

**THE EPISTLE
TO THE HEBREWS**

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The epistle to the Hebrews by A. B. Davidson

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A. B. DAVIDSON

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THE EPISTLE

TO

THE HEBREWS.

With Introduction and Notes

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INTRODUCTION.

CHAP. I. THE READERS OF THE EPISTLE.

1. The readers themselves.—In our English Bibles the Epistle has the heading: "Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews;" and at the end there stands the remark: "Written to the Hebrews from Italy by Timothy." In the best MSS. the heading reads simply, *To the Hebrews*, and the remark at the end is wanting, or agrees with the superscription. The heading "To the Hebrews" is the proper heading of the Epistle, and is found from the time that the Epistle is historically mentioned in connection with other New Testament books. It has been supposed that the Epistle was also known under other designations, as, *To the Laodiceans*, or, *To the Alexandrians*, but this seems incapable of proof. Though as old as the first historical mention of the Epistle in connection with other New Testament books, the inscription *To the Hebrews* does not come from the hand of the original writer of the Epistle. It originated, no doubt, in the course of transcription, and whether it rests on tradition or was suggested by the contents of the Epistle cannot be ascertained. Any one reading the Epistle now would stamp it with the same title, apart from all tradition respecting its origin or destination.

The term "Hebrews" is used in a wider and in a narrower sense. In a wider sense, it describes all who were descendants of Abraham, wherever they resided, and whatever language they spoke. In this sense it is equivalent to Israelites and opposed to Gentiles (comp. 2 Cor. xi. 22; Phil. iii. 5). In its narrower sense, it describes Jews living in Palestine and using the native language of that country. In

this sense it is opposed to "Grecians" or Hellenists, that is, foreign Jews, speaking Greek (Acts vi. 1, ix. 27). There is nothing to determine in which of these senses the term is used in the superscription to the Epistle. The Alexandrians understood by it Palestinian Jews; but this is merely their interpretation, and can hardly be assumed to rest on tradition. The phrase "To the Hebrews" might mean of itself that the Epistle was addressed to all Christians of Jewish extraction; but the local colour of the Epistle is very distinct, and the allusions are of such a kind as to make it certain that the Epistle was addressed to "Hebrews" in a particular locality. No allusion is made in the Epistle to Gentile believers, and this seems to imply that it was written to a community consisting exclusively of Jewish Christians, or one at least in which the Hebrew element very greatly predominated. The Author's view is no doubt that the Hebrews to whom he writes are the true and rightful successors of the Old Testament church; they are "the People" of God, and they are so as believing Hebrews. But this way of regarding them, even though it be based on principles recognised in other New Testament writings (Rom. xi.), would have had something unnatural in it if they had been a minority in the church or circle of churches to which the letter was addressed. Thus all the information which we gather from the inscription to the Epistle is, that it was addressed to Christian believers of the race of Israel—a conclusion which we could have reached apart from any inscription.

2. *Their circumstances.*—The Hebrews to whom the Epistle was addressed had not been themselves hearers of the Lord, but had received the gospel from those who heard Him (ii. 3), and who worked many wonders in attestation of their preaching (ii. 4). The church had not apparently been founded by mere believers from Palestine congregating in numbers in the locality, but by some apostolic missionaries, themselves direct hearers of the Lord (ii. 3, xiii. 7; comp. x. 32, where their enlightenment is referred to as a distinct historical event). Their conversion to the faith of Christ was a thing that, when the Epistle was written, had long taken place: for, on account of the time, they ought themselves to have been teachers (v. 12); those who brought the gospel to them were already dead (xiii. 7); and their history had been one of varied vicissitudes, for on