

**THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS,
IN GREEK AND ENGLISH:
WITH AN ANALYSIS AND
EXEGETICAL COMMENTARY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649575787

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Commentary by Samuel H. Turner

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS,

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BY
SAMUEL H. TURNER, D.D.,
PROFESSOR OF BIBLICAL LEARNING AND INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE IN THE GENERAL
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, AND OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE AND
LITERATURE IN COLUMBIA COLLEGE, N. Y.

NEW YORK:
STANFORD AND SWORDS, 137, BROADWAY.
1852.

INTRODUCTION.

It may seem superfluous to offer to the Church an exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in addition to the many and valuable works illustrative of that portion of Holy Scripture which already exist. But even the best may contain some objectionable matter, or may omit a suitable notice of certain points of interest and importance; or, some circumstances may make it expedient to bring forward prominently doctrinal or practical considerations clearly maintained in the Epistle, while others may make the publication of an additional commentary not only proper but obligatory. These considerations combined have had their influence in inducing me to issue this small volume on the Hebrews, and even to express an intention to follow it by other similar publications on the New Testament, if they shall appear to be wanted.

The Greek text follows the edition of Hahn, as printed by Professor Robinson, the punctuation being in a few instances slightly altered. In the analysis and notes, I have endeavoured to explain the Epistle by giving the reader the results of some little examination, rather than to present him with a long array of writers to whom but few have access, and whom still fewer would take the trouble to study. I have, however, laid before him the reasons also for the results, or the process by which they are thought to be sustained. I am not aware of being influenced by any other motive than a desire to present conscientiously what I believe to be the true meaning of the inspired writer. And so far as this may have been done, I would humbly hope for the divine blessing; and wherein it has failed, not less humbly trust in that infinite mercy which "winks at ignorance," and is not "extreme to mark what is done amiss."

It is well known that the Epistle to the Hebrews has given

rise to many inquiries, which have called forth very many critical and learned discussions. The inquisitive reader who wishes to investigate the various topics alluded to, must consult Introductions to the New Testament, such as Horne's or Hug's, or that of John David Michaelis; or commentators whose purpose may have led them into so wide a field, of whom it may be sufficient to mention Professor Stuart of our own country, and Kuinoel and Tholuck of Germany,* learned, pious and candid men, although on some points they have come to different results. It is not my intention to enter into such disquisitions, which would oblige me to extend my book to an inordinate size. Still it is proper to mention a few of the topics. They are such as these.

Is the work properly an epistle or an instructive religious discourse? This point is really of very little consequence, as its decision does not affect in any degree the statements, doctrines, arguments, or practical bearing of the work. Although it does not take the usual form of a letter in the commencement, the general internal evidence confirms the probability of its being what it has always been called, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*.

To whom was the work addressed? To all the Hebrew nation, both in their own land and dispersed in various countries, whether converted to the Gospel or not? Or to Jews of Palestine or some other particular locality? Certain texts in St. Peter have been supposed to favour the theory that St. Paul wrote the Epistle to the Christian Churches, composed chiefly of Jewish converts, which at that time existed in various parts of Asia Minor. In his second Epistle, iii. 15, he says that his brother Paul had written to those whom he was addressing, and a comparison of the first verse of the same chapter with the first verse of the former Epistle, shows that they were Christians of those provinces. But the argument assumes that the first of these texts refers to this Epistle, whereas it is more probable that the allusion is to some of St. Paul's smaller letters. Neither does a comparison of Heb. ii. 2 with Gal. iii. 19, both of which speak of the agency of angels in giving the law, prove, as some have supposed, any such connection between the two Epistles; for St. Stephen states the same thing in Acts vii. 53, and

* A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, by Moses Stuart. Second Edition, Andover, 1833: Kommentar zum Briefe an die Hebräer, von Dr. A. Tholuck. Hamburg, 1835. A new edition appeared in 1840. This work, translated into English by Hamilton and Ryland, makes the 29th and 30th volumes of Clark's Biblical Cabinet. Edited, 1849: D. Christ. Theoph. Kuinoel Commentarius in Epistolam ad Hebræos. Lips. 1831.

it is founded on Deut. xxxiii. 2, and would very properly be used in addressing Jews any where. These arguments are alleged by Kuettnr, and introduced from him by Peile in his late work on the Hebrews.* They are evidently inconclusive. It is enough to learn from the contents of the Epistle, that it was addressed to Hebrews who had been converted to Christianity, but were in danger of apostatizing; with the collateral view also of impressing the truths of the Gospel on their unbelieving brethren who might have an opportunity of reading it.

The genuineness and canonical authority of the book have been the subjects of learned disquisition, and Christian antiquity has been thoroughly searched, and its testimony largely adduced. The result is a satisfactory decision in its favour, affording evidence of the care of the primitive Church not to admit any work into the canon, unless on incontrovertible proof of its legitimate claim to such distinction.

The language in which it was written has also been a point of investigation. Many of the fathers assert it to have been the Hebrew. But the opinion rather seems to have been assumed on the supposition that this was the vernacular tongue of the nation, and consequently that the Greek would have been an unsuitable medium of communication. On the other hand it has been shown that Greek as well as Hebrew was sufficiently understood for all practical purposes by the body of the Hebrews.† Besides, not a vestige of the Epistle in the Hebrew language has been transmitted from an early age, and the work does not exhibit any indication of being a version, but on the contrary looks in all respects like an original. Those who wish to know what has been said in defence of the opinion referred to, may consult the introduction of J. D. Michaelis, translated by Bishop Marsh, chap. xxiv. sect. 8-12, vol.

* Annotations on the Apostolical Epistles, by Williamson Felle, D.D. Vol. III. Theocalonians—Hebrews. Lond. 1851. This is a work of considerable labour. It contains many important quotations, particularly from Calvin. The parallel texts, though frequently exceedingly apposite, are too numerous, and occasionally have little or no bearing on the point to be elucidated. The expositions too are sometimes quite obscure; and the style is so involved and parenthetical, that, even with the aid of all the appliances of Italics, capital letters, and dashes, it often requires the closest attention in order to elicit the meaning.

† In reference to this subject I refer the reader to the work of the learned Neapolitan, Dominic Deodati, entitled: *De Christo Græce loquente Ræclectico*, published at Naples in 1767, and edited with a Preface by Orlando T. Dobbin, LL. B. London 1843, 18mo: Also, to the treatise by Professor Phänkeuche on the prevalence of the Aramæan language in Palestine in the age of Christ and his Apostles; and to that of Hug in his Introduction, on the prevalence of the Greek in the same country and period. These treatises have been translated into English and may be found in the Biblical Repository, Andover 1831, vol. I. No. II. Art. IV., and No. III. Art. v.

iv. pp. 211-284, London, 1802; also, "An Essay to discover the author of the Epistle and the language in which it was originally written, by Joseph Hallett, junr., Lond. 1788," Sec. II.*

The time of writing the Epistle has also been a subject of examination. It is pretty generally agreed, however, among critics, that its date must be placed anterior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

The most important and interesting inquiry of the sort above mentioned relates to the authorship of this Epistle. Hallett in the first section of the Essay just mentioned, Michaelis, Horne, Hug, and other writers of Introductions to the New Testament, have discussed the subject at length. Stuart and Tholuck, in the Introductions to their respective commentaries, are particularly worthy of attention. They have examined whatever antiquity contains which seems to bear upon this inquiry, and also the whole structure, arrangement, style and peculiarities of the Epistle; in a word, whatever may serve to characterise and identify the writer. The conclusion to which the former arrives is that the author is St. Paul; while, according to the latter, the probabilities are in favour of Apollos. To these learned commentators I must refer the reader, confining myself to such a brief notice as seems necessary.

The opinions of the leading writers of the early church varied as much respecting the authorship of this Epistle, as they did on the length of our Lord's ministry. In the latter part of the second century and beginning of the third, St. Luke was by some, and Clement of Rome by others, considered as the author. See Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.* vi. 25. Clement of Alexandria regarded the present Epistle as a translation by St. Luke of St. Paul's original Hebrew work: *Eus.* vi. 14, who also remarks that some attributed the translation to Clement of Rome: iii. 88. Tertullian† quotes vi. 4-8 from the Epistle, which he ascribes to Barnabas, the apostle. If it were credible that the production generally known as the epistle of Barnabas, and published among the apostolical fathers, were the work of the friend and companion of St. Paul, it would be quite certain that such a writer could not be the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. A candid and intelligent man has only to read the

* This Essay is an introduction to "A Paraphrase and Notes on the three last chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews; being a supplement to the learned Mr. Petree's Paraphrase and Notes on this epistle." The author referred to is the Rev. James Petree of Eton, a dissenting minister, who died before he had completed his work on the Hebrews. It is a laborious production, and in some respects learned; though, as it seems to me, occasionally extravagant in its expostions, and wanting in that plain, good sense, without which no commentator can thoroughly enter into the character and meaning of his original.

† De Fœdicitia, xx. p. 282. Opera, Edit. Rigalt. Paris. 1675.

two, in order to satisfy himself that the mind which conceived the thoughts, and adjusted the arguments of the canonical Epistle, could not have come down to the well-meaning puerilities and far-fetched analogies of the so-called apostolical book. But as the authenticity and genuineness of the letter ascribed to Barnabas are without valid support either of external or internal evidence, no argument can be drawn from a comparison of the two.

The most generally received opinion undoubtedly of the Christian church is, that St. Paul was the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Clement of Alexandria,* Origen,† Eusebius,‡ Jerome,§ and the leading ecclesiastical writers, concur in this sentiment. The difference of style from that of the other well-known writings of this apostle, and the absence of his usual introduction, have been adduced in opposition to this theory; and this discrepancy had so great an influence on the acute and critical mind of Origen as to lead him to adopt the opinion that the thoughts were St. Paul's, but the language that of some other writer. His view may be seen in Eusebius, vi. 25. It appears to be at least as probable as any that has been advanced, and best adapted to harmonize the leading external evidence with that suggested by the style and manner of the work. Tholuck remarks that Luther first ascribed the authorship to Apollos; and this, as I have already said, is his own opinion. Nevertheless, the reader will find in his introduction a very full and clear exhibition of the arguments, both external and internal, in defence of the ancient view of Clement of Alexandria. He does not appear to have withheld any consideration of importance which might be thought to favour the claim of St. Paul, and is entitled to great respect for the ability and candour with which he has conducted the whole investigation.

One thing is certain, and it is a fact of the very greatest importance. The Epistle to the Hebrews was regarded by the early church as the work of an apostle or apostolic man. As such it was received by the Christian community as an embodiment of Christian doctrines, and publicly read as such in the congregations. It was appealed to as an exponent of Gospel truth. Whatever doubt therefore may exist respecting its author, it stands out prominently as a Christian work of authority, as early at least as the year

* Eus. vi. 14.

† Id. vi. 25.

‡ Id. iii. 2. I have confined my references to Eusebius, chiefly to avoid a multiplicity of authorities.

§ Catalogue of Ecclesiastical writers, under Paul. Opera, Tom. iv. col. 103. Edit. Paris. 1768.

seventy; and consequently the doctrinal views which it contains are those of the apostles and leading followers of Christ who lived in that age. To represent the book as the production of a narrow-minded Alexandrine Jewish convert, is as much in contradiction to historical record, as it plainly is to the whole nature and character of the work itself.

The evident design of the Epistle is to confirm and establish the faith of the Hebrew Christians who had been exposed to persecutions, and were in danger of apostasy. With this view the author presents to their consideration the excellence of the Gospel, particularly in contradistinction to the law. As the Mosaic system was introduced through the agency of angels, he shows the superiority of the author of Christianity to these celestial beings, both in his original divine nature and in the elevation of his human to universal supremacy. He compares the respective heads of the two dispensations, acknowledging the fidelity of Moses, but representing him as a servant merely, while Christ is the distinguished Son. He compares at large the priestly and sacrificial character and actions of our Lord with those under the law, pointing out the weakness and inadequacy of the latter, and stating fully, with suitable evidence and illustrations, the sufficiency and perfection of the former. He intersperses these discussions with most important instructions on various kindred topics, and with serious and affecting exhortations and warnings. He exhibits the practical value of faith, and displays the superior excellency of the Gospel to the law, as an incentive to an unwavering adherence to a religion so glorious and divine, and undeviating obedience to its demands. It is impossible to read the work with attention and candour without a firm conviction that the author has accomplished his task with complete success.