people, and its writing precedes the siege of Jerusalem, and the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. This information is critical to understanding some of the more controversial passages found therein. Some have said that the phrase in Chapter 13 "*They of Italy salute you*" means the Jews in Rome were meant.¹³ Some good

¹³ Exell, Rev. Joseph S., *The Biblical Expositor-Hebrews Vol. 1* (James Nisbet & Co., London), Intro., ix-x.

points are made in this respect. Paul writing from Rome also makes a lot of sense.

Theme

Knowing the theme of the book of the Bible you are reading is always helpful. It keeps you in mind of what the author's point in writing is. In the case of Hebrews, it is more important than any other book we can think of. This writer was listening to another pastor's preparatory remarks as he was introducing an expository series on this book, and he gave the theme as "Warnings Against Apostasy in Trying Times." While there are dire warnings in the book for the 1st century Jewish Christians, and their situation parallels what it looks like Christians may be experiencing in the near future, making the warnings the theme puts the focus somewhere other than where it ought to be. Besides that, the warnings have no strength if they are not tied together by the theme! The series ended up being a diatribe about Lordship Salvation.

There is one theme that each of the books of the Bible points to, however indirectly. Paul's epistles all relate to Christian living, but the Christian life cannot be lived outside of Christ. "What about the historical books of the Old Testament?" you say. Whether you recognize it or not, EVERY book is about Christ. The historical books are about the history of redemption, and therefore have their central theme as Christ. If you want some authority on the issue, take a spin on this:

Jesus said in John 5:39:

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“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”

Jesus says the Scriptures testify of Him. In the preface to the King James Bible, there is a section in the prefatory material that tells about the canonization process. This is the process by which it was determined which books should be included in the Bible. This writer is very thankful that the final verdict was never up to single men, councils, or even scholars, because the book of Hebrews rarely made this list. Men as imminent as Luther didn't think it belonged. Yet it speaks of Christ in a way no other book can come close to. It is the strongest link between the anticipatory nature of the religion of the Jewish people, and the satisfaction of Christ's fulfilling work.

The proper theme, therefore, is “Christ is better,” or “Christ is Superior.” This theme is not only repeated throughout the book but is the answer to the warnings found in it. The author tells his audience to be strong and not go back to Judaism. Why? Because Christ is Superior. The old religion was God-ordained and served its purpose but does no longer. Why? Because Christ is Superior. In the old religion, God's people could never enter His presence. They couldn't go into the Most Holy Place. Only the priest could, and that once a year. But now, in Christ, the believer has access to the very presence of God, any time he or she needs. Why? Because Christ is Superior. No person or church should be able to persuade the Christian into any kind of works-based system of

religion. Outward religion is obsolete. Why? Because Christ is Superior!

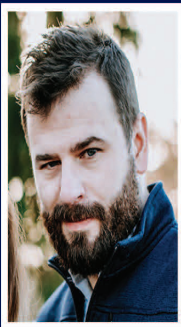
Keeping Christ as the theme will keep the guardrails up regarding interpretation. It will also guard against apostasy. If Christ is the theme, you won't force the Bible into extreme versions of Dispensationalism. If Christ is the theme, then the passages that appear to let on that salvation can be lost will be understood. If Christ's salvation can be lost, how is Christ Superior? We refer again to II Peter 3:15-16.

“And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.”

We assure you, this book, along with Matthew, Acts, and James are the most wrested down to this modern day. In this book, we will put 'Wresting' in contrast to 'Resting,' which is one of the subthemes of the book of Hebrews.

One final word about the theme. The theme is sister to the setting. Hebrews is very confusing to many because

- (1) they don't know that it is written to people who are facing possible judgment,



Lucas Scott Watkins holds a ThB from Andersonville Theological Seminary and serves at Fellowship Baptist Church in Lebanon, Ohio, home of The Fellowship Tract League. He also ministers through Bible preaching and teaching and singing with his family at meetings, revivals, and special services, or wherever the Lord leads.

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS is avoided by many and misinterpreted by most. The point of this commentary is to unfold the beautiful message of this rich book, as well as to bring light and clarity to its difficult passages. It will be seen throughout this study that the way to look at these passages is the same way that its original readers would have, and to be as careful in applying Old Testament typology as the original author was. The truths revealed thereby are encouraging, beautiful, and satisfying to those who are unsettled at best, and troubled at worst. The result is a treatment of the book that honors the Authorized text and avoids common theological blunders.

"THERE ARE MORE THAN FORTY WORKS ON THE BOOK OF HEBREWS IN MY LIBRARY, COUNTING THE SINGLE VOLUMES, PLUS COMMENTARIES. THIS WORK BY LUCAS WATKINS IS VALUED AMONG THE BEST OF THEM."

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