

Paul *Was* the Writer of Hebrews

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For years it seems that nearly every reference I come across on the book of Hebrews attributes it to the amorphous “writer of Hebrews.” I find this wholly unsatisfactory, since Seventh-day Adventists, particularly, have been given inspired insight as to the true writer. This brief essay provides much solid evidence for positive identification that the apostle Paul was indeed the book’s writer.

Let us touch on internal evidence first, but in all fairness it needs to be recognized that the King James Version’s use of the title “The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews” is not based on reliable manuscript evidence. The epistle’s title in the oldest Greek manuscripts, rather, is simply *Pros Hebraious* (“To the Hebrews”). Instead, those who ascribe Pauline authorship to this book usually do so on the basis of his distinctive literary style and the letter’s contents, as compared with other epistles that are generally accepted as issuing from his pen.

The Epistle of Hebrews itself provides a good number of valuable clues as to its penman’s identity. We list some pertinent ones below.

- He was a Jew, in fact addressing *fellow Hebrews*, as the epistle’s title indicates. This close affinity is underscored by his frequent employment of the first person plural (*we* 51 times; *us* 31 times; *our* 13 times, and a single use of *ourselves*: a total of 98 instances).
- He was not an immediate disciple of Jesus Christ (Heb. 2:3; cf. 1 Cor. 15:8).
- He was closely associated with one he refers to as “our brother Timothy,” whose visit he was anticipating (Heb. 13:23).
- He wrote from Italy (Heb. 13:24). This fact obviously excludes any candidates whose literary work did not involve currency of residence in Italy.
- His literary style and rhetoric demonstrate unquestioned polish (e.g., the use of alliteration and assonance in the opening sentence), and his argument high organization (e.g., detailed comparisons and contrasts between the earthly and heavenly sanctuary/priesthood). Less educated New Testament writers, though indisputably inspired, are consequently ruled out.
- He displayed an intimate acquaintance with the Law as given in Mosaic Scripture, quoting from it (following the Greek Septuagint, or LXX) some 30 times and alluding to it some 50 times.

Mention also must be made of the “formula” used in the 13 generally accepted Pauline epistles’ closing benedictions, in order that the wording may be compared with that used in Hebrews. In every epistle, the Greek *charis* is translated as “grace.” The resultant list of 14 epistles follows the sequence as provided in the Authorized Version.

- Romans 16:20; 24. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you”; “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”
- 1 Corinthians 16:23. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

- 2 Corinthians 13:14. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.”
- Galatians 6:18. “Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”
- Ephesians 6:24. “Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.”
- Philippians 4:23. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”
- Colossians 4:18. “Grace be with you.”
- 1 Thessalonians 5:28. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”
- 2 Thessalonians 3:18. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”
- 1 Timothy 6:21. “Grace be with thee.”
- 2 Timothy 4:22. “Grace be with you.”
- Titus 3:15. “Grace be with you all.”
- Philemon 25. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”
- Hebrews 13:25. “Grace be with you all.”

An obvious question emerges as to whether other epistles in the New Testament use the same or very similar formula. The Petrine epistles include the following wording, which varies from all those attributed to Paul or even the so-called unknown “writer of Hebrews” (who we throughout this essay name unambiguously Paul).

- 1 Peter 5:14. “Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus.” Compare with wording in the *salutation* of this epistle: “Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied” (1:2).
- 2 Peter 3:18. “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Compare also with wording in the *salutation* of this epistle: “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” (1:2).

Let us also examine the Johannine epistles in order to determine whether they contain benedictory wording similar to those peculiarly Pauline. First John has neither a salutary nor benedictory greeting; the others have wording as follows.

- 2 John 3. “Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.”
- 3 John 14. “Peace be to thee.”

The foregoing evidence tells us that Paul’s and John’s epistolary benedictions are patently dissimilar. The benediction in the last verse of the last book of the Bible, however, is an exact duplicate of that found in Romans, Philippians, and 2 Thessalonians, to wit: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all” (Revelation 22:21). This formulaic benediction need not confuse us into making unwarranted connections between the writer John the Revelator’s book and the writer Paul’s epistles. The reason should be obvious: History attests that Paul had been resting in his grave a good while before the Seer of Patmos set down the Apocalypse.

The remaining epistles in the New Testament are James and Jude. James does not employ salutary or benedictory language. Though the Epistle of Jude does not include

benedictory language, the *salutation* in Jude 2 reads, “Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied.” The Pauline formula, in any event, is lacking in either epistle.

We recognize that scholars have debated the issue of the authorship of Hebrews for a very long time, yet we shall avoid recapitulation here of those arguments denying Pauline authorship. The reasons are clear and at least twofold. First, we believe that in this essay we have adduced more than ample internal evidence in the epistle’s itself. Secondly, Ellen G. White did not hesitate to identify Paul as this book’s penman. We shall provide Mrs. White’s pertinent statements that identify him unambiguously as the writer. They are arranged in chronological order for convenience.

“The apostle Paul, looking down through the ages, had written words of encouragement and warning for the tried, waiting ones at this crisis: ‘Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul’ ” (*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, p. 256.1 [1884], in *The Story of Redemption*, p. 374.1 [1947]). Hebrews 10:35–39 is the quoted passage.

“The apostle Paul exhorts us, ‘Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.’ Again he says, ‘Now the just shall live by faith’ ” (*Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists*, p. 145.2 [1886], in *Lift Him Up*, p. 372.3 [1988]). The quoted text here is Hebrews 10:35, 38.

“In the Epistle to the Hebrews are words of encouragement and warning for the tried, waiting ones at this crisis: ‘Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.’ Hebrews 10:35–39” (*The Great Controversy*, 1888 & 1911 eds., pp. 407.1–408.0).

“The apostle Paul, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, says: ‘Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all, which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat.’ Hebrews 9:1–5” (*The Great Controversy*, 1888 & 1911 eds., p. 411.1).

“Ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, were the heavenly messengers beheld by the prophet Daniel. The apostle Paul declared them ‘an

innumerable company. Daniel 7:10; Hebrews 12:22' ” (*The Great Controversy*, 1888 & 1911 eds., p. 512.0, in *The Truth About Angels*, p. 10.1 [1996]).

“The kingdom of grace is brought to view by Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews. After pointing to Christ, the compassionate Intercessor Who is ‘touched with the feeling of our infirmities,’ the apostle says: ‘Let us therefore come boldly unto *the throne of grace*, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace’ ” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 347.0; italics in the original). The quoted text is Hebrews 4:15, 16.

“Says the apostle Paul, ‘Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.’ Hebrews 3:12” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 294.2 [1890]).

“The apostle Paul charges the churches to do [the very work recorded in Isaiah 35:3]. ‘Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,’ he says, ‘and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.’ Hebrews 12:12–15” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 79.2–80.1 [1904]).

“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will[?]’ These words, spoken by the apostle Paul, come sounding down along the ages to our time” (*The Southern Watchman*, March 1, 1904, par. 11).

“What is the message that the apostle Paul bears to everyone who names the name of Christ? ‘Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith; Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.’ (Heb. 12:1–3)” (Lt 133, April 30, 1905, in *The Upward Look*, p. 134.2 [1982]).

The foregoing Spirit of Prophecy references we have cited cover a span of 21 years. It was during this period that Ellen White produced most of her major literary output. During that time she never wavered from her identification of the apostle Paul as the writer of Hebrews. With so many examples of her authoritative witness before us, we are puzzled as to why any serious Seventh-day Adventist writers, especially, continue to ignore it in favor of those giving the Gospel trumpet an uncertain sound. It is therefore

high time to declare, Away with such vagueness! Let us despise not Heaven's exquisite gift of the Spirit of Prophecy (see 1 Thess. 5:20). It was given to be a wonderful blessing to God's church, not as a subordinated adjunct to be trotted out only when it conveniently supports arguments coming either from without or from within the Seventh-day Adventist communion.