

Introduction

There are many theories regarding the authorship of the book of Hebrews. As this paper will show, there is not enough evidence to forcefully declare in favor of any specific author, but there are compelling clues and possibilities.

Scriptural Hints

There are some scriptural cues that one should consider in this analysis. Some commentators think it significant that the author does not identify himself in the text.¹ Pentecost speculated this indicated a desire to remain anonymous.² However, Pentecost also pointed out that the readers obviously knew who the author was,³ since he discussed being restored to them [13:18-19] and thanked them for help in past [10:34].⁴ Regardless of deviation from letter form, the omission of the author's identity seems far more likely to be because it was superfluous than because he had something to hide, particularly when you consider these personal references and the apparent authority the author assumes.⁵

The author appears not only to have been well known to the original recipients, but also intimate with local affairs, both happenings in the church [10:25] and with individuals [3:12-13; 4:1, 11; 6:11; 12:15],⁶ and seems to identify with leaders of the local church community [13:17-19].⁷ We can discern he was an early believer, as the letter was quoted as early as AD 95 by Clement of Rome.⁸ The author apparently was a man [11:32] with authority in the apostolic church,⁹ despite not making claim to an office or title.¹⁰ He apparently was an intellectual Hebrew Christian – consider his claim to share their inheritance of history, traditions, and institutions [1:1] – well versed in the Old Testament,¹¹ but primarily in the Septuagint, which he followed even when it diverted from the Hebrew scriptures.¹² He was apparently a second generation believer [2:3].¹³

¹ Kenneth Barker, Gen. Ed., *The Zondervan NASB Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 1781; see also Bruce B. Barton, Dave Veerman, and Linda K. Taylor, *Hebrews*, in *Life Application Bible Commentary*, ed. Grant Osborne (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1997), xii; Dwight J. Pentecost, *Faith that Endures: A Practical Commentary on the Book of Hebrews*, Rev. Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000), 13, 20.

² Pentecost, 13, 20.

³ William L. Lane, "Hebrews," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 444; see also Barker, 1781.

⁴ Pentecost, 14; see also Lane, 447.

⁵ Barker, 1781.

⁶ Lane, 445.

⁷ Lane, 447.

⁸ Barton, xii.

⁹ Barker, 1781.

¹⁰ Lane, 444.

¹¹ Barker, 1781; see also Lane, 444.

¹² Barton, xiii.

¹³ Lane, 444; see also Barton, xii; Barker, 1781.

The author was particularly knowledgeable about the Levitical system.¹⁴ He was a good writer of Greek, with a purity of style and good vocabulary unlike any other New Testament documents.¹⁵ He was able to interpret the Old Testament as a mature Christian,¹⁶ with exceptional reasoning ability.¹⁷ He appears to have been reluctant to write instead of speak in person.¹⁸ He was associated with Timothy [13:23].¹⁹ He provided only one geographic reference, to Italy [13:24].²⁰ His theology is compatible with the writings of Paul and John.²¹

History of Thought

None of the earliest commentators refer to the author.²² The earliest quotation is by Clement of Rome in AD 95,²³ with other early discussion apparent in the writings of Polycarp and Hermas.²⁴ From before AD 190, the letter was held to be in some sense Pauline in Alexandria.²⁵ Yet even there it was acknowledged there were problems with authorship, and even in the east as late as the early fourth century Methodius of Olympus treated the book as anonymous.²⁶

Clement of Alexandria thought Paul wrote it in Hebrew for the Hebrews and Luke translated it to Greek for the Gentiles.²⁷ Origen thought a disciple of Paul's took notes on his teachings and then wrote them up,²⁸ because the thoughts were Pauline but the style was not.²⁹ However, Origen acknowledged that some thought Clement of Rome or Luke wrote the letter, and that it

¹⁴ Zane C. Hodges, "Hebrews," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2004), 778.

¹⁵ Barton, xiii; see also Lane, 444.

¹⁶ Barton, xii; see also Lane, 444.

¹⁷ Lane, 444.

¹⁸ Lane, 444.

¹⁹ Hodges, 778; see also Barton, xiii.

²⁰ Hodges, 778.

²¹ Barton, xiii; see also Hodges, 778.

²² Barton, xii.

²³ Barton, xii; see also Pentecost, 13.

²⁴ Barton, xii.

²⁵ Hodges, 777; see also Barton, xii; Pentecost, 20.

²⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. Ed., in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 14-15.

²⁷ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 4, 14; see also Bruce, 15; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1990), 676-677; D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 601; Hodges, 777; Barton, xii; Pentecost, 13.

²⁸ Ellingworth, 5; see also Carson and Moo, 601; Donald Guthrie, 669; Bruce, 15. Pentecost, 19 attributed this position to Tertullian.

²⁹ Donald Guthrie, 669.

was impossible to prove authorship.³⁰ About AD 200, Tertullian quoted from an epistle to the Hebrews with an author of Barnabas, which seems to have been from this letter.³¹ In doing so, Tertullian presented this as an opinion his readers would know.³² Other early church writers suggested Luke or Clement of Rome.³³

In the earliest text from the early third century, the letter is attributed to Paul, probably from influence of the Eastern church.³⁴ On the other hand, the Muratorian Canon, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Gaius of Rome all deny Pauline authorship.³⁵ It is possible that in the ancient catalog of canonical books found in the Claremontanus List, this letter went under the name of “Epistle of Barnabas,” based on the number of lines attributed to it, which would fit this letter but not the non-canonical “Epistle of Barnabas.”³⁶ Barnabas was advocated by Gregory of Elvira and Filaster in the fourth century.³⁷

Eusebius held that Clement of Rome wrote the letter.³⁸ Jerome and Augustine popularized in the West the idea of Paul as author,³⁹ based on the need for apostolic authority.⁴⁰ However, Jerome also mentioned Barnabas⁴¹ and Clement of Rome,⁴² and distinguished Hebrews from other Pauline epistles,⁴³ while Augustine later referred to the letter as anonymous.⁴⁴ The Sixth Synod of Carthage in AD 419 ascribed the letter to Paul,⁴⁵ and it was commonly called “The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews” from roughly AD 400 to AD 1600.⁴⁶ Thomas Aquinas said Luke translated it into excellent Greek for Paul.⁴⁷

³⁰ Bruce, 15.

³¹ Carson and Moo, 601; see also Barker, 1781; Hodges, 778; Bruce, 16; Ellingworth, 14.

³² Donald Guthrie, 674; see also Carson and Moo, 601; Hodges, 778; Bruce, 16.

³³ Lane, 444; see also Donald Guthrie, 669.

³⁴ Carson and Moo, 600; see also Donald Guthrie, 670.

³⁵ Bruce, 16; see also Carson and Moo, 601.

³⁶ Donald Guthrie, 674; see also Hodges, 778.

³⁷ Hodges, 778; see also Bruce, 16.

³⁸ Donald Guthrie, 677.

³⁹ Carson and Moo, 601; see also Hodges, 777; Pentecost, 20.

⁴⁰ Carson and Moo, 601.

⁴¹ Hodges, 778.

⁴² Ellingworth, 13.

⁴³ Bruce, 17.

⁴⁴ Bruce, 17.

⁴⁵ Bruce, 17.

⁴⁶ Barker, 1781.

⁴⁷ Bruce, 17; see also Carson and Moo, 601; Ellingworth, 13-14.

Since the Reformation, most scholarly opinion is that Paul could not have written the letter,⁴⁸ though the original *Schofield Reference Bible* called the letter “The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews” based on Hebrews 13:23 and 2 Peter 3:5.⁴⁹ The official Roman Catholic position remains that Paul was the author, as advocated at the Council of Trent,⁵⁰ though few Roman Catholic theologians espouse that view today.⁵¹ David Allen Black is the most well-known proponent of Pauline authorship today.⁵² Erasmus believed that the thoughts were inspired by Paul,⁵³ though Clement of Rome wrote it.⁵⁴ Martin Luther suggested Apollos as author.⁵⁵ Calvin suggested Clement of Rome or Luke.⁵⁶ Grotius advocated Luke.⁵⁷ Some nineteenth century scholars considered Silas.⁵⁸ Harnack speculated Priscilla, perhaps in conjunction with Aquila.⁵⁹

After discussing all the suggestions, Lane said, “This variety of opinion shows that the limits of our historical knowledge preclude any certainty regarding the writer’s identity.”⁶⁰

Paul

There are several similarities to Pauline thought in this letter.⁶¹ Of course, all the New Testament writers had one source in common, the Holy Spirit! And many of the similarities are basic apostolic teaching.⁶² Hebrews is consistent with Paul’s teaching on the following, for example: Christ’s previous glory and part in creation;⁶³ Christ’s self-humbling;⁶⁴ Christ’s obedience;⁶⁵ Christ’s self-offering for us in propitiation;⁶⁶ the view of the new covenant,⁶⁷ which

⁴⁸ Barker, 1781.

⁴⁹ Barton, xiii.

⁵⁰ Carson and Moo, 602; see also Barton, xiii.

⁵¹ Carson and Moo, 602.

⁵² Carson and Moo, 602.

⁵³ Bruce, 17.

⁵⁴ Donald Guthrie, 677.

⁵⁵ Bruce, 17-18; see also Donald Guthrie, 671, 679; Carson and Moo, 602; Barker, 1781; Hodges, 778; Ellingworth, 20.

⁵⁶ Bruce, 17; see also Carson and Moo, 602.

⁵⁷ Donald Guthrie, 671.

⁵⁸ Donald Guthrie, 678.

⁵⁹ Bruce, 18-19; see also Carson and Moo, 604.

⁶⁰ Lane, 444.

⁶¹ Donald Guthrie, 709, has some scripture references.

⁶² Bruce, 19.

⁶³ Donald Guthrie, 709; see also Pentecost, 15.

⁶⁴ Donald Guthrie, 709.

⁶⁵ Donald Guthrie, 709.

⁶⁶ Pentecost, 15; see also Donald Guthrie, 709.

is seen to be better than the blessings under the Law;⁶⁸ use of Abraham's faith as an example;⁶⁹ distribution of gifts by the Spirit;⁷⁰ appeal to the same Old Testament passages and use of such passages to build arguments, make illustrations, and formulate doctrine;⁷¹ use of an athletic metaphor of Christian life;⁷² and esteem for the Law, the Aaronic priesthood, the tabernacle, religious feasts, and prescribed sacrifices.⁷³ H. Montefiore found thirteen points of contact between Hebrews and 1 Corinthians.⁷⁴ Additionally, there are some similarities to Pauline phraseology,⁷⁵ a reference to Timothy [13:23],⁷⁶ and the suggestion of time in prison [13:18-19], possibly in Rome [13:24], with a reference to previous help [10:34] that could refer to a previous time in prison.⁷⁷

On the other hand, the specific emphases of the letter and the writing style are markedly different from any of Paul's work,⁷⁸ including distinct vocabulary differences,⁷⁹ though arguments built on such considerations are highly subjective and often used to propose untenable positions on other issues.⁸⁰ There is some overlap in vocabulary, though this might be explained away as to common traditions.⁸¹ The Greek is elegant and pure, closer to Luke's writing and unlike Paul's.⁸² Hebrews seems to follow the rhetoric style of Greek Christian writers in Alexandria, different from Paul's usual style.⁸³ Some have speculated that Paul wrote the original in Hebrew and what we have today is a Greek translation, but the letter does not bear signs of being translated from Hebrew: it is not written in translation Greek, the Old Testament is quoted from the Septuagint even when it deviates from the Hebrew text, and the argument of 9:15-20 depends on the double sense of "covenant" and "testament" of the Greek word *διαθήκη*, which would not work with the comparable Hebrew word.⁸⁴

⁶⁷ Donald Guthrie, 709.

⁶⁸ Pentecost, 15.

⁶⁹ Donald Guthrie, 709.

⁷⁰ Donald Guthrie, 709.

⁷¹ Donald Guthrie, 709; see also Pentecost 15-17.

⁷² Donald Guthrie, 709-710, attributing the idea to H. Windisch.

⁷³ Pentecost, 15.

⁷⁴ Donald Guthrie, 710, referring to "H. Montefiore, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, (BC), 1964."

⁷⁵ Pentecost, 17-18; he lists thirty-two of them.

⁷⁶ Pentecost, 14.

⁷⁷ Pentecost, 14.

⁷⁸ Carson and Moo, 602; see also Barker, 1781; Lane, 444; Donald Guthrie, 672; Bruce, 20.

⁷⁹ Carson and Moo, 602; see also Lane, 444; Bruce, 15, 20.

⁸⁰ Hodges, 777.

⁸¹ Ellingworth, 11-12.

⁸² Barton, xiii; see also Lane, 444; Ellingworth, 12.

⁸³ Pentecost, 19.

⁸⁴ Bruce, 15.

There are different ways of referring to God and Jesus than in Paul's letters,⁸⁵ the use of particles is different than Paul's,⁸⁶ and Hebrews employs a distinctive range of images that are unlike Paul's.⁸⁷ There are none of Paul's "Hebraisms,"⁸⁸ nor his characteristic long sentences,⁸⁹ rapid changes of thought,⁹⁰ or usual ways for introducing Old Testament passages.⁹¹ Hebrews lacks the degree of personal allusions common in Paul's writing.⁹² While the author of Hebrews expresses some personal concerns for the readers, there is not the same strong references of relationship common in Paul's writings,⁹³ though that could be because he is writing to a church he has not planted [compare Romans]. We could explain away some of these differences by noting that Paul's letters were written by various protégés and assuming Hebrews was written by a different protégé of Paul's, with a bit more autonomy but under Paul's oversight.⁹⁴

The writer did not identify himself as Paul usually does.⁹⁵ Clement of Alexandria's argument that Paul left his name off because Jews were against him⁹⁶ is weak: as Pentecost pointed out, the letter was not addressing the nation of unbelievers, but rather believers who would hold Paul in high esteem;⁹⁷ also, without knowledge of the author, the letter would carry no authority and the personal relational references would be nonsensical. Supposedly, Clement also heard from Pantaenus that Paul did not use his name out of reverence to Jesus who was the apostle for the Hebrews [consider 3:1],⁹⁸ but he could have identified himself without claiming authority. Instead, there appears to be an assumption of authority, but not the demand for recognition of it as in many of Paul's letters.⁹⁹

There are a few theological aspects of Hebrews that differ from Paul's writings. Hebrews highlights the high priesthood of Christ, not mentioned in Paul's known epistles,¹⁰⁰ but then this

⁸⁵ Ellingworth, 11.

⁸⁶ Ellingworth, 11.

⁸⁷ Lane, 444.

⁸⁸ Barton, xiii.

⁸⁹ Barton, xiii.

⁹⁰ Donald Guthrie, 672; see also Barton, xiii.

⁹¹ Bruce, 20; see also Barton, xiii.

⁹² Donald Guthrie, 672; see also Barton, xiii.

⁹³ Ellingworth, 8.

⁹⁴ Pentecost, 20, suggests a protégé author.

⁹⁵ Carson and Moo, 602; see also Donald Guthrie, 671; Barker, 1781; Barton, xii.

⁹⁶ Ellingworth, 4; see also Carson and Moo, 601; Donald Guthrie, 671; Bruce, 15.

⁹⁷ Pentecost, 19.

⁹⁸ Donald Guthrie, 672; see also Barton, xii.

⁹⁹ Ellingworth, 11; see also Donald Guthrie, 672.

¹⁰⁰ Donald Guthrie, 673; see also Barton, xiii-xiv; Carson and Moo, 602; Lane, 444.

was not dealt with by any other New Testament writer either.¹⁰¹ Hebrews discusses sacrifice at length,¹⁰² focuses on Christ's exaltation instead of resurrection,¹⁰³ and focuses on the cleansing and sanctifying work of Christ instead of the redeeming.¹⁰⁴ Hebrews does not mention Pauline thoughts on union with Christ or justification by faith,¹⁰⁵ does not discuss the opposition of faith and works or tension between flesh and spirit,¹⁰⁶ and does not seem to wrestle with the issue of the Law,¹⁰⁷ though it does say the Old Covenant is obsolete.¹⁰⁸ While Paul's interest in the Law seems to be ethical and judicial, in Hebrews the focus is cultic and it is used in argument unlike in Paul's writings.¹⁰⁹ Hebrews does not deal with Paul's interests in sexual morality and use of wealth, rarely mentions "αγαπη," and contains no discussion of Jews and Gentiles.¹¹⁰ It is noteworthy, however, that Hebrews contains no actual contradictions with Pauline thought.¹¹¹

Perhaps of more concern are three questions. First, whether Paul would write to the Hebrews when he had a designated role to the Gentiles, leaving the Jews to Peter.¹¹² Perhaps he would, especially since he was concerned with correct doctrine throughout the church and if this letter was written at a time when Peter was not in Jerusalem. Second, whether Paul would quote from the Septuagint instead of the Hebrew text, especially considering the evidence in the Pauline literature to the contrary.¹¹³ Third, whether Paul would identify himself as in verse 2:3, which seems to indicate the author did not receive special revelation directly [cf. Gal 1:11-12].¹¹⁴

Barnabas

As with all possibilities other than Paul, the arguments in favor and against Barnabas being the author are minimal, primarily because we lack adequate material for comparison. In favor of Barnabas, it has been noted that he was associated with Paul in Antioch and on Paul's first missionary journey [Acts 13:1-4], which could account for similarities to Pauline thought in the letter.¹¹⁵ Barnabas would provide the apostolic authority [Acts 14:4, 14] desired for canonical

¹⁰¹ George H. Guthrie, "Old Testament in Hebrews," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 849.

¹⁰² Lane, 444.

¹⁰³ Donald Guthrie, 673; see also Ellingworth, 8.

¹⁰⁴ Donald Guthrie, 673.

¹⁰⁵ Ellingworth, 9; see also Barton, xiv; Donald Guthrie, 673; Carson and Moo, 602.

¹⁰⁶ Barton, xiv; see also Donald Guthrie, 673; Carson and Moo, 602.

¹⁰⁷ Donald Guthrie, 710.

¹⁰⁸ Donald Guthrie, 673.

¹⁰⁹ Ellingworth, 10.

¹¹⁰ Ellingworth, 9-10.

¹¹¹ Donald Guthrie, 673, 710; see also Pentecost, 15; Barton, xiv.

¹¹² Pentecost, 20.

¹¹³ Pentecost, 20.

¹¹⁴ Donald Guthrie, 673-674; see also Bruce, 19-20; Carson and Moo, 602; Barker, 1781; Barton, xiii [who refers to 1 Cor 9:1 also]; Ellingworth, 7 [who refers to Gal 1:1 also].

¹¹⁵ Barker, 1781; see also Barton, xiv; Carson and Moo, 603.

material and apparent in the letter.¹¹⁶ It is argued that Barnabas being a Jew of the priestly tribe of Levi [Acts 4:36] would explain the author's knowledge,¹¹⁷ but this argument is weakened when we realize that Hebrews relies on the Old Testament directly, not contemporary practice, and that there is no mention of Levites in Hebrews.¹¹⁸ Reaching for evidence, there is the thought that Barnabas was called "Son of Encouragement" [Acts 4:36], and so could have written this "word of exhortation" [13:22],¹¹⁹ but this is weak as many early ministering believers were involved in encouragement and exhortation.¹²⁰

Arguments against Barnabas as the author begin with Acts 14:12, which seems to suggest Barnabas was less eloquent than Paul, not capable of such eloquent writing as this.¹²¹ As with Paul, one has to wonder if Barnabas would refer to himself in the manner of v.2:3,¹²² though it is possible he never had first-hand experience with Jesus.¹²³ There is no claim of apostolic authority in the letter,¹²⁴ but again note that there is such a tone, an assumption of respect. Like with Paul, Barnabas seemed to be more intent on reaching Gentiles than fellow Jews.¹²⁵ Some think the writing of Hebrews to be too Hellenistic to be written by a Palestinian Jew,¹²⁶ though others argue that Hebrews is more consistent with "mainstream Jewish and primitive Christian thought and methodology" than anything Hellenistic.¹²⁷ Finally, there is no evidence of ancient support outside of Northern Africa,¹²⁸ though it is possible this letter was part of the Claromontanus List under the name of Barnabas.¹²⁹

Apollos

Despite being a late entrant to the field, there is some support for the idea of Apollos as the author of Hebrews. He was Alexandrian by birth and a Jewish Christian with notable intellectual and oratorical abilities [Acts 18:24],¹³⁰ and he had a thorough knowledge of the scriptures [Acts 18:24].¹³¹ It is thought that the Alexandrian birth could explain similarities with the writings of

¹¹⁶ Hodges, 778; see also Ellingworth, 15.

¹¹⁷ Carson and Moo, 603; see also Donald Guthrie, 674; Barker, 1781; Barton, xiv.

¹¹⁸ Ellingworth, 15.

¹¹⁹ Carson and Moo, 603; see also Donald Guthrie, 674-675.

¹²⁰ Carson and Moo, 603; see also Ellingworth, 15.

¹²¹ Ellingworth, 15.

¹²² Donald Guthrie, 675; see also Ellingworth, 15.

¹²³ Bruce, 16.

¹²⁴ Ellingworth, 15.

¹²⁵ Ellingworth, 15.

¹²⁶ Donald Guthrie, 675-676.

¹²⁷ George H. Guthrie, 842, with expansion on the idea through 845.

¹²⁸ Donald Guthrie, 674; see also Barton, xiv.

¹²⁹ Donald Guthrie, 674.

¹³⁰ Donald Guthrie, 679; see also Barker, 1781; Barton, xiv; Lane, 444; Ellingworth, 20.

¹³¹ Carson and Moo, 603; see also Donald Guthrie, 679; Ellingworth, 20.

Philo of Alexandria,¹³² though the thoughts in Hebrews are very different from the Neoplatonism and Stoicism that undergird the writings of Philo,¹³³ and Acts does not mention such an education.¹³⁴ Even more interesting is the argument that Hebrews is more consistent with “mainstream Jewish and primitive Christian thought and methodology” than with Philo or allegorical exegesis.¹³⁵ Still, the letter does seem to follow the rhetoric and style of Greek Christian writers in Alexandria.¹³⁶ Other points in favor of Apollos are that he spoke accurately about Jesus and with great fervor [Acts 18:25-28],¹³⁷ he was an apologist,¹³⁸ Pauline thought could be explained in that he was associated with Paul in the early years of the church [1 Cor 1:12; 3:4-6, 22],¹³⁹ he knew Timothy [Acts 18:25-26],¹⁴⁰ was familiar with Ephesus,¹⁴¹ and had considerable influence in various churches.¹⁴² Against Apollos are two arguments. First, Luke’s portrayal of Apollos’ style was that he was “powerfully confuting... the Jews in public” whereas Hebrews relies on tactful persuasion.¹⁴³ More importantly, Apollos lacks any support from the early church,¹⁴⁴ and it is hard to believe that would be true if a prominent Alexandrian was known to have written it.¹⁴⁵

Clement of Rome

Clement is considered for authorship because there are similarities between his writings and Hebrews,¹⁴⁶ including frequent quotes and allusions to Hebrews itself, similar Old Testament inspiration attributed to the Holy Spirit, and the same use of some language.¹⁴⁷ However, this could be accounted for by his familiarity with Hebrews,¹⁴⁸ and, if Clement had written Hebrews, it would be strange for him to quote from it so often.¹⁴⁹ Clement’s writings have disagreements with Hebrews, such as appealing to Old Testament ceremonial laws to support views of the

¹³² Carson and Moo, 603; see also Barton, xiv; Donald Guthrie, 679.

¹³³ Carson and Moo, 603.

¹³⁴ Donald Guthrie, 679.

¹³⁵ George H. Guthrie, 842, with expansion on the idea through 845.

¹³⁶ Pentecost, 19; see also Bruce, 18; Ellingworth, 20.

¹³⁷ Barton, xiv.

¹³⁸ Ellingworth, 20.

¹³⁹ Barker, 1781; see also Barton, xiv; Carson and Moo, 603; Donald Guthrie, 679.

¹⁴⁰ Donald Guthrie, 679; see also Barton, xiv.

¹⁴¹ Ellingworth, 20.

¹⁴² Donald Guthrie, 679.

¹⁴³ Ellingworth, 21.

¹⁴⁴ Donald Guthrie, 679; see also Bruce, 18; Hodges, 778.

¹⁴⁵ Bruce, 18.

¹⁴⁶ Donald Guthrie, 677; see also Barton, xv.

¹⁴⁷ Ellingworth, 13.

¹⁴⁸ Donald Guthrie, 678.

¹⁴⁹ Carson and Moo, 602.

church's ministry,¹⁵⁰ and specifically using Hebrews' teaching on Christ's high priesthood as a justification to establish a Christian hierarchy based on the Jewish one.¹⁵¹ There are differences in style and language, method of citation, and range of thought and insight, between Hebrews and Clement's writings.¹⁵² Finally, Clement's writing lacks theological contribution, so if he had written Hebrews it would have been anomalous.¹⁵³

Luke

The arguments for Luke get a little confused, because of the possibility that he wrote it, not for himself, but for Paul or Barnabas.¹⁵⁴ The use of Greek in Hebrews is more like that of Luke-Acts than like any other book of the New Testament.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, there are some common constructions and expressions which occur only in Hebrews and Luke-Acts.¹⁵⁶ Parts of Hebrews are strikingly similar in style and content to Acts, especially where Acts deals with Stephen's speech [Acts 7:1-53],¹⁵⁷ with its reviews of Hebrew history, stress on the call of Abraham and mention of his non-possession of the land, discussion of the tabernacle as divinely ordered, and tradition that the law was mediated by angels.¹⁵⁸ However, many believe this similarity to be too slight to support a theory of common authorship.¹⁵⁹ It also seems to suppose Stephen's speech was written by Luke,¹⁶⁰ whereas anyone who heard Stephen's speech, heard of Stephen's speech, or shared theological thoughts with Stephen before the speech could have reproduced similar thoughts. The only real argument against Luke is that there is an absence in Luke-Acts of any mention of Sabbath rest or Christ's high priesthood, which are central to Hebrews, and some scholars do not think this is explainable by different purposes or genres alone.¹⁶¹

Silvanus [Silas]

The strongest evidence in favor of Silvanus is that there are similarities between Hebrews and 1 Peter, which we know Silvanus wrote for Peter [1 Peter 5:12]. There are similarities in style, though this could be from a developing common liturgical style at the time.¹⁶² Hebrews and 1 Peter both deal with holding fast in faith during times of testing and persecution and obedience to those in authority, but this could address common issues that affected people all over at that

¹⁵⁰ Carson and Moo, 602; see also Bruce, 14.

¹⁵¹ Ellingworth, 13.

¹⁵² Donald Guthrie, 678.

¹⁵³ Donald Guthrie, 678.

¹⁵⁴ Donald Guthrie, 676-677; see also Bruce, 16.

¹⁵⁵ Donald Guthrie, 677; see also Carson and Moo, 601.

¹⁵⁶ Ellingworth, 14.

¹⁵⁷ Donald Guthrie, 677; see also Barton, xiv.

¹⁵⁸ Donald Guthrie, 677.

¹⁵⁹ Carson and Moo, 602.

¹⁶⁰ Donald Guthrie, 677.

¹⁶¹ Ellingworth, 14.

¹⁶² Ellingworth, 16.

time.¹⁶³ Silas did know Paul, Peter and Timothy,¹⁶⁴ and was familiar with the temple cultus.¹⁶⁵ Against this are differences with 1 Peter in method of citation,¹⁶⁶ and that 1 Peter emphasizes resurrection while Hebrews emphasizes exaltation, and 1 Peter emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit and baptism while Hebrews does not.¹⁶⁷ Silas was a Jerusalem Jew, so it seems unlikely his writing would take on Alexandrian or Hellenistic aspects,¹⁶⁸ though, as mentioned previously, it is possible these distinctions have been overblown. Weaker arguments are that there is no mention of Silas' Gentile mission and that one might expect even more Pauline thought from a protégé like Silas¹⁶⁹ [though this last point is never mentioned with regard to Luke, Apollos, or Barnabas!].

Priscilla

There is a theory that Priscilla might have written the letter, not identifying herself because a female author would have been difficult for the early church to accept;¹⁷⁰ for the same reason, her name would have been purged from the collective church memory.¹⁷¹ As with the reasoning about why Paul would have left off his name, this is weak logic, because without knowing the author the recipients would not have given the letter any authority, and there are some personal relational references in the letter. Some speculate that Aquila might have helped Priscilla, because of the occasional use of "we" in the letter,¹⁷² but this too is weak because of other language issues.¹⁷³ The argument in favor of Priscilla [with or without Aquila] is that she was capable enough to teach Apollos [Acts 18:26],¹⁷⁴ she must have known Timothy since she was with Paul in Corinth and Ephesus [Acts 18:5; 19:22; 1 Corinthians 16:10, 19],¹⁷⁵ she hosted a house church in Rome while there [this assumes they were writing to their own house church],¹⁷⁶ in Paul's last letter he mentioned both Timothy and Priscilla and Aquila [and he might be dead as of the writing of Hebrews],¹⁷⁷ and some features of the letter are suggestive of traits of Priscilla, such as the pilgrim approach [11:13-16], nautical terms [3:6, 14; 6:19; 13:9], interest in the tabernacle [as a tentmaker], and interest in childhood [5:12; 11:23; 12:7] and parenthood [7:3;

¹⁶³ Ellingworth, 16-17.

¹⁶⁴ Donald Guthrie, 678; see also Barton, xiv.

¹⁶⁵ Donald Guthrie, 678.

¹⁶⁶ Donald Guthrie, 678.

¹⁶⁷ Ellingworth, 16.

¹⁶⁸ Donald Guthrie, 678.

¹⁶⁹ Ellingworth, 16.

¹⁷⁰ Donald Guthrie, 680; see also Bruce, 19; Barton, xv; Carson and Moo, 604.

¹⁷¹ Bruce, 19.

¹⁷² Bruce, 19; see also Carson and Moo, 604; Barton, xv; Donald Guthrie, 680.

¹⁷³ Donald Guthrie, 680.

¹⁷⁴ Bruce, 18-19; see also Donald Guthrie, 680; Carson and Moo, 604; Ellingworth, 19.

¹⁷⁵ Carson and Moo, 604; see also Donald Guthrie, 680; Bruce, 19; Ellingworth, 19.

¹⁷⁶ Bruce, 19; see also Ellingworth, 19.

¹⁷⁷ Donald Guthrie, 680; he did not elaborate on this view of Harnack's.

11:23],¹⁷⁸ though none of that gives much support. Against the idea of Priscilla as author is the masculine-singular self reference in 11:32.¹⁷⁹ There is also the question of whether Priscilla – who was so closely associated with Paul and would surely both know and respect his views – would act contrary to Paul’s teaching about women teaching publicly [noting that her discipleship of Apollos was private, not public].¹⁸⁰ On the other hand, it is argued that writing this epistle would not be in conflict with Paul’s view, because this was writing a letter, not speaking in church.¹⁸¹

Others

Epiphraas is proposed as the author of Hebrews based on the supposition that Hebrews is the letter to the Laodiceans mentioned in Colossians 4:16, noting the similarities between Colossians and Hebrews like the theme of maturity and assurance.¹⁸² However, that would seem to depend on the idea that Hebrews was written to attack Gnostic teaching¹⁸³ and – worse! – to suppose that Epiphraas wrote Colossians too.

Nobody puts forth John as the author, but it is noted that there are similarities in thought between Hebrews and John’s works,¹⁸⁴ and 1 John is the only other epistle without an identifying salutation.¹⁸⁵

In favor of Peter are the similarities in style with 1 Peter [though this could be from a common developing liturgical style and that both Hebrews and 1 Peter deal with holding fast in faith during times of testing and persecution and obedience to those in authority].¹⁸⁶ Against Peter are differences with 1 Peter in method of citation,¹⁸⁷ and that 1 Peter emphasizes resurrection while Hebrews emphasizes exaltation, and 1 Peter emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit and baptism while Hebrews does not.¹⁸⁸ Also notable is the lack of mention of apostolic authority.

In the twentieth century, some proposed that the letter of Jude was the “word of encouragement” of Hebrews 13:22, speculating that Jude was the author of Hebrews.¹⁸⁹ However, while Hebrews is gently persuasive, Jude was highly polemical; Jude attacks gross physical sins which are largely ignored in Hebrews; Jude was concerned with fallen angels, while Hebrews was

¹⁷⁸ Donald Guthrie, 680-681.

¹⁷⁹ Donald Guthrie, 681; see also Carson and Moo, 604; Lane, 443; Bruce, 18; Ellingworth, 20.

¹⁸⁰ Donald Guthrie, 681.

¹⁸¹ Ellingworth, 20.

¹⁸² Ellingworth, 20; see also Barton, xv; Donald Guthrie, 681.

¹⁸³ Ellingworth, 20.

¹⁸⁴ Donald Guthrie, 711.

¹⁸⁵ Pentecost, 13.

¹⁸⁶ Ellingworth, 15-17.

¹⁸⁷ Donald Guthrie, 678.

¹⁸⁸ Ellingworth, 16.

¹⁸⁹ Ellingworth, 17.

concerned with angels in general; and it is questionable whether Jude – who was Jesus’ brother – would refer to himself as in Hebrews 2:3¹⁹⁰ [though on this last point, as Jude apparently did not come to faith in Christ until after the resurrection, perhaps he did have to be introduced to the faith second hand].

Similarities between Stephen’s speech in Acts 7 and Hebrews 11, in content, diction, and reference to common traditions such as the role of angels as intermediaries in the giving of the Law, have made Stephen a possibility to some as the author of Hebrews.¹⁹¹ However, this can be mitigated by realizing that both passages refer to a common Jewish history.¹⁹² Also, the Acts passage has an intensely polemical climax unlike Hebrews.¹⁹³ Furthermore, this would give a very early date to Hebrews, as Stephen died early in the movement.

Some have proposed Phillip, considering Hebrews could have been written to reconcile Samaritan and Jewish Christians.¹⁹⁴ However, Hebrews quotes from all over the Old Testament, not just the Pentateuch that the Samaritans would accept as canonical; Jerusalem figures prominently in the climax of the epistle, which might have been offensive to the Samaritans; and there is no mention of such a reconciliation attempt in the letter itself.¹⁹⁵

There is speculation that Aristion wrote the longer ending of Mark [based on an Armenian manuscript of 986], and this has led some to propose Aristion as the author of Hebrews too because of similarities between the two texts.¹⁹⁶ However, the authorship of the longer ending of Mark has not been proven, and the similarities are merely a reference to miracles performed by believers, while the ending of Mark presupposes a Gentile mission to which Hebrews does not refer.¹⁹⁷ There is also an older tradition about Aristion that does not connect him with Hebrews.¹⁹⁸

Some have proposed Jesus’ mother, Mary, as the author,¹⁹⁹ perhaps with the help of Luke and John,²⁰⁰ based on similarities between Hebrews and the Lucan infancy narratives, though this might be merely common use of Septuagintal language.²⁰¹ There are two other objections, the

¹⁹⁰ Ellingworth, 17.

¹⁹¹ Ellingworth, 17.

¹⁹² Ellingworth, 18.

¹⁹³ Ellingworth, 18.

¹⁹⁴ Ellingworth, 19.

¹⁹⁵ Ellingworth, 19.

¹⁹⁶ Ellingworth, 19.

¹⁹⁷ Ellingworth, 19.

¹⁹⁸ Ellingworth, 19.

¹⁹⁹ Ellingworth, 20; see also Donald Guthrie, 681; Carson and Moo, 604.

²⁰⁰ Donald Guthrie, 681.

²⁰¹ Ellingworth, 20.

masculine-singular self reference in Hebrews 11:32 and – especially! – the reference to coming to the faith second-hand in Hebrews 2:3.²⁰²

Others who have received scholarly mention include Timothy²⁰³ [though, would he refer to himself in a letter?], an unknown Christian monk of first century Jerusalem,²⁰⁴ and a second generation pseudo-Paul.²⁰⁵ As Pentecost said, the authorship of Hebrews has been attributed at some point to nearly every individual who appears in the New Testament.²⁰⁶

Conclusion

Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence to strongly support any specific person as the author. The field is fairly wide open considering theology, because, as Donald Guthrie noted, “A truer appreciation of the facts would seem to require a theory of co-lateral development in which Pauline thought, the theology of Hebrews and the catechesis of John could all find a place contemporaneously.”²⁰⁷

Given the assumption of authority, it seems likely a Jew prominent in the New Testament account was the source [or apostolic force] behind the letter. Given the eloquent writing, it seems likely it was composed by an educated Gentile believer. Forced to hazard a guess, I would say Luke was the composer, for he knew both Paul and Peter, and probably almost every other major player after having done his research for Luke-Acts. If Luke was the composer, perhaps he put together an essay, not so much an epistle, with a cover letter from a sponsor like Paul or Peter [who both spent time in Rome]. Maybe he wrote the essay with the support of both Paul and Peter, since they appear to have been in Rome at the same time in the early AD 60s,²⁰⁸ which might explain why there are so many similarities to Pauline and Petrine thought, yet so many stylistic differences. Silas was also in Rome with Peter,²⁰⁹ perhaps when Paul was there, and would be a second possible composer under this theory.

In any case, it is fortunate that, as Pentecost noted, “Doubts concerning the authorship of the epistle have never raised serious questions concerning its authority, canonicity, or trustworthiness.”²¹⁰ We can continue to study Hebrews confident that God inspired the words, whomever he used as the human writer. As Charlie Baylis has been known to say, if God wanted us to know who wrote it, he would have put the name in the text.

²⁰² Ellingworth, 20.

²⁰³ Carson and Moo, 604.

²⁰⁴ Donald Guthrie, 681.

²⁰⁵ Donald Guthrie, 681.

²⁰⁶ Pentecost, 20.

²⁰⁷ Donald Guthrie, 711.

²⁰⁸ Paul Barnett, *Jesus & the Rise of Early Christianity: A History of New Testament Times* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 21, 301-303.

²⁰⁹ Barnett, 304-307.

²¹⁰ Pentecost, 20.