

## 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.<sup>1</sup> Pentecost speculated this indicated a desire to remain anonymous.<sup>2</sup> However, Pentecost also pointed out that the readers obviously knew who the author was,<sup>3</sup> since he discussed being restored to them [13:18-19] and thanked them for help in past [10:34].<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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],<sup>6</sup> and seems to identify with leaders of the local church community [13:17-19].<sup>7</sup> We can discern he was an early believer, as the letter was quoted as early as AD 95 by Clement of Rome.<sup>8</sup> The author apparently was a man [11:32] with authority in the apostolic church,<sup>9</sup> despite not making claim to an office or title.<sup>10</sup> 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,<sup>11</sup> but primarily in the Septuagint, which he followed even when it diverted from the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>12</sup> He was apparently a second generation believer [2:3].<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Pentecost, 13, 20.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Pentecost, 14; see also Lane, 447.

<sup>5</sup> Barker, 1781.

<sup>6</sup> Lane, 445.

<sup>7</sup> Lane, 447.

<sup>8</sup> Barton, xii.

<sup>9</sup> Barker, 1781.

<sup>10</sup> Lane, 444.

<sup>11</sup> Barker, 1781; see also Lane, 444.

<sup>12</sup> Barton, xiii.

<sup>13</sup> Lane, 444; see also Barton, xii; Barker, 1781.

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

### History of Thought

None of the earliest commentators refer to the author.<sup>22</sup> The earliest quotation is by Clement of Rome in AD 95,<sup>23</sup> with other early discussion apparent in the writings of Polycarp and Hermas.<sup>24</sup> From before AD 190, the letter was held to be in some sense Pauline in Alexandria.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

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

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<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> Barton, xiii; see also Lane, 444.

<sup>16</sup> Barton, xii; see also Lane, 444.

<sup>17</sup> Lane, 444.

<sup>18</sup> Lane, 444.

<sup>19</sup> Hodges, 778; see also Barton, xiii.

<sup>20</sup> Hodges, 778.

<sup>21</sup> Barton, xiii; see also Hodges, 778.

<sup>22</sup> Barton, xii.

<sup>23</sup> Barton, xii; see also Pentecost, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Barton, xii.

<sup>25</sup> Hodges, 777; see also Barton, xii; Pentecost, 20.

<sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> 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.

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

<sup>29</sup> Donald Guthrie, 669.

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

In the earliest text from the early third century, the letter is attributed to Paul, probably from influence of the Eastern church.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the Muratorian Canon, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Gaius of Rome all deny Pauline authorship.<sup>35</sup> 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.”<sup>36</sup> Barnabas was advocated by Gregory of Elvira and Filaster in the fourth century.<sup>37</sup>

Eusebius held that Clement of Rome wrote the letter.<sup>38</sup> Jerome and Augustine popularized in the West the idea of Paul as author,<sup>39</sup> based on the need for apostolic authority.<sup>40</sup> However, Jerome also mentioned Barnabas<sup>41</sup> and Clement of Rome,<sup>42</sup> and distinguished Hebrews from other Pauline epistles,<sup>43</sup> while Augustine later referred to the letter as anonymous.<sup>44</sup> The Sixth Synod of Carthage in AD 419 ascribed the letter to Paul,<sup>45</sup> and it was commonly called “The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews” from roughly AD 400 to AD 1600.<sup>46</sup> Thomas Aquinas said Luke translated it into excellent Greek for Paul.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Bruce, 15.

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

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

<sup>33</sup> Lane, 444; see also Donald Guthrie, 669.

<sup>34</sup> Carson and Moo, 600; see also Donald Guthrie, 670.

<sup>35</sup> Bruce, 16; see also Carson and Moo, 601.

<sup>36</sup> Donald Guthrie, 674; see also Hodges, 778.

<sup>37</sup> Hodges, 778; see also Bruce, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Donald Guthrie, 677.

<sup>39</sup> Carson and Moo, 601; see also Hodges, 777; Pentecost, 20.

<sup>40</sup> Carson and Moo, 601.

<sup>41</sup> Hodges, 778.

<sup>42</sup> Ellingworth, 13.

<sup>43</sup> Bruce, 17.

<sup>44</sup> Bruce, 17.

<sup>45</sup> Bruce, 17.

<sup>46</sup> Barker, 1781.

<sup>47</sup> 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,<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup> The official Roman Catholic position remains that Paul was the author, as advocated at the Council of Trent,<sup>50</sup> though few Roman Catholic theologians espouse that view today.<sup>51</sup> David Allen Black is the most well-known proponent of Pauline authorship today.<sup>52</sup> Erasmus believed that the thoughts were inspired by Paul,<sup>53</sup> though Clement of Rome wrote it.<sup>54</sup> Martin Luther suggested Apollos as author.<sup>55</sup> Calvin suggested Clement of Rome or Luke.<sup>56</sup> Grotius advocated Luke.<sup>57</sup> Some nineteenth century scholars considered Silas.<sup>58</sup> Harnack speculated Priscilla, perhaps in conjunction with Aquila.<sup>59</sup>

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.”<sup>60</sup>

## Paul

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

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<sup>48</sup> Barker, 1781.

<sup>49</sup> Barton, xiii.

<sup>50</sup> Carson and Moo, 602; see also Barton, xiii.

<sup>51</sup> Carson and Moo, 602.

<sup>52</sup> Carson and Moo, 602.

<sup>53</sup> Bruce, 17.

<sup>54</sup> Donald Guthrie, 677.

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

<sup>56</sup> Bruce, 17; see also Carson and Moo, 602.

<sup>57</sup> Donald Guthrie, 671.

<sup>58</sup> Donald Guthrie, 678.

<sup>59</sup> Bruce, 18-19; see also Carson and Moo, 604.

<sup>60</sup> Lane, 444.

<sup>61</sup> Donald Guthrie, 709, has some scripture references.

<sup>62</sup> Bruce, 19.

<sup>63</sup> Donald Guthrie, 709; see also Pentecost, 15.

<sup>64</sup> Donald Guthrie, 709.

<sup>65</sup> Donald Guthrie, 709.

<sup>66</sup> Pentecost, 15; see also Donald Guthrie, 709.

is seen to be better than the blessings under the Law;<sup>68</sup> use of Abraham's faith as an example;<sup>69</sup> distribution of gifts by the Spirit;<sup>70</sup> appeal to the same Old Testament passages and use of such passages to build arguments, make illustrations, and formulate doctrine;<sup>71</sup> use of an athletic metaphor of Christian life;<sup>72</sup> and esteem for the Law, the Aaronic priesthood, the tabernacle, religious feasts, and prescribed sacrifices.<sup>73</sup> H. Montefiore found thirteen points of contact between Hebrews and 1 Corinthians.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, there are some similarities to Pauline phraseology,<sup>75</sup> a reference to Timothy [13:23],<sup>76</sup> 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.<sup>77</sup>

On the other hand, the specific emphases of the letter and the writing style are markedly different from any of Paul's work,<sup>78</sup> including distinct vocabulary differences,<sup>79</sup> though arguments built on such considerations are highly subjective and often used to propose untenable positions on other issues.<sup>80</sup> There is some overlap in vocabulary, though this might be explained away as to common traditions.<sup>81</sup> The Greek is elegant and pure, closer to Luke's writing and unlike Paul's.<sup>82</sup> Hebrews seems to follow the rhetoric style of Greek Christian writers in Alexandria, different from Paul's usual style.<sup>83</sup> 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.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Donald Guthrie, 709.

<sup>68</sup> Pentecost, 15.

<sup>69</sup> Donald Guthrie, 709.

<sup>70</sup> Donald Guthrie, 709.

<sup>71</sup> Donald Guthrie, 709; see also Pentecost 15-17.

<sup>72</sup> Donald Guthrie, 709-710, attributing the idea to H. Windisch.

<sup>73</sup> Pentecost, 15.

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

<sup>75</sup> Pentecost, 17-18; he lists thirty-two of them.

<sup>76</sup> Pentecost, 14.

<sup>77</sup> Pentecost, 14.

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

<sup>79</sup> Carson and Moo, 602; see also Lane, 444; Bruce, 15, 20.

<sup>80</sup> Hodges, 777.

<sup>81</sup> Ellingworth, 11-12.

<sup>82</sup> Barton, xiii; see also Lane, 444; Ellingworth, 12.

<sup>83</sup> Pentecost, 19.

<sup>84</sup> Bruce, 15.

There are different ways of referring to God and Jesus than in Paul's letters,<sup>85</sup> the use of particles is different than Paul's,<sup>86</sup> and Hebrews employs a distinctive range of images that are unlike Paul's.<sup>87</sup> There are none of Paul's "Hebraisms,"<sup>88</sup> nor his characteristic long sentences,<sup>89</sup> rapid changes of thought,<sup>90</sup> or usual ways for introducing Old Testament passages.<sup>91</sup> Hebrews lacks the degree of personal allusions common in Paul's writing.<sup>92</sup> 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,<sup>93</sup> 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.<sup>94</sup>

The writer did not identify himself as Paul usually does.<sup>95</sup> Clement of Alexandria's argument that Paul left his name off because Jews were against him<sup>96</sup> 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;<sup>97</sup> 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],<sup>98</sup> 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.<sup>99</sup>

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,<sup>100</sup> but then this

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<sup>85</sup> Ellingworth, 11.

<sup>86</sup> Ellingworth, 11.

<sup>87</sup> Lane, 444.

<sup>88</sup> Barton, xiii.

<sup>89</sup> Barton, xiii.

<sup>90</sup> Donald Guthrie, 672; see also Barton, xiii.

<sup>91</sup> Bruce, 20; see also Barton, xiii.

<sup>92</sup> Donald Guthrie, 672; see also Barton, xiii.

<sup>93</sup> Ellingworth, 8.

<sup>94</sup> Pentecost, 20, suggests a protégé author.

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

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

<sup>97</sup> Pentecost, 19.

<sup>98</sup> Donald Guthrie, 672; see also Barton, xii.

<sup>99</sup> Ellingworth, 11; see also Donald Guthrie, 672.

<sup>100</sup> 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.<sup>101</sup> Hebrews discusses sacrifice at length,<sup>102</sup> focuses on Christ's exaltation instead of resurrection,<sup>103</sup> and focuses on the cleansing and sanctifying work of Christ instead of the redeeming.<sup>104</sup> Hebrews does not mention Pauline thoughts on union with Christ or justification by faith,<sup>105</sup> does not discuss the opposition of faith and works or tension between flesh and spirit,<sup>106</sup> and does not seem to wrestle with the issue of the Law,<sup>107</sup> though it does say the Old Covenant is obsolete.<sup>108</sup> 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.<sup>109</sup> 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.<sup>110</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that Hebrews contains no actual contradictions with Pauline thought.<sup>111</sup>

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.<sup>112</sup> 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.<sup>113</sup> 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].<sup>114</sup>

### **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.<sup>115</sup> Barnabas would provide the apostolic authority [Acts 14:4, 14] desired for canonical

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<sup>101</sup> 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.

<sup>102</sup> Lane, 444.

<sup>103</sup> Donald Guthrie, 673; see also Ellingworth, 8.

<sup>104</sup> Donald Guthrie, 673.

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

<sup>106</sup> Barton, xiv; see also Donald Guthrie, 673; Carson and Moo, 602.

<sup>107</sup> Donald Guthrie, 710.

<sup>108</sup> Donald Guthrie, 673.

<sup>109</sup> Ellingworth, 10.

<sup>110</sup> Ellingworth, 9-10.

<sup>111</sup> Donald Guthrie, 673, 710; see also Pentecost, 15; Barton, xiv.

<sup>112</sup> Pentecost, 20.

<sup>113</sup> Pentecost, 20.

<sup>114</sup> 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].

<sup>115</sup> Barker, 1781; see also Barton, xiv; Carson and Moo, 603.

material and apparent in the letter.<sup>116</sup> It is argued that Barnabas being a Jew of the priestly tribe of Levi [Acts 4:36] would explain the author's knowledge,<sup>117</sup> 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.<sup>118</sup> 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],<sup>119</sup> but this is weak as many early ministering believers were involved in encouragement and exhortation.<sup>120</sup>

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.<sup>121</sup> As with Paul, one has to wonder if Barnabas would refer to himself in the manner of v.2:3,<sup>122</sup> though it is possible he never had first-hand experience with Jesus.<sup>123</sup> There is no claim of apostolic authority in the letter,<sup>124</sup> 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.<sup>125</sup> Some think the writing of Hebrews to be too Hellenistic to be written by a Palestinian Jew,<sup>126</sup> though others argue that Hebrews is more consistent with "mainstream Jewish and primitive Christian thought and methodology" than anything Hellenistic.<sup>127</sup> Finally, there is no evidence of ancient support outside of Northern Africa,<sup>128</sup> though it is possible this letter was part of the Claromontanus List under the name of Barnabas.<sup>129</sup>

## **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],<sup>130</sup> and he had a thorough knowledge of the scriptures [Acts 18:24].<sup>131</sup> It is thought that the Alexandrian birth could explain similarities with the writings of

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<sup>116</sup> Hodges, 778; see also Ellingworth, 15.

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

<sup>118</sup> Ellingworth, 15.

<sup>119</sup> Carson and Moo, 603; see also Donald Guthrie, 674-675.

<sup>120</sup> Carson and Moo, 603; see also Ellingworth, 15.

<sup>121</sup> Ellingworth, 15.

<sup>122</sup> Donald Guthrie, 675; see also Ellingworth, 15.

<sup>123</sup> Bruce, 16.

<sup>124</sup> Ellingworth, 15.

<sup>125</sup> Ellingworth, 15.

<sup>126</sup> Donald Guthrie, 675-676.

<sup>127</sup> George H. Guthrie, 842, with expansion on the idea through 845.

<sup>128</sup> Donald Guthrie, 674; see also Barton, xiv.

<sup>129</sup> Donald Guthrie, 674.

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

<sup>131</sup> Carson and Moo, 603; see also Donald Guthrie, 679; Ellingworth, 20.



Philo of Alexandria,<sup>132</sup> though the thoughts in Hebrews are very different from the Neoplatonism and Stoicism that undergird the writings of Philo,<sup>133</sup> and Acts does not mention such an education.<sup>134</sup> 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.<sup>135</sup> Still, the letter does seem to follow the rhetoric and style of Greek Christian writers in Alexandria.<sup>136</sup> Other points in favor of Apollos are that he spoke accurately about Jesus and with great fervor [Acts 18:25-28],<sup>137</sup> he was an apologist,<sup>138</sup> 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],<sup>139</sup> he knew Timothy [Acts 18:25-26],<sup>140</sup> was familiar with Ephesus,<sup>141</sup> and had considerable influence in various churches.<sup>142</sup> 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.<sup>143</sup> More importantly, Apollos lacks any support from the early church,<sup>144</sup> and it is hard to believe that would be true if a prominent Alexandrian was known to have written it.<sup>145</sup>

### **Clement of Rome**

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

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<sup>132</sup> Carson and Moo, 603; see also Barton, xiv; Donald Guthrie, 679.

<sup>133</sup> Carson and Moo, 603.

<sup>134</sup> Donald Guthrie, 679.

<sup>135</sup> George H. Guthrie, 842, with expansion on the idea through 845.

<sup>136</sup> Pentecost, 19; see also Bruce, 18; Ellingworth, 20.

<sup>137</sup> Barton, xiv.

<sup>138</sup> Ellingworth, 20.

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

<sup>140</sup> Donald Guthrie, 679; see also Barton, xiv.

<sup>141</sup> Ellingworth, 20.

<sup>142</sup> Donald Guthrie, 679.

<sup>143</sup> Ellingworth, 21.

<sup>144</sup> Donald Guthrie, 679; see also Bruce, 18; Hodges, 778.

<sup>145</sup> Bruce, 18.

<sup>146</sup> Donald Guthrie, 677; see also Barton, xv.

<sup>147</sup> Ellingworth, 13.

<sup>148</sup> Donald Guthrie, 678.

<sup>149</sup> Carson and Moo, 602.

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

## **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.<sup>154</sup> The use of Greek in Hebrews is more like that of Luke-Acts than like any other book of the New Testament.<sup>155</sup> Indeed, there are some common constructions and expressions which occur only in Hebrews and Luke-Acts.<sup>156</sup> Parts of Hebrews are strikingly similar in style and content to Acts, especially where Acts deals with Stephen's speech [Acts 7:1-53],<sup>157</sup> 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.<sup>158</sup> However, many believe this similarity to be too slight to support a theory of common authorship.<sup>159</sup> It also seems to suppose Stephen's speech was written by Luke,<sup>160</sup> 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.<sup>161</sup>

## **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.<sup>162</sup> 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

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<sup>150</sup> Carson and Moo, 602; see also Bruce, 14.

<sup>151</sup> Ellingworth, 13.

<sup>152</sup> Donald Guthrie, 678.

<sup>153</sup> Donald Guthrie, 678.

<sup>154</sup> Donald Guthrie, 676-677; see also Bruce, 16.

<sup>155</sup> Donald Guthrie, 677; see also Carson and Moo, 601.

<sup>156</sup> Ellingworth, 14.

<sup>157</sup> Donald Guthrie, 677; see also Barton, xiv.

<sup>158</sup> Donald Guthrie, 677.

<sup>159</sup> Carson and Moo, 602.

<sup>160</sup> Donald Guthrie, 677.

<sup>161</sup> Ellingworth, 14.

<sup>162</sup> Ellingworth, 16.

time.<sup>163</sup> Silas did know Paul, Peter and Timothy,<sup>164</sup> and was familiar with the temple cultus.<sup>165</sup> Against this are differences with 1 Peter in method of citation,<sup>166</sup> 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.<sup>167</sup> Silas was a Jerusalem Jew, so it seems unlikely his writing would take on Alexandrian or Hellenistic aspects,<sup>168</sup> 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 Silas<sup>169</sup> [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;<sup>170</sup> for the same reason, her name would have been purged from the collective church memory.<sup>171</sup> 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,<sup>172</sup> but this too is weak because of other language issues.<sup>173</sup> The argument in favor of Priscilla [with or without Aquila] is that she was capable enough to teach Apollos [Acts 18:26],<sup>174</sup> she must have known Timothy since she was with Paul in Corinth and Ephesus [Acts 18:5; 19:22; 1 Corinthians 16:10, 19],<sup>175</sup> she hosted a house church in Rome while there [this assumes they were writing to their own house church],<sup>176</sup> in Paul's last letter he mentioned both Timothy and Priscilla and Aquila [and he might be dead as of the writing of Hebrews],<sup>177</sup> 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;

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<sup>163</sup> Ellingworth, 16-17.

<sup>164</sup> Donald Guthrie, 678; see also Barton, xiv.

<sup>165</sup> Donald Guthrie, 678.

<sup>166</sup> Donald Guthrie, 678.

<sup>167</sup> Ellingworth, 16.

<sup>168</sup> Donald Guthrie, 678.

<sup>169</sup> Ellingworth, 16.

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

<sup>171</sup> Bruce, 19.

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

<sup>173</sup> Donald Guthrie, 680.

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

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

<sup>176</sup> Bruce, 19; see also Ellingworth, 19.

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

11:23],<sup>178</sup> though none of that gives much support. Against the idea of Priscilla as author is the masculine-singular self reference in 11:32.<sup>179</sup> 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].<sup>180</sup> 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.<sup>181</sup>

### 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.<sup>182</sup> However, that would seem to depend on the idea that Hebrews was written to attack Gnostic teaching<sup>183</sup> 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,<sup>184</sup> and 1 John is the only other epistle without an identifying salutation.<sup>185</sup>

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].<sup>186</sup> Against Peter are differences with 1 Peter in method of citation,<sup>187</sup> 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.<sup>188</sup> 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.<sup>189</sup> 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

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<sup>178</sup> Donald Guthrie, 680-681.

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

<sup>180</sup> Donald Guthrie, 681.

<sup>181</sup> Ellingworth, 20.

<sup>182</sup> Ellingworth, 20; see also Barton, xv; Donald Guthrie, 681.

<sup>183</sup> Ellingworth, 20.

<sup>184</sup> Donald Guthrie, 711.

<sup>185</sup> Pentecost, 13.

<sup>186</sup> Ellingworth, 15-17.

<sup>187</sup> Donald Guthrie, 678.

<sup>188</sup> Ellingworth, 16.

<sup>189</sup> Ellingworth, 17.

concerned with angels in general; and it is questionable whether Jude – who was Jesus’ brother – would refer to himself as in Hebrews 2:3<sup>190</sup> [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.<sup>191</sup> However, this can be mitigated by realizing that both passages refer to a common Jewish history.<sup>192</sup> Also, the Acts passage has an intensely polemical climax unlike Hebrews.<sup>193</sup> 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.<sup>194</sup> 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.<sup>195</sup>

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.<sup>196</sup> 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.<sup>197</sup> There is also an older tradition about Aristion that does not connect him with Hebrews.<sup>198</sup>

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

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<sup>190</sup> Ellingworth, 17.

<sup>191</sup> Ellingworth, 17.

<sup>192</sup> Ellingworth, 18.

<sup>193</sup> Ellingworth, 18.

<sup>194</sup> Ellingworth, 19.

<sup>195</sup> Ellingworth, 19.

<sup>196</sup> Ellingworth, 19.

<sup>197</sup> Ellingworth, 19.

<sup>198</sup> Ellingworth, 19.

<sup>199</sup> Ellingworth, 20; see also Donald Guthrie, 681; Carson and Moo, 604.

<sup>200</sup> Donald Guthrie, 681.

<sup>201</sup> 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.<sup>202</sup>

Others who have received scholarly mention include Timothy<sup>203</sup> [though, would he refer to himself in a letter?], an unknown Christian monk of first century Jerusalem,<sup>204</sup> and a second generation pseudo-Paul.<sup>205</sup> As Pentecost said, the authorship of Hebrews has been attributed at some point to nearly every individual who appears in the New Testament.<sup>206</sup>

### 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.”<sup>207</sup>

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,<sup>208</sup> 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,<sup>209</sup> 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.”<sup>210</sup> 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.

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<sup>202</sup> Ellingworth, 20.

<sup>203</sup> Carson and Moo, 604.

<sup>204</sup> Donald Guthrie, 681.

<sup>205</sup> Donald Guthrie, 681.

<sup>206</sup> Pentecost, 20.

<sup>207</sup> Donald Guthrie, 711.

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

<sup>209</sup> Barnett, 304-307.

<sup>210</sup> Pentecost, 20.