

EPHESIANS, HEBREWS, PASTORALS, ACTS OF PAUL AND THECLA  
INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT  
WINTER 2016

**HEBREWS**

**AUTHOR, DATE, AUDIENCE, BACKGROUND**

1. Mysterious, little concrete information (cf. Ephesians)
2. Anonymous, only later ascribed to Paul; author unknown
3. Audience & Circumstances
  - a. Persecution 10:32-34
  - b. Failure to maintain their initial commitment, 2:3; 10:25
  - c. Often thought that Hebrews addressed to Jewish-Christians endanger of “falling back into traditional Judaism” but this argument is weak. Mainly to do with the ascription “to the Hebrews” and use of the OT
  - d. Alternative theory: Predominate Gentile audience (see 6:2). Author does not want them falling back into the mainstream of society.
4. Date – early vs. late
  - a. Latest possible date first decade of 2<sup>nd</sup> Century (Clement)
  - b. Reasons given for early date
    - i. No mention of destruction of Jerusalem Temple, so must be written beforehand. But....
  - c. Reasons for late date
    - i. Later generation – 2:3
    - ii. Temple argument doesn’t hold
    - iii. Knowledge of gospels? 2:3-4; 5:7
    - iv. Theology of supersessionism 8:13; 10:9
5. Not a letter, but a speech or sermon, or maybe a treatise! – first sustained theoretical treatment on Christology.

**THE PRIMARY ARGUMENTS MADE IN HEBREWS**

1. The Ultimate Superiority of Christ over other figures
2. Supersessionism – the complete obsolescence of the “old cult”
3. Jesus as Priest and Sacrifice

**IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF HEBREWS**

1. Christology
  - a. Christ as the inaugurator, mediator, and Lord over the New Covenant. All of Hebrews a kind of treatise on Christology. Most important aspect of Jesus: Jesus as the ultimate High Priest. Best captures the priestly Christology of Jesus in Hebrews: 7:11-18; 23-28; 8:6-7.
  - b. Christology is supersessionist. He is a priest of perfection who oversees a new, final covenant that is also perfect (complete). The old one was never effectual and has now been abrogated.

- c. Hebrews combines high and low Christology. Chaps. 1-2. Christ stands above angels and every figure in cosmic history and yet it was his lowly humanity and especially his suffering that made him perfect.
- 2. Use of the OT
  - a. Quotations cited as oracles of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Heb 1:1-4. Examples: 2:12; 3:7; 5:5; 10:5
  - b. Hebrews 11 – A comprehensive retelling of scripture that offers a “denationalized” reading of Jewish scripture.
  - c. In Hebrews, the denationalized reading of scripture combines with supersessionism to create a shift in the way third and fourth generation Christians understand biblical history. This shift is carried to the next level in texts like the *Epistle of Barnabas* (early 2<sup>nd</sup> century) or Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* (mid 2<sup>nd</sup> Century), and most of the rest of official Christian discourse, which understands heroes of OT biblical history to be the ancestors of Christians specifically, while the disobedient people of Israel are the forebears of the Jews, whom God has abandoned when the old covenant was “superseceded” Supersessionist theology is, in my view, the real kick-off point that leads to Christian anti-Judaism and later anti-semitism.

## **EPHESIANS**

### **PSEUDONYMITY (WITH REGARD TO EPHESIANS)**

- 1. External: Manuscript anomalies. Example of beginning of Ephesians in Codex Sinaiticus
- 2. Internal:
  - a. Virtually no concrete information of the kind we find in undisputed letters. Too generic.
  - b. Grammar, sentence structure, and style differ markedly from undisputed letters. Ephesians florid; Paul writes with rhetorical punch rather than overly elaborated floridity.
  - c. Ecclesiology: Church understood as a comprehensive, even cosmic institution. Paul uses the word church to refer to particular congregations.
  - d. Different use of metaphor. Example of body imagery (see below)
  - e. Different understanding of salvation (see below)
  - f. The overwhelming majority of scholars do not think Paul authored Ephesians and thus it is pseudonymous.

### **MAJOR THEMES**

- g. Christ is the head of the body in Eph and this metaphor influences his theology, and ecclesiology as well as his Christology. (cf. 1 Cor 12 – when Paul uses the body metaphor, he does not describe Christ as the head)
- h. Household codes: Household Codes are found in Colossians 3:18-25; Ephesians 5:21-6:9; 1 Peter 2:17-3:7. They each show significant differences. Ephesians has more expansive directions for husbands and wives and uses the body metaphor with Christ as the head to validate his instructions.
  - i. Found in Greco-Roman rhetoric
  - ii. They stress that a well-ordered household is a strictly hierarchal one with the “paterfamilias” (patriarch) at the top.

- iii. Christian Household codes tend to ameliorate the hierarchy somewhat by assigning responsibilities of benevolence to those in authority.
- iv. The presence of Household codes may indicate an interest/need to ensure that Christians did not disrupt family life or deviate from commonly accepted standards in the Greco-Roman world.
- v. The man who has a well-governed household demonstrates that he is capable of governing larger social organizations. The pastoral epistles indicate a growing concern with Church leadership (see 1 Tim 3:4).
- i. Ephesians shares much in common with Colossians, but most scholars believe Colossians pre-dates Ephesians. Many scholars believe that Colossians is also pseudonymous, though there is more debate about the authenticity of Colossians than Ephesians. Most date both letters to the generation after Paul, though both the date and context remain uncertain.
- j. The Christology of Ephesians emphasizes a Christ whose authority extends through the whole cosmos.
- k. The author of Ephesians thinks of the church in as comprehensive a way as he does Christ.
- l. The author of Ephesians thinks of believers as already “saved.” (Paul never speaks of salvation in the past tense, always the future; see e.g. Rom 5).

## **1 TIMOTHY**

1. Believed by most to be pseudonymous.
  - a. External: Missing in Chester Beatty Papyrus
  - b. Internal: The Pastoral Epistles seem to reflect a time of church institutionalization that we do not see in the undisputed letters. For example the emphasis on church offices in chap. 3, and what seems to be an “order of widows.”
2. Major Theme: Women
  - a. One of the primary emphases of 1 Timothy is the appropriate behavior of women and the need to curtail their influence. The order of widows discussed at length in chap 5 implies that they had recognized service roles (perhaps thought of as “offices”), but that the author wishes to severely limit their membership and their role.
  - b. Chastity for women is explicitly condemned. (2:15) Some scholars think that women who had never been married, that is were virgins, were joining the order of widows, and that is why the author of 1 Tim takes such pains to define who can count as a widow.
  - c. One suspects that women in early Christian communities had significant positions of authority and were particularly revered if they were virgins.
  - d. The Acts of Paul and Thecla, roughly contemporary with 1 Timothy refers to Paul as having preached a “gospel of chastity,” and is a text that encourages women to forego marriage. This is true of other apocryphal acts, too.
3. The Pastoral Epistles as well as texts like Paul and Thecla seem to indicate a battle for the authentic Pauline gospel in the generations that followed the apostle’s death. Different sorts of Christians believed themselves to be following in Paul’s footsteps, though their interpretations of Paul varied greatly.

## **TERMS**

Virgins

Widows

Household Codes

Supersessionism

Christology

Pseudonymity

Internal evidence

External evidence