

An Overview of The Letter “To the Hebrews”

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Preface

This is originally written as a term paper. At the beginning of the preparation I tried to balance every argument and make it as clear as possible. But obviously I am not able to do it in such a short amount of time. So there is a great change of style immediately after the section “When: Date”. For the sections before it, it would be helpful to skip everything and jump right to the conclusion in the first reading.

For the sections after that, I wrote as I recalled from my memory. So in this sense it is quite “original”. However, I believe most of them are written/commented by most others. I am therefore here to point out that the most original work done in this paper are: “Structure and the Related Literary Features”, “Horizontal Chart”, “Key Cognates and Key Sentences”, and some part of “The Significance of the Book and Its Relation to Other Books in the Bible”.

Kalen Cheung

Introduction

Who: Author

The author did not identify himself in the letter. There are numerous suggestions by different people varies from early Church fathers to contemporary biblical scholars on who the author actually was. Here we listed out the most common one:

1. Paul, as suggested by the earliest tradition (unlikely, universally regarded as unacceptable)
 - a. Point:
 - i. The name is included in the superscription
 - ii. Paul was somehow responsible for this letter but someone else actually composed it
 - b. Counter-point:
 - i. The superscription only reflects the traditional view
 - ii. The style is very different than Paul’s:
 1. The anonymity of the text
 2. The lack of any hints of the dramatic experience at his conversion
 3. The use of Greek is different
 - a. Lacked Paul’s “rudeness of expression”
 - b. More idiomatically Greek, Good literary style in koinē Greek
 - c. Fewer irregularities of syntax than Paul’s
 - d. Do not digress in the way Paul did
 4. Method of Old Testament citations
 5. No personal revelation from God as in Heb 2:3
 6. Very little parallel in Paul’s writings
 7. Even when similar themes are discussed, they are treated differently
 - iii. One main reason for people to suggest Paul was the author was that they believed it has to be written by an apostle in order to be canonical, which is not true (e.g. Jude, James)
2. Luke (unlikely)
 - a. Point:
 - i. Hebrews and Luke’s writing shares the closest literature and Greek styles.
 - b. Counter-point:
 - i. This do not however suggest a common authorship
3. Clement (unlikely)
 - a. Point:
 - i. Some parallels in Clement’s writing
 - b. Counter-point:
 - i. Almost certainly Clement was citing this letter
 - ii. Wide differences in theological content
4. Barnabas, as suggested by Tertullian (unlikely)
 - a. Point:
 - i. A Levite with Hellenistic environment – Cyprus (Acts 4:36)

- ii. The “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36) might be responsible to the “word of encouragement” (13:22)
 - b. Counter-point:
 - i. This author is interested in the tabernacle than the temple
- 5. Apollos, as suggested by Martin Luther, which has the most supporters among modern guesses
 - a. Point:
 - i. Alexandrian (Acts 18:24), who should be familiar to Philo, sharing similar ways of thought with this letter
 - ii. Have close relationship to Paul (e.g. 1Co 1:12)
 - iii. Eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures (Acts 18:24)
 - b. Counter-point:
 - i. Again this do not however suggest a common authorship
- 6. Silvanus (Silas):
 - a. Point:
 - i. An influential person traveling in the same circles as timothy (Heb 13:23)
 - ii. Probably a scribe (1 Pe 5:12), having the necessary educational level for this letter
- 7. Priscilla
- 8. Philip
- 9. Peter
- 10. Aristion
- 11. Jude

Each one in the list does have its own supporters. However, the long list suggested it has a variety of different opinions. And each opinion is not without its own problem. So one cannot be too dogmatic on whom the author actually was. Indeed, the author of Hebrews suggested that the human authorship of Scripture is of secondary importance (For most of the citations of the Old Testament, he did not mentioned which book it is from. And the only mentioned one, David, is said to be spoken by the Holy Spirit in him (Heb 3:7; 4:7)). As the early church historian Eusebius quoted the biblical scholar Origen as saying, “Who it was that really wrote the Epistle [Hebrews], God only knows”. So here we hold the view that the author is anonymous.

So let’s summarize the characteristics of this anonymous author from the letter itself:

- Pondered long on the Christian approach to the Old Testament
- His train of thought is clear and has a clear direction
- Well trained in Hellenistic culture and in Greek
- He knew his recipients and longed to be reunited with them (Heb 13:19)
- He has a mutual friend, Timothy, with the audience (probably the one close to Paul)
- A male (the use of masculine participle in Heb 11:32)
- Not an eyewitness of Jesus (Heb 2:3)

Where: Destination

The author did not mention the destination in the introduction (or precisely, the lack of an introduction of a letter) as many other New Testament authors do. Here we listed out some of the possibilities:

- 1. Jerusalem:
 - a. Point:
 - i. As the title “To the Hebrews” suggested
 - ii. The reference to persecution (Heb 10:32) fits in the background of Jerusalem
 - iii. No Church claims this letter, suggesting the Church was destroyed quite early, as Jerusalem did in AD 70
 - iv. The emphasis on the Levitical ritual. And the use of present tense hints that the ritual were still being observed.
 - v. The Greek character of this letter can be understood by:
 - 1. Qumran group, located near Jerusalem also infiltrated Hellenistic ideas. See more in “Whom: Audience and Title”
 - 2. The Hellenistic synagogues that the Jerusalem has (Acts 6:9) might be the reason of the use of Septuagint (LXX)

- vi. If the one problem countered by the audience was to make offerings in the Levitical ritual, Jerusalem is the place offerings being offered
- b. Count-point:
 - i. See the previous section on “Whom: Audience and Title” about the title “To the Hebrews”
 - ii. Persecutions are predominant at that time
 - iii. No evidence that other New Testament books with known destination are claimed by the church(es) addressed
 - iv. This book refers to the Tabernacle rather than the temple
 - v. Full of Greek character:
 - 1. Predominance of Hellenistic ideas is in this book, which is difficult to imagine at Jerusalem than elsewhere
 - 2. The consistent use of the Septuagint (LXX)
 - vi. “Offering in Jerusalem” does not necessarily mean that “the destination is in Jerusalem”. And it also relates to if the audience is facing this problem.
 - vii. It also related to dating the epistle written before AD 70
 - viii. Neither the writer nor the readers had heard the Lord personally (Heb 2:3). It is difficult to imagine no one among the recipients in Jerusalem did so.
 - ix. The letter refers to the generosity of the readers (Heb 6:10). But the poverty of Jerusalem mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament does not quite fit with it.
- 2. Alexandria:
 - a. Point:
 - i. Parallels between this letter and the writings of Philo of Alexandria
 - b. Counter-point:
 - i. Alexandrian church did not mention that
 - ii. This suggestion assumed an earlier date sent by Paul
- 3. Rome (most probable)
 - a. Point:
 - i. It was at Rome that the epistle was first known and quoted
 - ii. Some connection may be seen between a Roman destination and the greetings from ‘those who come from Italy’ (Heb 13:24). The most natural way to understand this expression is of people whose home is in Italy, but who are living elsewhere and are desirous of sending greetings home.
 - b. Count-point:
 - i. the wording of Heb 13:24 could be understood in terms of the author’s location or equally in terms of the readers’ origin.
- 4. Colossae
- 5. Samaria
- 6. Ephesus
- 7. Galatia
- 8. Cyprus
- 9. Corinth
- 10. Syria
- 11. Antioch
- 12. Berea
- 13. Caesarea

Among all suggestions, Jerusalem and Rome has the most supporters. Either one do have its own points and counter-points. Here we lean towards the suggestion of Rome but agrees that other others, especially Jerusalem, is also possible.

Whom: Audience and Title

The title attached to this letter in the earliest extant manuscript is ‘To the Hebrews’. There are no manuscripts of the letter, in fact, which do not bear this title. Nevertheless, no specific indication is given in the text of the letter itself that the readers were Hebrews and it is possible therefore that the title was not

original. There is no patristic evidence to doubt it, although there are some divergent opinions. And the recipients are clearly Christians. So they are probably Jewish Christians. And from Heb 1:1, the author mentioned “the fathers” rather than “our fathers” might indicate that there could possibly be some Gentiles who had previously been drawn to the Jewish religion.

And even we know it is “to the Hebrews”, there remain many possibilities on which specific group of Hebrews the letter was addressing to. From Heb 5:11; 6:9-10; 10:33-34; 13:4-5; 13:17, 18, 19, 23 etc., it is clear that the author has a specific group of audience in mind (hence it is not really a general epistle).

We can first reconstruct some of the characteristics of the audience first. From Heb 5:12; 10:25, we might deduce that the audiences are more gifted, who were supposed to be teachers, and probably because of this they thought they are superior to the others and hence left the Church and form their own group.

And here are the possibilities of what this specific group might be:

1. Former priests became Christians
 - a. Point:
 - i. In Acts considerable numbers of priests were saved
 - ii. The levitical ritual is the central idea in this letter
 - iii. Priests were superior in the old covenant. So they might want to maintain a superior status.
 - b. Count-point:
 - i. No evidence of any group comprised of Christians who were formerly priests
2. Former members of the Essene community at Qumran converted to Christians
 - a. Point:
 - i. Qumran tends to separate from the others
 - ii. Qumran covenanters had quarreled with the Jews over the current temple procedure. Therefore this would fit in the concentration on the tabernacle ritual instead.
 - b. Counter-point:
 - i. No mention of Essenes is mentioned anywhere in New Testament
3. Gentiles
 - a. Point:
 - i. Some other books in the New Testament (e.g. Romans, Galatians) use Old Testament extensively as well. So the audiences need not to be Jews because of the extensive use of Old Testament.

Here we hold the traditional view that the recipients are predominantly Jewish Christians. It is theoretically possible that it could be to Gentiles but there are much evidence pointing towards the traditional view. It is not necessary to suggest the otherwise. And although there are a few suggestions on specifically what Jewish Christian group it could be, the evidence is not strong enough for us to be sure if it is true. And also considered the destination mentioned in “Where: Destination”, they are probably a certain specific Jewish (and Gentiles previously converted to Jewish) Christian group in Rome (or possibly Jerusalem, or even others). They are known and closed to the author, possibly gifted and left the church to form their own specific group.

When: Date

There are some hints on the date the letter written, both internal and external:

- The letter of Clement of Rome, which was written in AD 95, quoted this letter. So this letter should be written well before it.
- The temple was destroyed in AD 70. If the letter was written after that, it would have been very convincing to mention this to argue what the author want to convey: the old covenant is obsolete. Also the present tense used in Heb 7:8; 9:6-9; 13:10 would suggest the levitical ritual is still present (though it is not the temple ritual). Therefore this letter should be written before AD 70.
- In Heb 12:4 “you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood”. If the recipients were in Rome, it might suggest a date before Nero’s persecutions, which is in AD 64.
- In Heb 13:23, Timothy was mentioned but not Paul. So Paul might be dead at the time of writing, meaning after AD 64.

We can only be (quite) certain that the letter was written before AD 70. Most date it in the late 60s but we cannot be sure about that.

What and How

Structure and the Related Literary Features

Figuring out the structure of this book is the key to understand this book, as in any other books in the Bible, but more so in this book in particular.

There are three keys to see the structure of the books through knowing its literary features.

First, this is a letter without an introduction. Second, it is a word of exhortation. Third, it is an exposition on the Old Testament.

This is a letter. It ends like many New Testament letters (Heb 13:18-25). But it does not begin as a letter. It begins in a formal way (Heb 1:1-4), with no word as who the author is or to whom he is writing. There is neither prayer nor thanksgiving.

And then it is a word of exhortation (Heb 13:22), and if this phrase is used in the same sense as in Acts 13:15 (a sermon following the Scripture readings in a Jewish synagogue), this is a sermon like letter. There is one ancient letter-writing form as the “letter-essay”, and this letter probably is in this form. i.e. a written sermon or homily. See, for example, how the author “speak” to the audience in Heb 2:5; 5:11; 6:9; 8:1; 9:5; 11:32.

As it begins like a sermon and ends like a letter, and also because of the subject matter – Heb 1-12 formed a closely linked and sustained theological argument - we can divide this letter into two big half, namely, Heb 1-12 and Heb 13. Heb 13 is more like a conclusion of a letter with specific moral exhortations that is tied into the same theme.

Now we can further divide Heb 1-12. We need to view it as a “word of exhortation”. i.e. There are 5 sections which has direct exhortations to the audience. Namely, Heb 2:1-4; 3:7-4:16; 5:11-6:20; 10:19-39; 12:1-29. Note that in each sections there are clear indicators to see the change of tone – from a mere exposition to a direct exhortation:

Sections	Indicator of the exhortations
Heb 2:1-4	We must pay...attention...lest we drift away...
Heb 3:7-4:16	Take care...exhort one another...let us hold fast our confession..
Heb 5:11-6:20	About this we have much to say...let us leave...
Heb 10:19-39	Let us draw near...we are...of those who have faith...
Heb 12:1-29	Let us...lay aside...let us run...

More interestingly, the “infamous” 5 warning passages fits within these 5 exhortations, namely, Heb 2:1-4; 3:7-18; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:25-29. Here we see that the warning passages do not form the natural structure of the book, but rather, sub-sections of the natural sections within the book. Moreover, the author called it the “word of exhortation” but not the “word of final warning” or so. So therefore, the purpose of the author is to exhort the readers, through occasional use of warnings and other argument. Note that the author’s use of warning is also very subtle. His purpose is to exhort therefore he is very careful not to warn them too severely. And it is usually followed by immediate encouragement.

It is worth noting that some people regarded these warning passages as parentheses. But as the whole letter is regarded as the “word of exhortation” by the author himself, the 5 sections of exhortation including the 5 warning passages are actually the most important passages in this book.

Now we come back to the discussion on the structure of the book, we found out 5 sections of exhortation, it is not difficult to figure out what is left. The other sections are actually teaching. So the author alternated between teaching and exhortations repeatedly. We might then divide the whole argument, Heb 1-12, into 5 sections: Heb 1-2; 3-4; 5-7; 8-10; 11-12. Each teaching corresponding to the truth that is necessary to know prior to an exhortation. And each exhortation becomes a natural reflection on the previous teaching. However, not all these 5 sections share the same structure as “teaching – exhortation”, but two of them are having a sandwiched structure: “teaching – exhortation – teaching”. This can be seen from the subject matter. Before we proceed to see the whole structure of the book, there is one final feature appears in the book: Chiasmus. This can be seen from finding the parallels in the subject matter. The whole chiasmus ends in chapter 7.

Finally, noting that the change in subject matter started from chapter 11, we know that Heb 1-10 and Heb 11-12 form two big sections in its own.

We summarize the structure of the book in the following horizontal chart.

Horizontal Chart

Heb 1-12: Main Body	Heb 1-10: The Superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ	Heb 1-7: The Superior High Priest	Heb 1-2: Superior to Angels	Heb 1: Teaching: Jesus as the Son of God
				Heb 2:1-4: Exhortation: Do Not Neglect Such a Great Salvation
				Heb 2:5-18: Teaching: Jesus as a Man
		Heb 8-10: The Superior Sacrifice	Heb 3-4: Superior to Moses and Joshua	Heb 3:1-6: Teaching: Jesus as the Apostle and High Priest
				Heb 3:7-4:16: Exhortation: Believe in His Word to Enter the Rest
			Heb 5-7: Superior to Aaron	Heb 5:1-10: Teaching: The Manward Jesus as the High Priest
		Heb 5:11-6:20: Exhortation: Be Mature And Hold Fast to the Hope		
		Heb 7: Teaching: The Godward Jesus as the High Priest		
		Heb 8:1-10:18: Teaching: Jesus as the Sacrifice		
		Heb 10:19-39: Exhortation: Approach God through the Blood of Jesus Alone		
	Heb 11-12: The Race of Faith of His Companions	Heb 11-12: The Superior Faith	Heb 11: Teaching: The Commendation of the People of Old: By Faith Alone	
			Heb 12: Exhortation: By Faith in Jesus We Endure	
	Heb 13: Final Exhortation: Sacrifices in Our Daily Life Pleasing to God			

Key Cognates and Key Sentences

Key Cognates:

	Cognate group	Greek	ESV	Instances	Occurance	total occurrence within the cognate group	
word related	λαλέω	λαλέω	speak/declare/say	Heb 1:1,2; 2:2,3,5; 3:5; 4:8; 5:5; 6:9; 7:14; 9:19; 11:4,18; 12:24,25; 13:7	16	16	
	φωνή	φωνή	voice	Heb 3:7,15; 4:7; 12:19,26	5	5	
	ῥῆμα	ῥῆμα	word	Heb 1:3; 6:5; 11:3; 12:19	4	4	
	λόγος, λέγω, εἶπον, ὁμολογία, προεῖπον, λόγιον, εὐλογία, εὐλογέω, ἀντιλογία, ἀγενεαλόγητος, γενεαλογέω, ὁμολογέω, λογιζομαι, ἀναλογίζομαι, διαλέγομαι	λόγος	λόγος	message/word/say/doctrine/account/give account	Heb 2:2; 4:2,12,13; 5:11,13; 6:1; 7:28; 12:19; 13:7,17,22	12	79
		λέγω	λέγω	say/explain/name/speak/declare/call	Heb 1:6,7; 2:6,12; 3:7,15; 4:7; 5:6,11; 6:14; 7:11,13,21; 8:1,8,9,10,11,13; 9:2,3,20; 10:5,8,16; 11:14,24,32; 12:26; 13:6	32	
		εἶπον	εἶπον	say/speak/add	Heb 1:5,13; 3:10; 4:3,4; 7:9; 10:7,9,15,30; 12:21; 13:5	12	
		ὁμολογία	ὁμολογία	confession	Heb 3:1; 4:14; 10:23	3	
		προεῖπον	προεῖπον	quote	Heb 4:7	1	
		λόγιον	λόγιον	oracle	Heb 5:12	1	
		εὐλογία	εὐλογία	blessing	Heb 6:7; 12:17	2	
		εὐλογέω	εὐλογέω	bless	Heb 6:14; 7:1,6,7; 11:20; 11:21	6	
		ἀντιλογία	ἀντιλογία	dispute/hostility	Heb 6:16; 7:7; 12:3	3	
		ἀγενεαλόγητος	ἀγενεαλόγητος	genealogy	Heb 7:3	1	
		γενεαλογέω	γενεαλογέω	descent	Heb 7:6	1	
		ὁμολογέω	ὁμολογέω	acknowledge	Heb 11:13; 13:15	2	
		λογιζομαι	λογιζομαι	consider	Heb 11:19	1	
		ἀναλογίζομαι	ἀναλογίζομαι	consider	Heb 12:3	1	
		διαλέγομαι	διαλέγομαι	address	Heb 12:5	1	
	ὑπακούω, ὑπακοή, παρακοή, ἀκούω, εἰσακούω, ἀκοή	ὑπακούω	ὑπακούω	obey	Heb 5:9; 11:8	2	15
		ὑπακοή	ὑπακοή	obedience	Heb 5:8	1	
		παρακοή	παρακοή	disobedience	Heb 2:2	1	
		ἀκούω	ἀκούω	hear/listen/hearer	Heb 2:1,3; 3:7,15,16; 4:2,7; 12:19	8	
		εἰσακούω	εἰσακούω	hear	Heb 5:7	1	
		ἀκοή	ἀκοή	hear	Heb 4:2; 5:11	2	
	παράκλησις, παρακαλέω, καλέω, ἐπικαλέω, κλήσις, ἐκκλησία	παράκλησις	παράκλησις	encouragement/exhortation	Heb 6:18; 12:5; 13:22	3	17
		παρακαλέω	παρακαλέω	exhort/encourage/urge/appeal	Heb 3:13; 10:25; 13:19; 13:22	4	
		καλέω	καλέω	call/name	Heb 2:11; 3:13; 5:4; 9:15; 11:8,18	6	
		ἐπικαλέω	ἐπικαλέω	call	Heb 11:16	1	
		κλήσις	κλήσις	calling	Heb 3:1	1	
		ἐκκλησία	ἐκκλησία	congregation/assembly	Heb 2:12; 12:23	2	

God related	Ἰησοῦς	Ἰησοῦς	Jesus/Joshua	Heb 2:9; 3:1; 4:8,14; 6:20; 7:22; 10:10,19; 12:2,24; 13:8,12,20,21	14	14
	Χριστός	Χριστός	Christ	Heb 3:6,14; 5:5; 6:1; 9:11,14,24,28; 10:10; 11:26; 13:8,21	12	12
	κύριος	κύριος	Lord	Heb 1:10; 2:3; 7:14,21; 8:2,8,9,10,11; 10:16,30; 12:5,6,14; 13:6,20	16	16
	θεός	θεός	God	Heb1:1,6,8,9(2); 2:4,9,13,17; 3:4,12; 4:4,9,10,12,14; 5:1,4,10,12; 6:1,3,5,6,7,10,13,17,18; 7:1,3,19,25; 8:10; 9:14(2),20,24; 10:7,12,21,29,31,36; 11:3,4(2),5(2),6,10,16(2),19,25,40; 12:2,7,15,22,23,28,29; 13:4,7,15,16,20	68	68
	πνεῦμα	πνεῦμα	Spirit	Heb 1:7,14; 2:4; 3:7; 4:12; 6:4; 9:8,14; 10:15,29; 12:9,23	12	12
priest / sacrifices related	ἀρχιερεὺς, ἱερεὺς, ἱερατεία, ἱερωσύνη, ἀρχή, ὑπάρχω, ἀρχηγός, πατριάρχης, ὑπαρξίς	ἀρχιερεὺς	high priest	Heb 2:17; 3:1; 4:14,15; 5:1,5,10; 6:20; 7:26,27,28; 8:1,3; 9:7,11,25; 13:11	17	46
		ἱερεὺς	priest	Heb 5:6; 7:1,3,11,14,15,17,20,21,23; 8:4; 9:6; 10:11,21	14	
		ἱερατεία	priestly	Heb 7:5	1	
		ἱερωσύνη	priesthood	Heb 7:11,12,24	3	
		ἀρχή	beginning/original/basic/elementary	Heb 1:10; 2:3; 3:14; 5:12; 6:1; 7:3	6	
		ὑπάρχω	property	Heb 10:34	1	
		ἀρχηγός	founder	Heb 2:10; 12:2	2	
		πατριάρχης	patriarch	Heb 7:4	1	
	ὑπαρξίς	possession	Heb 10:34	1		
	θυσία, θυσιαστήριον, θυμιατήριον	θυσία	sacrifices	Heb 5:1; 7:27; 8:3; 9:9,23,26; 10:1,5,8,11,12,26; 11:4; 13:15,16	15	18
		θυσιαστήριον	altar	Heb 7:13; 13:10	2	
		θυμιατήριον	altar	Heb 9:4	1	
	ἄμαρτία, ἄμαρτάνω, ἄμαρτωλός	ἄμαρτία	sin	Heb 1:3; 2:17; 3:13; 4:15; 5:1,3; 7:27; 8:12; 9:26,28; 10:2,3,4,6,8,11,12,17,18,26; 11:25; 12:1,4; 13:11	25	29
		ἄμαρτάνω	sin	Heb 3:17; 10:26	2	
		ἄμαρτωλός	sinners	Heb 7:26; 12:3	2	
	βασιλεία, βασιλεύς	βασιλεία	kingdom	Heb 1:8; 11:33; 12:28	3	10
		βασιλεύς	king	Heb 7:1,2; 11:23,27	7	

superiority related	διάφορος, φέρω, εκφέρω, προσφέρω, προσφορά, αναφέρω, πληροφορία, διηνεκής, συμφέρω, παραφέρω, εισφέρω	διάφορος	excellent/various	Heb 1:4; 8:6; 9:10	3	47
		φέρω	upholds/go/establish/endure/bear	Heb 1:3; 6:1; 9:16; 12:20; 13:13	5	
		εκφέρω	bear	Heb 6:8	1	
		προσφέρω	offer sacrifice/treat	Heb 5:1,3,7; 8:3,4; 9:7,9,14,25,28; 10:1,2,8,11,12; 11:4,17; 12:7	20	
		προσφορά	offering	Heb 10:5,8,10,14,18	5	
		αναφέρω	offer/bear	Heb 7:27; 9:28; 13:15	4	
		πληροφορία	assurance	Heb 6:11; 10:22	2	
		διηνεκής	forever/continually/time	Heb 7:3; 10:1,12,14	4	
		συμφέρω	good	Heb 12:10	1	
		παραφέρω	lead	Heb 13:9	1	
		εισφέρω	bring	Heb 13:11	1	
	κρείττων, κράτος, κρατέω, καρτερέω	κρείττων	better/superior	Heb 1:4; 7:7,19,22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16,35,40; 12:24	12	17
		κράτος	power	Heb 2:14	1	
κρατέω		hold	Heb 4:14; 6:18	2		
καρτερέω		endure	Heb 11:27	1		
perfection related	αιώνιος, αίων	αιώνιος	eternal	Heb 5:9; 6:2; 9:12,14,15; 13:20	6	21
		αίων	world/forever and ever/forever/age/universe	Heb 1:2,8; 5:6; 6:5,20; 7:17,21,24,28; 9:26; 11:3; 13:8,21	15	
	τελειόω, τελειωτής, τελείωσις, τέλειος, τελειότης, συντέλεια, τέλος, τελευτάω, παντελής, συντελέω, έπιτελέω, άλυσιτελής	τελειόω	perfect	Heb 2:10; 5:9; 7:19,28; 9:9; 10:14; 11:40; 12:23	9	25
		τελειωτής	perfecter	Heb 12:2	1	
		τελείωσις	perfection	Heb 7:11	1	
		τέλειος	mature/perfect	Heb 5:14; 9:11	2	
		τελειότης	maturity	Heb 6:1	1	
		συντέλεια	end	Heb 9:26	1	
		τέλος	end	Heb 3:14; 6:8,11; 7:3	4	
		τελευτάω	by the end of his life	Heb 11:22	1	
		παντελής	uttermost	Heb 7:25	1	
		συντελέω	establish	Heb 8:8	1	
		έπιτελέω	erect/performing	Heb 8:5; 9:6	2	
		άλυσιτελής	advantage	Heb 13:17	1	
	άπαξ, έφάπαξ	άπαξ	once	Heb 6:4; 9:7; 9:26,27,28; 10:2; 12:26,27	8	11
		έφάπαξ	once	Heb 7:27; 9:12; 10:10	3	
	διαθήκη	διαθήκη	covenant/will	Heb 7:22; 8:6,8,9,10; 9:4,15,16,17,20; 10:16,29; 12:24; 13:20	17	17

faith / hope related	πίστις, πιστός, πιστεύω, άπιστία	πίστις	faith	Heb 4:2; 6:1,12; 10:22,38,39; 11:1,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,11,13,17,20,21,22,23,24,27,28,29,30,31,33,39; 12:2; 13:7	3 2	4 1
		πιστός	faithful	Heb 2:17; 3:2,5; 10:23; 11:11	5	
		πιστεύω	believe	Heb 4:3; 11:6	2	
		άπιστία	unbelief	Heb 3:12,19	2	
	έλπίς, έλπίζω	έλπίς	hope	Heb 3:6; 6:11,18; 7:19; 10:23	5	6
		έλπίζω	hope	Heb 11:1	1	
	ύπομένω, ύπομονή, διαμένω, μένω, έμμένω, παραμένω	ύπομένω	endure	Heb 10:32; 12:2,3,7	4	1 5
		ύπομονή	endurance	Heb 10:36; 12:1	2	
		διαμένω	remain	Heb 1:11	1	
		μένω	continue/abide/last	Heb 7:3,24; 10:34; 12:27; 13:1,14	6	
		έμμένω	continue	Heb 8:9	1	
		παραμένω	continue	Heb 7:23	1	
	κατάπαυσις, καταπαύω, παύω	κατάπαυσις	rest	Heb 3:11,18; 4:1,3,5,10,11	8	1 2
		καταπαύω	rest	Heb 4:4,8,10	3	
παύω		cease	Heb 10:2	1		
σαββατισμός	σαββατισμός	Sabbath	Heb 4:9	1	1	
πλανάω	πλανάω	astray/wayward/wander	Heb 3:10; 5:2; 11:38	3	3	
participatio n related	μέτοχος, μετέχω, ένοχος, κατέχω, προσέχω, έξις, σχεδόν, συγκακουχέομαι, κακουχέω, άνέχομαι, έχω	μέτοχος	companion/share/participate	Heb 1:9; 3:1,14; 6:4; 12:8	5	5 9
		μετέχω	partake/live/belong	Heb 2:14; 5:13; 7:13	3	
		ένοχος	subject	Heb 2:15	1	
		κατέχω	hold	Heb 3:6,14; 10:23	3	
		προσέχω	pay/serve	Heb 2:1; 7:13	2	
		έξις	practice	Heb 5:14	1	
		σχεδόν	almost	Heb 9:22	1	
		συγκακουχέομαι	mistreat	Heb 11:25	1	
		κακουχέω	mistreat	Heb 11:37; 13:3	2	
		άνέχομαι	bear	Heb 13:22	1	
		έχω	has/need/belong/hold/their/stand/enjoy/surround/grateful	Heb 2:14; 3:3; 4:14,15; 5:12,14; 6:9,13,18,19; 7:3,5,6,24,27,28; 8:1,3; 9:1,4,8; 10:1,2,19,34,35,36; 11:10,15,25; 12:1,9,28; 13:10,14,18	3 9	
Inheritance/ law related	κληρονομέω, κληρονομία, κληρονόμος, συγκληρονόμος, τίθημι, διατίθημι, νόμος, νομοθετέω, πρόθεσις, επίθεσις, εύθετος, μετάθεσις, μετατίθημι, άμετάθετος, προστίθημι, άθότησις, άποτίθημι, άνομία	κληρονομέω	inherit	Heb 1:4,14; 6:12; 12:17	4	5 1
		κληρονομία	inheritance	Heb 9:15; 11:8	2	
		κληρονόμος	heir	Heb 1:2; 6:17; 11:7	3	
		συγκληρονόμος	heir	Heb 11:9	1	
		τίθημι	appoint/make	Heb 1:2,13; 10:13	3	
		διατίθημι	make	Heb 8:10; 9:16,17; 10:16	4	
		νόμος	law/legal	Heb 7:5,12,16,19,28; 8:4,10; 9:19,22; 10:1,8,16,28	1 4	
		νομοθετέω	law/enact	Heb 7:11; 8:6	2	
		πρόθεσις	bread of the presence	Heb 9:2	1	
		επίθεσις	lay	Heb 6:2	1	
		εύθετος	useful	Heb 6:7	1	
		μετάθεσις	change/take/removal	Heb 7:12; 11:5; 12:27	3	
		μετατίθημι	change/take	Heb 7:12; 11:5	3	
		άμετάθετος	unchangeable	Heb 6:17,18	2	
		προστίθημι	speak	Heb 12:19	1	
		άθότησις	set aside/put away	Heb 7:18; 9:26	2	
		άποτίθημι	lay aside	Heb 12:1	1	
		άνομία	wickedness/lawless	Heb 1:9; 10:17	2	

Key Words:

To give a more concise list that is easier to remember, we offer some key words (lexicons) here:

Priest: ἄρχιερεύς, ἱερεύς, ἱερατεία, ἱερωσύνη: 35

Word/say: λόγος, λέγω: 44

Faith/believe...: πίστις, πιστός, πιστεύω, ἀπιστία: 41

Perfect/mature/once/forever...: 74

See the previous section “Key Cognates” for the details.

Key Sentences:

These are one single sentence in Greek:

Heb 1:1-4; 5:5-10; 10:19-22; 12:1-2

Key verses:

To give a more concise list that is easier to remember, we offer some key verses here:

Heb 1:2-3; 5:8-10; 10:19,22; 12:1-2

Key quotations:

Among numerous quotations on the Old Testament, there are a few key quotations:

Ps 2; 110; Jer 31

See more on the section “The Use of the Old Testament”.

Key Concepts:

There are a few key ideas that are difficult to be fit in other sections. So we grouped them here:

- Comparison. In this letter comparison is used a lot. See for example in the “Key Cognates” the “superiority related” word group. Excellent/better as a word, and comparison as a literary feature are often shown up. It argues from the lower to the greater. And often use the concept that if this applies to the lower, how much it would be to the greater (e.g. Heb 2:2-3).
- God speak to us by his Son (Heb 1:2). In this letter, whenever the author quoted the Scripture, he used it anonymously but once. And even that once in Heb 4:7, it is He who speak in David. Furthermore, even the author is anonymous, as pointed out in the section “Who: Author”, and so far we cannot figure out who the author is. So in this book there is a strong concept of a direct revelation through Jesus Christ His Son. Everything is said by him. And He should be our only focal point.

Main Theme

Jesus Christ as the great high priest is superior to everything. Therefore, rather than neglecting such a great salvation, let us by the blood of Jesus draw near to God as the partaker of Jesus with faith, and encourage one another to persevere.

Why: Purpose

As pointed out in the section “Structure and the Related Literary Features”, this letter is regarded as the word of exhortation by the author. Therefore, the primary purpose of the letter is to exhort, to encourage the reader. Therefore even the sections corresponds to teachings are written for the sections corresponds to exhortations.

In short, the purpose is written as is in the “Main Theme”: not neglecting such a great salvation but by the blood of Jesus draw near to God as the partaker of Jesus with faith, and encourage one another to persevere.

The content in the author’s exhortation should be our proper response. So we will further elaborate the idea in the section “Our Response” under “Conclusion”.

Conclusion

The Significance of the Book and Its Relation to Other Books in the Bible

Old Testament

It has been said that this letter, the letter to the Hebrews, are the most difficult book in the Bible. It is mainly because of its extensive use of the Old Testament. The treatment of the Old Testament in this book is the most systematic one among all books in the Bible. And in fact this letter can be regarded as an exposition on the Old Testament. In some sense we can summarize this letter as an answer to the question, “How do Christians view and approach the Old Testament?” Therefore this letter serves as a guide to a satisfactory approach to the Old Testament, not only to its original readers, but more so to us the modern reader. Hence we might give this letter a name “The Handbook on Old Testament Exposition”.

Before we proceed on the details how the author use the Old Testament, we should mention some of the characteristics of his Old Testament quote:

- The author quoted mainly the Septuagint (LXX) translation of the Hebrew Bible.
- The author quoted the Old Testament anonymously. He gave the credits to the Triune God that it is spoken now by Christ (or by the Spirit). Therefore he regarded the Old Testament as authoritative, and is now spoken through Christ (see Heb 1:1-4).
- It varies from opinions how many times the author has cited the Old Testament. About 35-60 quotations are made. And if allusions were included, it would be about 116 times. See the appendix on the Table of “Old Testament citations in Hebrews”. The Author mainly cited Psalms and Pentateuch especially in Genesis, and the final chapters of Deuteronomy. It is interesting to note that the author never cited the Leviticus directly, although allusions were used.
- The author is aware of the context of his quotations, rather than using allegory. But he did not restrict it in the context only but bring out the extended meaning of the original text. Sometimes he even based his argument on the silence of Scripture rather than on its statements like Heb 7:3.

Now we focused on how the use of the Old Testament forms the main argument of the letter.

Some suggested that the whole book could be divided into seven expositions of key Old Testament texts¹. While we think that the structure of this letter is more rich than this as in the section of “Structure and the Related Literary Features”, this view shed lights on how the author used the Old Testament:

Hebrews	Old Testament cited
Heb 2:5–18	Psalm 8:4–6
Heb 3:7–4:13	Psalm 95:7–11
Heb 4:16–7:28	Psalm 110:4
Heb 8:1–10:18	Jeremiah 31:31–34
Heb 10:32–12:3	Habakkuk 2:3–4
Heb 12:4–13	Proverbs 3:11–12
Heb 12:18–29	Exod 19

Here we do not go into the details how each sections quotes the Old Testament. This could be found in any kind of Commentaries or Study Bibles alike. We only focus on the few key passages used here. Namely, Ps 2; 110; Jer 31

Of these, the Ps 110 is the key quotation among the key quotations. Out of the 116 quotations and allusions², 9 of them are citing this Psalm. Ps 110:1,4 are used. And the Ps 110:4 is the most important quote in the letter: “*The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”*” (Psalm 110:4, ESV). It is this verse the author proved that Christ is the high priest, which is the main theme of the book. So some people even suggests that, although overly exaggerated, this letter is an exposition on this verse. Ps 110:1 is quoted and alluded 5 times that Christ sit on the right hand of the LORD.

¹ Fee, G. D., & Stuart, D. K. (2002). *How to read the Bible book by book : A guided tour* (392). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan.

² See the attached “Old Testament citations in Hebrews”

Another important quote is the Ps 2:7. Although quoted twice only, this is the first direct quote made in this letter, saying that Christ is the Son of God.

And in Heb 5:5-6, the authored joined these two royal Psalms together and form his main argument: Christ as the Son of God becomes the great high priest for all of us. We will see more on this in the following section.

Finally, in Heb 8:8-12, the author cited the Jer 31:31-34. This Son of God as the great high priest can therefore be the mediator of a better covenant.

Paul's Letters

There are lots of parallels between this letter and Paul's, apart from the fact that they have very distinct features (so distinctive that we cannot believe this author was Paul).

Colossians

The emphasis on the Christology between these two books is very similar. It is arguably having very similar background too. In fact, some even argue that Colossae was the destination of this letter, although we do not agree. They are both abounded by Greek thoughts, they are both relating to Jewish tradition or Judaism in some way. And in response to this both authors focus on the Christology. Christ is above all and he is superior to everything else. The old things were shadow (Col 2:17) and in fact obsolete and ready to vanish away (Heb 8:13). Christ alone is the substance and is sufficient.

Philippians

They share the humiliation of Christ. E.g. Phil 2:7 and Heb 2:14-17. Phil 2:6-11 is regarded as the summary of the work of Jesus as the Son of Man, together with the fact that he is God (the Godward, Manward duality of Jesus). So no wonder we see the parallels here since Jesus as a man is a major requirement for him to be a priest (see Heb 2:5-18; 5:1-10). In fact Jesus has to be both the Son of God and a man in order to be a priest. See more in the "Christology" below. See also the parallels between Rom 5:19; Phil 2:8; Heb 5:8.

Romans and Galatians

Hab 2:4 is quoted 3 times in the New Testament: Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38. Hab 2:4 reads, "The righteous shall live by his faith." These 3 books are all regarding the Christian faith. In dealing with faith, both authors "coincidentally" cited this verse. It is arguably the most important Old Testament quote of all, so that the faith between the Old and the New Testaments is unified.

Some regarded that these 3 books, though simplified but easy to remember, that the Romans is an exposition on the first word: how can people be justified; the Galatians is an exposition on the second word: how should the righteous (the one who is justified, hence, Christians) live; and the Hebrews is an exposition on the third word: the superior life of faith.

Other Pauline Epistles

1. Sacrifice: Paul did not refer Christ as high priest but did refer him as the sacrifice (1Co 5:7; Eph 5:2).
2. New Covenant (2Co 3:9; Heb 8:6)
3. High regard of Abraham: both authors referred to Abraham a lot

Gospels And Acts

4 Gospels

The tradition said that the 4 Gospels reveal the different aspect of Jesus: Matthew reveal Jesus as the King, Mark reveal Jesus as the Servant, Luke reveal Jesus as the Son of Man, and John reveal Jesus as the Son of God. And in this letter, we see that Jesus as both the Man and Son of God (the Godward-Manward duality), he becomes the royally priest (King-Priest duality)³. So we now see the parallels in the King, Son of Man, Son of God theme. And interestingly, what do a priest do? He serves people. We have already mentioned the parallels between Phil 2:5-11 to Hebrews, and the parallels between Mark and Phil 2:5-11 (which can be treated as the summary of Mark).

So some actually refers the Hebrews as the fifth Gospel. It reveals Jesus as the high priest, which is the main theme of this letter. It is rooted from the revelation in the Gospels. Some also said that the 4 Gospels are the

³ see more on the section "Christology"

Gospels on what Jesus was doing on Earth, and the Hebrews is the Gospel on what Jesus is doing in the heaven.

John

In Hebrews, it reveals that Christ is the superior high priest and the superior sacrifice, entered through the superior tent (Heb 9:11), and the Gospel of John reveal that Christ himself is the true tent (Jn 1:14). In fact, the Gospel of John reveals Christ as the high priest and the sacrifice too, but in a subtle way. Jn 17 was widely regarded as the prayer of a high priest. In Hebrews the author also mentioned the high priest's prayer in Heb 7:25. In the beginning of the Gospel of John, John reveals Christ as the sacrificial lamb (Jn 1:29,36). In the last week before the crucifixion, known as the Passion Week, Christ was tested by many people to show that he is the perfect sacrifice (which is in fact mentioned in all the Gospels). He then was put on the cross, the place to offer this perfect sacrifice. Hence the cross represents the altar. I.e. the Gospel of John reveals Christ as the true tent, the high priest, and the perfect sacrifice by historical account, and the Hebrews shows it by systematic teaching by quoting the Scriptures (including the Gospels indirectly, see the previous sections on the 4 Gospels. Also see e.g. Heb 5:7).

Acts 7

It is also worth noting that this letter and Stephen's speech in Acts 7 has some similarities:

- both stress Abraham's call
- attach importance to a temple not made with hands
- similar approach to and assessment of Old Testament history

Lucan: Luke/Acts

Among all other books in the New Testament, Luke shares the closest literary style and the training in the Greek culture and language with this author. Together with the fact that there are some parallels in Acts 7 and Hebrews as mentioned, some even believe that Luke was the author of this letter. However the parallels are limited to this far.

Other General Epistle

James

The letter of James is the next immediate letter after this one. Both have the theme of faith, however treated very differently. James' style is very Jewish, and both letters are to the Jewish Christians. James view that the law is perfect, and he stressed on the righteous act that through it the faith is shown. Rather, in Hebrews the author viewed the old ritual is obsolete and ready to vanish away. There are some apparent contradictions from these two letters. Some even suggested that James was inferior and so on. However we will leave this matter on a serious study of James and focus back on Hebrews. What we need to note here is their parallels.

1 Peter and 2 Peter and Jude

The first letter of Peter referred us Christians as priests, and Hebrews referred Christ as the high priest. Both complement each other for us to see the whole view. All three letters here has a strong sense of the future kingdom, as well as this letter do. The 2 Peter and Jude in particular do have some serious warnings that are difficult passages, as in Hebrews. The recipients of all letters are somehow under persecution too. And Hebrews, as the 3 letters here, also focus on the second coming of Jesus as in Heb 9:28 as He saves us to the uttermost (Heb 7:25) and made us perfect.

Revelation

There are parallels between this letter and the book of revelation. It is not hard to understand this: both books link to many other books in the Bible and this provides link to both of them. Hebrews quoted the Old Testament frequently, whereas the Revelation alludes on it frequently. Both of them emphasize the future, involving a strong sense of reward/punishment. Hebrews focuses more on now: how we should live our life for the future promise, and the Revelation focuses more on future, let us know what would be happening in the future to gives us hope and the corresponding righteous act we should have. Both focus on the revelation

of Christ, Hebrews as a conclusion from mainly the past and Revelation as a revelation from mainly the future. It is also worth noting that the Revelation also reveals that Christ is the lamb having been slain, i.e. the sacrificial aspect of him. There are still a lot of parallel here but we believe that, as the Revelation is the conclusion of the whole Bible, it links back to all Scripture. Hence we leave room here for further study on the Revelation to see how it relates to all books in the Bible and Hebrews in particular.

The Theology of the Letter

Christology (the person and work of Christ)

The book of Hebrews is a book to reveal Christ (as any books in the Bible do), in a systematic way (hence, Christology). In fact it is the most systematic one when the most rigorous treatment on Christology than any books in the Bible. Arguably, the Soteriology is the center of the argument in the book, but Soteriology roots itself in the Christology and hence the author also emphasize on the Christology.

The Christology of this book, however exhaustive, is centered in the theme that Christ is the high priest, which is in turn an exposition on Ps 110:4. And since the author treated it in a systematic way, it is rooted in the structure of the letter. We suggest the reader to read, if not yet, the Section on “Structure and the Related Literary Features” thoroughly prior to this section.

Here, rather than extracting all the instances contributed to the Christology, we focus on the train of thought of the author (hence related to the structure of the letter), drawing the fact from the Teaching sections in the structure:

The author starts in chapter 1, and the Heb 1:1-4 as the introduction in particular, that Christ is the Son of God, and through him God has spoken to us. It is of paramount importance of all, and the author proves it from quoting the Old Testament (From verse 5 on he almost did nothing but quoting the Old Testament). As a Son of God, he is superior to the angels: he is the creator and the upholder of the universe, he inherited everything, he is the king, and he is ready to bring his companions to God, and defeats his enemies.

Then in Heb 2:5-18, the author reveals Jesus became man, a little while lower than the angels (Heb 2:9). It is of paramount importance too since if he were not a man, he could not partake in the flesh and blood (Heb 2:14) like all men do and save them (Heb 2:15-18). Only if he is tempted he is able to help those who are being tempted (Heb 2:18).

To summarize, in Chapter 1-2 the author reveals the Godward-Manward duality of Jesus and hence superior to the angels, become a merciful and faithful high priest to save us all (Heb 2:17).

In Chapter 3-4 it is the pivot point of the Chiasmus, saying that only through believing in His Word we can enter the rest, which represent the ultimate salvation. It is worth mentioned that it ends on the high priest theme too (Heb 4:14-16).

In Heb 5:1-10, the author starts the high priest theme formally. As a parallel to Heb 2:5-18, Christ is the man that is also beset with weakness and so he can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward (Heb 5:2). He actually has the flesh (Heb 5:7), and in it he cried, he submitted to God, and he even learnt obedience, as a man would do, through suffering. In short, he has to be a man in order to be a priest.

After an exhortation, in Chapter 7 the author further elaborate the idea that Christ is the high priest, but here he focus on the Godward aspect of it (hence the parallel to Chapter 1). He is the high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4 which is cited a lot here). Our Lord was descended from Judah (Heb 7:14) and Melchizedek was the king of Salem, hence the author hinted at the royal aspect of this superior high priest (the King-Priest duality). Although he has the flesh (from the previous section, Heb 5:7), he becomes a priest not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily (fleshly) descent, but rather, the power of an indestructible life that is in his Godward nature. And only because of this, he has the privilege to become priest made with an oath. Together with his Godward nature, he can be the high priest forever (Heb 7:24,28) and hence able to save us to the uttermost (Heb 7:25,27,28).

Hence, from his Godward-Manward duality he could be the priest having King-Priest duality (hence the royal high priest, and quoting the royal Psalms 2; 110 to prove it). It is worth noting here he is mentioned to be the guarantor of a better covenant (Heb 7:22), which is the theme in the following section.

In Heb 8:1-10:18, he is the mediator of a better covenant (Heb 8:6). Heb 8:1 concludes that Heb 1-7 shows us the high priest and from then on we focus on what he do, which is to offer gifts and sacrifices (Heb 8:3). As a mediator of a better covenant, the covenant he mediates is better (Heb 8:7-13), the place he enters is better (Heb 9:1-14), and hence he has died for us as a will is involved and only through death it is

established (hence saving us) (Heb 9:15-22), through his blood the covenant is then established (Heb 9:12,18-22). The better sacrifice, which is himself, purified the heavenly tent (Heb 9:23-28). Here he does away the law to establish the second (Heb 10:1-10) and hence the covenant is established (10:11-18).

In fact, from this train of thought we can see the Chiasmus as follows:

Heb 8: Introduction: mediator of a better covenant

Heb 9:1-14: where: greater and more perfect tent in contrast to the old

Heb 9:15-22: the mediator of the new covenant has to die (similar to the old)

Heb 9:23-28: better sacrifices

Heb 10:1-10: does away the law to establish the second (Heb 10:9)

Heb 10:11-18: conclusion: New Covenant established

To conclude, the Godward-Manward Jesus (Heb 1-2) became the King-Priest (Heb 5-7). And as a mediator of a better covenant he offered himself as a better sacrifice to establish the new covenant (Heb 8-10).

Soteriology (salvation teaching)

The Soteriology in this letter rooted in the Christology taught. In short, once saved, forever saved, but there will be severe, though not eternal, punishment if we went astray.

As we mentioned before, there are 5 passages of serious warnings in the book and in effect it makes many people doubt the eternal security of the salvation. And actually many heresies like to quote these a lot. There can be a lot of discussion here, but we mainly focus on our point of view that from the internal evidences in this letter, once saved, forever saved. And those 5 passages should actually interpret, from its context, as the severe but not eternal punishment a Christian could have when he went astray. This is rooted in the eschatology too, which again has a lot of debate. But we believe that apart from the eternal life we receive as a grace without any works, we gain rewards from the lord with righteous deeds. Here we take this point of view for granted and refers the readers humbly to a thorough commentary as well as the theology on the Eschatology in order to see this. And we will write a more thorough commentary on this letter including the 5 serious warnings if God permits.

Once Saved, Forever Saved

In the Hebrews, the concept of “forever”, “perfect”, “once”, etc. is very abounded. In fact the concept of perfection is in the key cognate groups, having a total occurrence of 74 times.

Here we listed out the key verses conveying this idea:

“And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,” (Hebrews 5:9, ESV)

“but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” (Hebrews 7:24–25, ESV)

“He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.” (Hebrews 7:27, ESV)

“But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,” (Hebrews 10:12, ESV)

“For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” (Hebrews 10:14, ESV)

“then he adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.” (Hebrews 10:17–18, ESV)

From these verses it is plain to see the eternal security of our salvation. It can be summarized by: Christ as the high priest is perfect and forever, therefore he can save us to the uttermost and make us perfect.

Severe Punishment

It is described in the 5 warning passages:

Heb 2:1-4:

How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

Here it hinted at the severe punishment one might have without going into details.

Heb 3:7-18:

If we do not believe in his word, we cannot enter the rest. There are three levels of rest here, in Heb 4:1,3,9,11. We who have believed enter that rest (Heb 4:3), however we could lose it therefore we should

stive to enter it in this life (Heb 4:11). In Heb 4:9 hinted at the future rest we would have, hence the future kingdom. And with this Eschatology it involves the concept of rewards and punishment. Hence the severe punishment as warned.

Heb 6:4-8:

From its context we see that we are the land and if it bears thorns and thistles, it is to be burned. It has a parallel to 1Co 3. In this context we have a picture of the land being burnt, and it is not difficult to imagine it is the thorns and thistles that would be disappeared from the burning, but not the land. Just like 1Co 3:15, we see that it is obviously burnt, but it does not mean that he would not be saved. Furthermore, Heb 5:11-6:12 has a strong concept of repeating/again. In fact the salvation is eternal and perfect, having been done once for all. It cannot be repeated. If anyone think that it should be done again or to repeat it, as in Heb 5:11-6:12, it is like Heb 6:6 that crucifying once again the Son of God. Nothing can restore them again to repentance as they have already get it and it is made once for all perfect! (Heb 6:6)

Heb 10:26-31:

Arguably, the deliberate sin in 10:26 refers to not acting according to Heb 10:19-25, hence not approaching God through Jesus alone, and probably the recipients might have thought about offering sacrifices according to the Moses' Law (see, e.g., Heb 10:18). Its punishment is indeed very severe but it does not necessarily means they are not saved. In Heb 10:39 it is even more obvious that it is talking about the faith preserving the souls.

Anyway, this passage would not be in contradiction with the full picture of the Hebrews: the salvation is eternally secure. Rather, it suggests that the punishment of God on Christians could be very severe, so severe that a modern Christians emphasized on having the eternal life alone would be difficult to understand.

Heb 12:25-29:

It is quite obvious the kingdom is the main subject here. What some others might not see is there is a future kingdom lasting for 1000 years, and only those who overcome would enter it. We will leave this to, e.g., a commentary on Revelation to see more on this. We also encourage earnestly the readers to also study the Book of Daniel, Matthew 24-25, and Revelation to truly understand the Eschatology in order to live a life with the right hope.

Our Response

As we have mentioned, the author regarded this letter as the letter of encouragement. Therefore, the main purpose of this letter is the encourage us. Hence, our response is the main concern of the author.

As mentioned in the "Structure and the Related Literary Features", there are 5 main encouragements made in the letter, and if the final encouragement is included, there are 6.

Here we will mention briefly each sections and give a summary on it.

Heb 2:1-4: Such a Great Salvation

The author encouraged us not to neglect such a great salvation.

Heb 3:7-4:16: Believe the Faithful one and His Word to Enter the Rest

The author encouraged us not to have any unbelief. Instead, we should believe in the faithful one and his word, to enter the rest.

In fact, the word of God is superior (Heb 4:12-13). We should hold fast our confession (confession in Greek means the word we agree/share) (Heb 4:14), and to draw near to the throne of grace (Heb 4:16).

Heb 5:11-6: Be Mature and Hold Fast to the Hope

We should leave the elementary doctrine of Christ (Heb 6:1). Rather than keep repeating on the basics (Heb 5:12; 6:1-2,6), we should go on to maturity (Heb 6:1), hope fast to the hope set before us (Heb 6:11-12,18), which is a hope enters into the holy of holies (Heb 6:19).

Heb 10:19-39: Draw Near to God, Hold Fast to Our Hope, Consider How to Stir Up One Another

Since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus (Heb 10:19), we should draw near (Heb 10:22), hold fast to our hope (Heb 10:23), and consider how to stir up one another (Heb 10:24). And after knowing how to approach God (Heb 1-10; in particular Heb 10:19), if we do not do so will be regarded as deliberate sin (Heb 10:26). Therefore let us recall the former days of sufferings, do not throw away our confidence, let us not shrink back but have faith to preserve our souls.

Heb 12: Be disciplined with Faith

Lay aside that sin (referring to that in Heb 10:19-39) but run the race of faith by fixing our eye onto Jesus. Do not regard lightly discipline of the Lord (Heb 12:5), who disciplines us as the father of spirits. And finally do not reject him who warns us that he will shake not only the earth but also the heavens,. But be grateful (in Greek it means have grace. Some has pointed out the parallel to the other sections in the “throne of grace”) for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28).

Heb 13: Sacrifices in Our Daily Life Pleasing to God

Here is a long list of encouragement. Some will regard them as the true sacrifices that please God. We will point out a few important points here.

Remember and obey the leaders (Heb 13:7,17).

Suffer with Christ.

Offer the fruit of lips as a sacrifice of praise to God, and to share what we have as sacrifices pleasing to God.

To conclude, do not go astray. Instead, draw near to God through Christ and Christ alone, and to encourage one another to do this. If we hold fast to this hope we will enjoy the Sabbath remained for us (which is a reference to the reward in the future kingdom). This theme appears again and again in all the 5 encouragements. And this is the main theme of the letter, as shown in “Main Theme”.

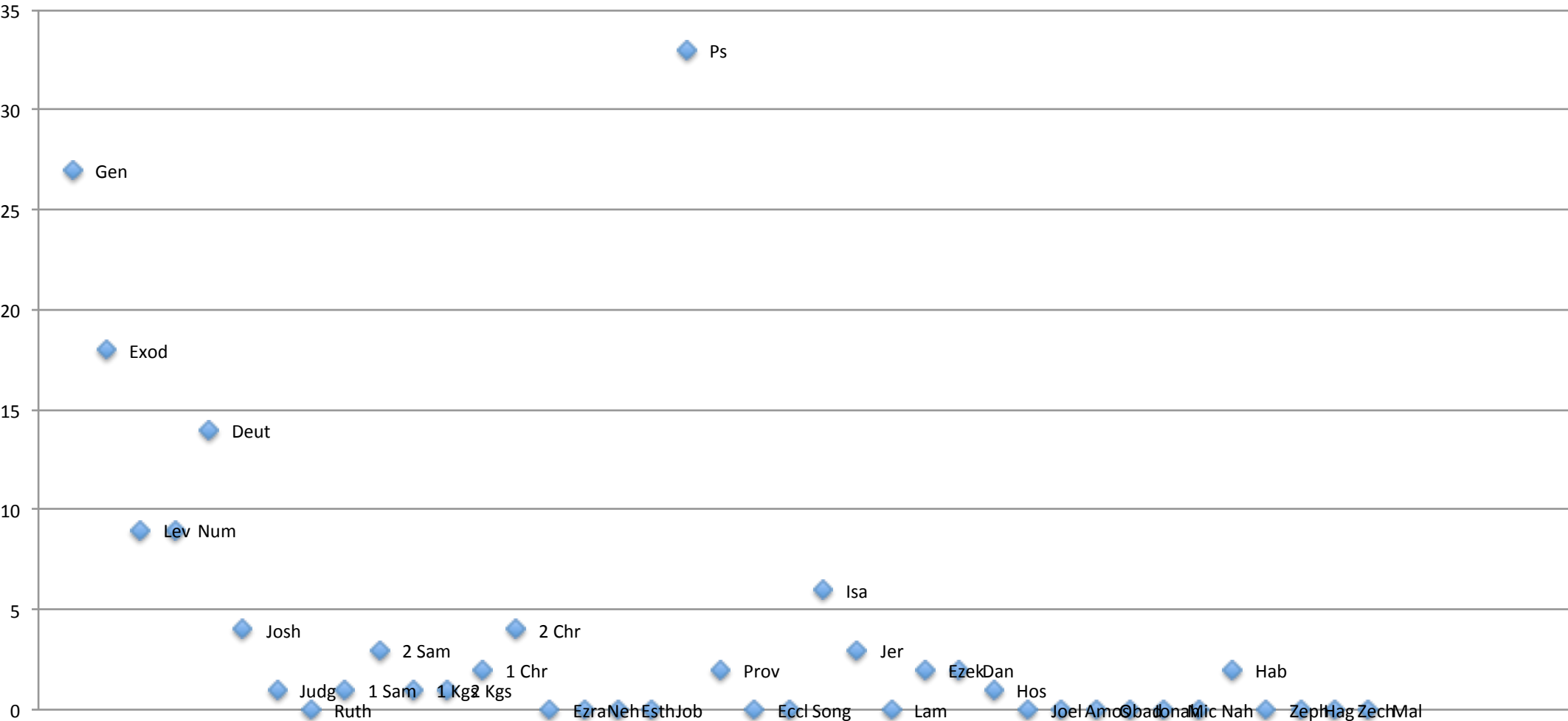
Appendix

Old Testament Citations in Hebrews

Heb	OT	Remarks
Heb 1:3	Ps 110:1	Allusions
Heb 1:5	Ps 2:7	
Heb 1:5	2Sam 7:14; 1Ch 17:13	
Heb 1:6	Deut 32:43; Ps 97:7	
Heb 1:7	Ps 104:4	
Heb 1:8-9	Ps 45:6-7	
Heb 1:10-12	Ps 102:25-27	
Heb 1:13	Ps 110:1	
Heb 2:6-8	Ps 8:4-8	
Heb 2:12	Ps 22:22	
Heb 2:13	2Sam 22:3; Ps 18:2; Isa 12:2	
Heb 2:13	Isa 8:17-18	
Heb 2:16	Is 41:8-9	Allusions
Heb 3:2	Num 12:7	
Heb 3:5	Num 12:7	
Heb 3:7-11	Ps 95:7-11	
Heb 3:13	Ps 95:7	
Heb 3:15	Ps 95:7-8	
Heb 3:16-18	Num 14:1-35	Allusions
Heb 3:17	Num 14:29	
Heb 4:3	Ps 95:11	
Heb 4:4	Gen 2:2	
Heb 4:5	Ps 95:11	
Heb 4:7	Ps 95:7-8	
Heb 4:8	Deut 31:7; Jos 22:4	Allusions
Heb 4:10	Gen 2:2	Allusions
Heb 5:3	Lev 9:7	Allusions
Heb 5:5	Ps 2:7	
Heb 5:6	Gen 14:18-20; Ps 110:4	
Heb 5:10	Ps 110:4	
Heb 6:8	Gen 3:18	Allusions
Heb 6:13	Gen 22:16	
Heb 6:14	Gen 22:16-17	
Heb 6:20	Ps 110:4	
Heb 7:1-2	Gen 14:17-20	
Heb 7:4	Gen 14:20	
Heb 7:5	Num 18:21	Allusions
Heb 7:17	Ps 110:4	
Heb 7:21	Ps 110:4	
Heb 7:27	Lev 9:7	Allusions
Heb 8:1	Ps 110:1	Allusions
Heb 8:5	Ex 25:40	
Heb 8:8-12	Jer 31:31-34	
Heb 9:2	Ex 26:1-30	Allusions
Heb 9:4	2Ch 26:19; Eze 8:11	
Heb 9:5	Ex 25:22	Allusions
Heb 9:6	Num 18:2-6	Allusions
Heb 9:7	Ex 30:10; Lev 16:2	Allusions
Heb 9:13	Lev 16:12; Num 19:9	Allusions
Heb 9:19	Ex 24:6-8; Lev 14:4; Num 19:6	Allusions
Heb 9:20	Ex 24:8	
Heb 9:21	Lev 8:19	Allusions
Heb 9:22	Lev 17:11	Allusions
Heb 9:27	Gen 3:19	Allusions
Heb 9:28	Isa 53:12	
Heb 10:4	Lev 16:21	Allusions
Heb 10:5-7	Ps 40:6-8	
Heb 10:8	Ps 40:6	
Heb 10:9	Ps 40:7	
Heb 10:11	Ex 29:38	Allusions

Heb 10:12-13	Ps 110:1	
Heb 10:16-17	Jer 31:33-34	
Heb 10:22	Eze 36:25	Allusions
Heb 10:27	Isa 26:11	
Heb 10:28	Deut 19:15	Allusions
Heb 10:30	Deut 32:35; Ps 135:14	
Heb 10:30	Deut 32:36	
Heb 10:37-38	Isa 26:20	
Heb 10:37-38	Hab 2:3-4	
Heb 11:3	Gen 1:1; Ps 33:9	Allusions
Heb 11:4	Gen 4:3-10	Allusions
Heb 11:5	Gen 5:24	
Heb 11:7	Gen 7:1	Allusions
Heb 11:8	Gen 12:1-5	Allusions
Heb 11:9	Gen 35:27	Allusions
Heb 11:11	Gen 21:2	Allusions
Heb 11:12	Gen 32:12; Ex 32:13; Deut 1:10	Allusions
Heb 11:13	Gen 47:9; Deut 10:22; 1Ch 29:15; Ps 39:12	Allusions
Heb 11:16	Ex 4:5	Allusions
Heb 11:17	Gen 22:1-10	Allusions
Heb 11:18	Gen 21:12	
Heb 11:20	Gen 27:39-40	Allusions
Heb 11:21	Gen 47:31	
Heb 11:22	Gen 50:24-25; Ex 13:19	Allusions
Heb 11:23	Ex 2:2	Allusions
Heb 11:24	Ex 2:10-12	Allusions
Heb 11:27	Ex 2:15	Allusions
Heb 11:28	Ex 12:21-30	Allusions
Heb 11:29	Ex 14:21-31	Allusions
Heb 11:30	Jos 6:12-21	Allusions
Heb 11:31	Jos 6:21-25	Allusions
Heb 11:33	Jdg 14:6-7; 1Sam 17:34-36; Dan 6:1-27	Allusions
Heb 11:34	Dan 3:23-25	Allusions
Heb 11:35	2Ki 22:26-27	Allusions
Heb 11:36	1Ki 22:26-27; 2Ch 18:25-26; Jer 38:6	Allusions
Heb 11:37	2Ch 24:31	Allusions
Heb 12:2	Ps 110:1	Allusions
Heb 12:5-6	Prov 3:11-12	
Heb 12:7	Deut 8:5; 2Sam 7:14	
Heb 12:9	Num 16:22	Allusions
Heb 12:12	Isa 35:3	
Heb 12:13	Prov 4:26	
Heb 12:15	Deut 29:18	
Heb 12:16	Gen 25:33-34	Allusions
Heb 12:17	Gen 27:30-40	Allusions
Heb 12:18-19	Ex 20:18-21; Deut 5:22-27	Allusions
Heb 12:20	Ex 19:12-13	
Heb 12:21	Deut 9:19	
Heb 12:24	Gen 4:10	Allusions
Heb 12:25-26	Hab 2:6,21	
Heb 12:29	Deut 4:24; Deut 9:3	
Heb 13:2	Gen 19:1-3	Allusions
Heb 13:5	Deut 31:6; Jos 1:5	
Heb 13:6	Ps 118:6	
Heb 13:11	Lev 16:27	Allusions
Heb 13:15	2Ch 29:31; Ps 50:23; Ho 14:2	Allusions
Total no. of Quotations	95	
Total no. of Allusions	21	
Total no. of Quotations and Allusions	116	

The Use of OT in Heb



Suggestions on Further Researches

- The Eschatology from this Letter
- Hebrews as “The Handbook on Old Testament Exposition”
- Hebrews as “The Guide to Sermon Preparation”
- Modern Application: What Make Us Went Astray In the Modern Age?
- View the Hebrews Through the Lens of Christ and His Church
- A Hymn Collection on Hymns Quoting from Hebrews
- A Commentary and Translation on the Letter

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