

# Session 1 Before the Silence: Introducing Hebrews

## *Before the Silence: A Study of Hebrews*

Session 1 | Hebrews 1:1-2

### Series Orientation

- This study approaches Hebrews as a late, kingdom-oriented document written to Israel in the shadow of impending judgment.
- The series theme, **Before the Silence**, emphasizes urgency, warning, and transition as the Temple era neared its end.
- Hebrews will be read within its own historical and covenantal setting rather than flattened into later systematic theology.

### Working Thesis

- Hebrews speaks to a Jewish audience facing pressure, delay, and the consequences of rejecting or neglecting the kingdom offer.
- The book stands near the close of the apostolic-era testimony to Israel before the long silence that followed the setting aside of the kingdom program.
- Its exhortations, warnings, priestly arguments, and kingdom expectations must be handled in light of Israel, the Temple, covenant promises, and impending judgment.
- This study will work from a **late pre-70 date**, likely AD 68-69.
  - This agrees with the common conservative instinct that Hebrews was written before the destruction of the Temple, since the book speaks naturally of priestly service and sacrifice as still operating.
  - It is more specific, and probably later, than the broader common range often given for Hebrews, such as the early-to-mid 60s or generally sometime before AD 70.
  - It differs from post-70 approaches, which read the Temple language as literary, theological, or retrospective rather than as part of the book's immediate historical pressure.
  - A date in AD 68-69 places Hebrews in the crisis years of the Jewish revolt, with judgment near, the Temple order about to vanish, and Israel's kingdom expectation moving toward silence.
- The title **Hebrews** is not a modern guess, but the ancient and consistent title attached to the book: *To the Hebrews*.
  - The words *To the Hebrews* do not appear inside the body of the book itself; they are an external title supplied by transmission history.
  - Therefore the audience is not named by an opening address, as in many epistles, but is strongly implied by the ancient title and by the book's internal evidence.
  - The title is early: Papyrus 46 (c. AD 200), one of the earliest witnesses to Hebrews, already preserves the title form *pros Hebraious* ("To the Hebrews").
  - The title is also stable and never meaningfully replaced by a competing audience-title.
  - The name fits the contents: fathers, prophets, angels, Moses, Joshua, Aaron, Melchizedek, covenant, priesthood, sacrifices, tabernacle, Temple-era worship, and Israel's wilderness history.
  - This creates an interpretive oddity: many interpreters accept the title "Hebrews" while reading the book as though it were written directly to a mostly Gentile church.
  - If the modern church insists that "Hebrews" should be read as though it means "Gentiles," then consistency would almost require changing the book's title.
  - The burden of proof should run the other way: unless the text forces a Gentile-church audience, the title and internal evidence point naturally to Hebrews, that is, Jews.
  - Gentiles may learn from Hebrews, but they should not be allowed to erase the book's implied and internal Jewish audience.

### The Mysteries of Hebrews

- Authorship: who wrote Hebrews, and why does the book not name its author?
  - This study will proceed with **Pauline authorship** as the working position.
  - For a fuller defense, see Randy White, *Prove It! Scripture on Trial: Proving Biblical Truths*, Chapter 3, "Hebrews Was Written By Paul" (Taos, NM: Dispensational Publishing House, Inc., 2024; first printing August 2024; ISBN 978-1-961110-25-0).
  - Major points from that chapter:
    - The broad rejection of Pauline authorship is relatively recent, while older canonical placement and tradition often treated Hebrews with the Pauline epistles.
    - The absence of Paul's name may be deliberate anonymity, especially if he was writing to Jews who were suspicious of him and needed to hear the message without reacting first to the messenger.
    - Style alone is weak evidence against Paul, since authors can write differently for different audiences, purposes, and circumstances.
    - Hebrews requires a writer deeply trained in Jewish Scripture, priesthood, sacrifice, covenant, and typology; Paul was eminently qualified for such a task.
    - Hebrews 13:23 connects the writer with Timothy, fitting Paul's known circle of ministry.

- 2 Peter 3:15-16 suggests Paul wrote to Peter’s Jewish audience, which supports the likelihood of a Pauline letter to Hebrews.
- Placement: why does Hebrews sound and function differently from Paul’s church epistles?
- Audience: who are the “Hebrews,” and what danger are they facing?
- Warning passages: what do the severe warnings mean, and to whom do they apply?
- Doctrine: why does Hebrews appear to create tension with Pauline teaching on grace, assurance, and salvation?
- Context: how does the book’s Jewish, priestly, covenantal, and Temple-centered language control its interpretation?

## Major Questions for the Study

- What is the historical moment behind Hebrews?
- What does the book assume about the Temple, priesthood, sacrifices, and covenant order?
- How does Hebrews relate to the kingdom offer made to Israel?
- What kind of perseverance is being demanded?
- What kind of judgment is being warned against?
- What does Hebrews reveal about the transition from Israel’s kingdom expectation to the present dispensation?

## God Has Spoken in the Son (Hebrews 1:1-2a)

### God Spoke in Former Days (v. 1)

- God and His revelation are the subject of the opening sentence.
- In former days God spoke “unto the fathers by the prophets.”
- The audience is therefore immediately placed inside Israel’s story: fathers, prophets, and covenant revelation.
- The former revelation came “at sundry times and in divers manners,” showing variety, progression, and incompleteness.
- The “times past” are presumably the days of the Hebrew Scriptures. In the next verse, Paul contrasts them with “these last days,” signifying (not proving) that Paul is taking a dispensational approach to the revelatory work of God.

### God Has Spoken in These Last Days (v. 2a)

- The contrast is not between a silent God and a speaking God, but between former prophetic revelation and the more current revelation.
- “These last days” should likely be read in relation to Israel’s prophetic calendar and kingdom expectation.
  - If taken in such a prophetic understanding, then Hebrews begins with urgency because the audience is living at the end of an era, if not the ultimate last-days.
  - Compare to the Epistle of James, which gives several “last days” statements:
    - James 5:3 says the rich had “heaped treasure together for the last days.”
    - James 5:7 tells the brethren to be patient “unto the coming of the Lord.”
    - James 5:8 adds, “the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.”
    - James 5:9 says, “the judge standeth before the door.”
  - James and Hebrews therefore share a similar atmosphere: Jewish readers are being warned, exhorted, and pressed toward endurance because judgment and kingdom expectation are near.
- God has now spoken “by his Son,” making the Son the final and decisive messenger to Israel, nationally.
- A key pronoun: **us**.
  - The first use of a pronoun in any Biblical book, especially epistles, is insightful.

- By nailing down the first pronoun, it makes identification of other pronouns easier.
  - In Hebrews, there is no authorship, so “us/we” can’t be taken as the Author and company, as in some other epistles.
- Let’s nail down the “us/we” first person plural in Hebrews:
  - **Us** are the people of “the fathers” and “the prophets” (v. 1), and therefore Israel-centric. Under no scenario could “the fathers” be taken as relating to the body of Christ.
  - Hebrews 2:1 - “Therefore **we** ought to give the more earnest heed...” The warning rests on the revelation just described: God spoke to Israel’s fathers by the prophets and now to “us” by His Son.
  - Hebrews 2:3 - “How shall **we** escape...” if “we” neglect what was spoken by the Lord and confirmed by those who heard Him. The Lord’s earthly message was first to Israel, and the confirmation ministry fits the apostolic witness to Israel.
  - Hebrews 3:1 - “**holy brethren**, partakers of the heavenly calling...” The audience is addressed as brethren within the Hebrew covenantal frame, then told to consider Christ as Apostle and High Priest.
  - Hebrews 3:6 - “whose house are **we**, if **we** hold fast...” The “house” language follows Moses, servant in God’s house, and Christ, Son over His own house. The natural reference is Israel’s house, not a Gentile body.
  - Hebrews 4:1-2 - “**us**” is tied to the promise of entering rest, and the comparison is explicitly with the wilderness generation. “Unto **us** was the gospel preached, as well as unto them.”
  - Hebrews 4:14-16 - “**we** have a great high priest... let **us** hold fast... let **us** therefore come boldly...” The language assumes a people for whom priesthood, mercy seat access, and covenant worship are native categories.
  - Hebrews 6:18 - “**we** might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge...” This draws on Israel’s refuge imagery and covenant hope, not Gentile ecclesiology.
  - Hebrews 8:1 - “**We** have such an high priest...” The

priestly argument is unintelligible apart from Israel's priesthood, covenant, tabernacle, and sacrificial order.

- Hebrews 10:19-23 - "Having therefore, brethren... let **us** draw near..." The imagery is sanctuary access, blood, sprinkling, washing, priestly approach, and confession, all drawn from Israel's worship system.
- Hebrews 12:1 - "**we** also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses..." The witnesses of Hebrews 11 are Israel's faithful, so the "we" naturally continues the Hebrew audience standing in that history.
- Hebrews 12:25 - "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh... much more shall not **we** escape..." The comparison is Sinai versus the present speaking from heaven; again, Israel's covenant history controls the warning.
  - Note the pronoun overlap: **ye** is the addressed Hebrew audience, while **we** includes the writer with them under the same warning.
  - In other words, the second-person plural may be more limited/direct, while the first-person plural may be broader/inclusive, but both still sit inside the Hebrew/Israel frame unless the context says otherwise.
- There are some clear authorial or local "we/us" uses that should not be forced into the audience category:
  - Hebrews 2:5 - "whereof **we** speak" refers to the writer's present argument.
  - Hebrews 5:11 - "of whom **we** have many things to say" is the writer's discourse marker.
  - Hebrews 6:9 - "**we** are persuaded better things of you"

distinguishes the writer from the readers.

- Hebrews 13:18-19 - "Pray for **us**... restored to you" refers to the writer and his associates.
  - These authorial cases do not weaken the Hebrew-audience argument because the context clearly signals the shift. The default audience "us/we" remains Hebrew unless the passage itself gives a reason to read it otherwise.
- The Gospel of Christ is the primary issue that Israel needs to deal with in order to receive her Kingdom.
  - This is why Paul is going to spend the first portion of Hebrews telling how Christ is "better."
  - What is the Gospel of Christ?
    - For more detail, see Randy White, *The Gospel of Christ: Its Nature and Identity* (Taos, NM: Dispensational Publishing House, Inc., 2024; first printing November 2024).
    - The booklet argues that the "Gospel of Christ," a phrase used exclusively by Paul, should not be automatically equated with the Gospel of grace by which we are saved today.
    - It distinguishes the Gospel of Christ as Paul's testimony, especially to Jews, that Jesus is the Christ, Israel's Messiah.
    - This explains why the phrase can be connected with Jewish priority, kingdom expectation, synagogue preaching, and Paul's burden for Israel.
    - In Hebrews, this matters because the opening issue is not generic religion, but whether Israel will receive God's final word in His Son.