The Authorship of Hebrews

By:

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Outline

**Thesis:** Although one can not be dogmatic or conclusive regarding the human author of the book of Hebrews. For some particular reasons, the writer of the book of Hebrews did not pen his name on the book. For centuries, church fathers and biblical scholars have sought to identify the author of Hebrews. Many struggled and disagreed regarding the human author of Hebrews. Modern scholars tend to object to Pauline authorship. This research paper will not resolved centuries old debate but is the result of my intensive research regarding why I believe Paul to be the most possible human author and my substantiation for Paul as most likely candidate. This paper also present a brief discussion to why I believe Apollo, Barnabas, Clement, Luke, Philip, Pricislla and Aquilla are less likely to be a candidate of authorship.

I. Evidences against Pauline Authorship of Hebrews

II. Evidence supporting Pauline Authorship of Hebrews

III. Rejection of others as a possible author of Hebrews

IV. Paul the most prominent and likely author of Hebrews
The Authorship of Hebrews

One can not be dogmatic or conclusive regarding the human author of the book of Hebrews. For some particular reasons, the writer of the book of Hebrews did not pen his name on the book. For centuries, church fathers and biblical scholars have sought to identify the author of Hebrews. Many struggled and disagreed regarding the human author of Hebrews. This research paper will not resolved centuries old debate regarding the human author of Hebrews. But it is the result of my intensive research regarding who I believe to be the possible human author and my substantiation for why I believe Paul to be the best possible candidate. This paper also present a brief discussion to why I believe Apollo, Barnabas, Clement, Luke, Philip, Pricislla and Aquilla are less likely to be a candidate of authorship. I believe an apostle Paul to be a possible candidate; “by far the most prominent candidate is the apostle Paul. In the ancient times it was the belief that Paul was the author” (Kent 1972,17)

The problem exists no matter who is suggested to be the human other of Hebrews. There will be objection to every possible suggestions and candidates. Since, internally, several things, which can be known about the author of Hebrews but it is not possible to draw any definitive conclusion about the author. The early church fathers held many opinions to who the author of Hebrews was and in all their effort their conclusion was inconclusive. The early Christian on Eastern Shore of the Mediterranean and around Alexandria associates the book of Hebrew with Paul. In North Africa, Tertullian thought that Barnabas wrote the book of Hebrews. Christian in the West were unanymous in their opinion that Paul was not the author of Hebrew. (Douglas and Tenney 1987, 427). Origin statement to who (the human author) wrote the book of Hebrews seems to sum up the
whole search of the human author of Hebrews, “God only knows certainly” or to put it another way, no one really know who wrote the book. Many will asked then, “Is it for us to be certain in regard to its human author, and is it of any important that we should know, since the letter comes to us anonymously?” (Ironside 1952, 7) Some even goes further to say if God wants us to know the human author would He not have told us or have the author penned his name down? According to Dr. Sauer in the video cassette tape that it is important to know who wrote it. “These preliminary issue will have an affects on how we interpret the scripture and as well as understanding and personal application.” (Sauer, 1991)

We know that all Scripture is written by the Holy Spirit or inspired by the Holy Spirit. We do know also that whoever wrote Hebrews must have been well know to those early Christians and it’s reader. The issue is not so much of authority but the instrument. Who was the instrument that God used to pen down the book of Hebrews? Several things are known about the author of Hebrew but are not enough to be absolute conclusive because the book makes no direct reference to the author. The author was very familiar with the Old Testament scriptures, as well as familiar with first century Jews practices.

Most modern scholars tend to reject Apostle Paul as the author of Hebrew “A careful study of the letter in the Greek text disclose some important things about the author. (1). The letter has a polish Greek style, like master rhetorician. The continuous use of this style is not like Paul’s style; Paul frequently picked up new stream of thought before he finished the one in which he was involved. (2). The vocabulary, figure of speech and manner of argument show an Alexandria and Paul did not have the
background. Although both Paul and author of Hebrews quoted Old Testament often but by the way they introduce their quotation is quiet different (Douglas and Tenney 1987, 427)

Bowman quoting Guthrie in his “New Testament Introduction” states “Most modern writer find more difficulty in imagining how this epistle was ever attribute to Paul. Gutheries list five arguments or objections against Pauline authorship: (1) the anonymity of the book is not in keeping wit Paul’s pattern. (2). Differences in style. (3) Absence or lack of Pauline experience. (4). Theological differences both theoretical and practical. (5). A different historical position of the writer than Paul (Bowman 2002).

Today Pauline authorship is denied by many scholars because nowhere in the book of Hebrews does the writer identify himself as Paul; this is very unlikely in view of Paul’s other letter as well as no Apostolic authority is mention. The Greek writing style is not typical of Pauline abruptness and digressions; it is more classical in Hebrews. In Apostle’s writing he always introduced his own experience with Christ and his calling which is missing in Hebrews. Many scholars claimed that Apostle Paul through out the scripture claimed to be apostle to the Gentiles therefore he couldn’t be the author. “For this case I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles (Ephesians 3:1) as well as in I Timothy 2:7 “For this I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle as I speak in truth…as teacher of the Gentiles in faith and in verity” (KJV) According to Bowman, Paul was emphatic that he was chosen apostle to the uncircumcisions, the Gentiles” Bowman further reject Pauline authorship of Hebrew by stating that “Pauline theology is absent from Hebrews.” He emphatically stated that Paul could not be the author of Hebrews. (Bowman, 2002)
Dr. John Macarthur does not believe that the author of Hebrews is Paul “due to difference in style, vocabulary, and pattern of personal reference in the epistles known to be his. I do not believe it was written by Paul.” (Macarthur. 1983, intro.).

One of the primary arguments against Pauline authorship of Hebrews is in Hebrew 2:3 which says “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.” The objection to Pauline authorship based on this verse is that the writer seems to be speaking as though his knowledge is a second hand. Paul would not have spoken this way, since he was sent by Jesus (Warner, 2002). The writer seems to place himself among those to whom the message of Christ was confirmed by others. Paul always insisted that he received his gospel not from men (Galatians 1:12) “For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by revelation of Jesus Christ. The second objection or argument against Pauline authorship is that writing style of the books of Hebrews differs from Paul’s other epistle. Although one could argue that Paul’s audience dictate his language and style. While it is true that Paul’s other epistle display less refined form of Greek, and Hebrews is very polished and eloquent Greek, the only epistle Paul actually wrote was Galatians (Gal. 6:11) The difference in writing style explain by Warner is that “different people wrote the different epistles of Paul for him, explains the difference in writing style” (Warner, 2002)

Other objections to Paul’s authorship of Hebrews further stated since nowhere in the letter does the writer identify himself as Paul therefore it is unlikely that Paul wrote it. This is unlikely in view of Paul’s other letters as well as apostolic authority is nowhere mention in Hebrews as other epistles by Paul. The book of Hebrews does not place Paul
spiritual experience into the letter as Paul is noted for doing in his writing. These are some of the objections or arguments against Pauline authorship.

I am not holding dogmatically or tenaciously to an obsolete view. Rather, after I have examined the evidence to the best of my ability I find no reason to reject Paul as a possible author of Hebrews. From the book of Hebrew itself we see that the author must have been a Jew a Hellenist, familiar with Philo as well as the Old Testament. A friend of Timothy and a well known to those the letter was addressed to.

To answers some of the arguments or objections to Pauline authorship, we begin by examined the major objections against Pauline authorship. Some has stated that Hebrews 2:3 excludes Paul as the author because he says in Galatians 1:111-12 that he received his gospel not from man but God. The Galatians passage does not excludes the fact That Paul did not have it confirmed to him by the one who heard the Lord. In Galatians he is defending his Apostleship and is therefore showing from whence he received his authority. Paul didn’t actually sit under Jesus teaching in person as other Apostles had. It was the other apostles in Jerusalem who were seen as the spiritual authority over Jewish believers. When Paul went up Jerusalem he always submitted himself to their leadership of Apostles (Acts 21:18-26) To explain Hebrews 2:3 it is not that difficult to see that Paul was merely acting in character here and acknowledging the fact that the Jew believers to who Paul is writing to owed their allegiance to the apostles. It would have been proper for Paul to include himself with those Jews.

To explain the objection that “if Paul was to be the author of Hebrews his name will appear, the fact that his name does not appear shows he did write it.” If that is the case that Paul is proved not to be the author because his name is not appear, then the
same reasoning would prove the book has no author at all because it has no name attached to the book. There are explanation offers to why Paul might conceal his name. Remembered he was hated by Jewish nations. “They were greatly prejudiced against him and his ministry, though he yearned after them…many of them repudiated his apostleship and feared his attitude toward their ancient ritual” (Ironside 1952, 13) To put in modern term, Jewish would look at Paul as a “sell out” to his brethren or that it could have been that Paul left out his name “Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ” because he was not an apostle to the Jews but to the Gentiles. Certainly the fact that the author did not mention his name does not eliminate Paul from the list of the most possible author of Hebrew.

“To explain different style in writing of Hebrew, that different people wrote the different epistle which explains the difference in writing style. Paul usually dictated his epistle, which were transcribed by companions. We can see this in many closing remark of the epistle. For example in Roman 16:22 “I Tertius who wrote this epistle…” Paul only personally wrote Galatians.

There are internal considerations in favor Paul as the author of Hebrews. The characteristic in closing of the epistle (Hebrews 13:15; cf II Thessalonians 3:17-18), The association with “Brother Timothy” (Heb. 12:23), the general pattern of the letter with its doctrinal portion first followed by exhortation to duty and the occurrence of certain distinctively Pauline concept in the letter. (Kent 1972, 18) Another argument in support of Pauline authorship is that Paul’s epistles were ‘password protected’ Paul let it be know that every epistle that was from him he would write in his own handwriting using the large letter something goes like this ‘grace to you’. For example in II Thessalonians 3:17-18 “The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle;
so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, Amen. (KJV-New Scofield) Every epistle of Paul’s contained this closing blessing written in his own handwriting. The fourteen epistles if Hebrew is contributed to Paul are all contain similar close blessing. (All scripture are from KJV-New Scofield)

Romans 16:20 “…the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen”
1 Corinthians 16:23 “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen”
Galatians 6:18 “Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”
Ephesians 6:24 “Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.”
Philippians 4:23 “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen”
1 Thessalonians 5:28 “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen”
2 Thessalonians 3:18 “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen”
1 Timothy 6:21 “Which some, professing, have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee. Amen”
2 Timothy 4:22 “The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen”
Titus 3:15 “All that are with me greet thee. Greet them that love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen.
Philemon 1:25 “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen”
Hebrews 13:25 “Grace be with you all. Amen”

“With these well know signature of Paul: I can assure you no other orthodox writer in the early church would have infringed on Paul’s signature statement.” (Warner 2002). When we look at other epistles by James, Peter, John, or Jude none of them have this type of closing statement. Dr. Ironside makes a strong case in supporting Pauline authorship of Hebrews by stating that there is no question “but that we have Paul’s authentication of this letter…The proof becomes stronger when we turn to general epistle, and notice how different are all the endings. Never once is the word GRACE used except in 2 Peter 3:18 “grow in grace” (Ironside 1952, 12).
According to Dr. McGee, there are few suggestions in the epistle of Hebrews that point to Paul as the author. “The writer was a Jew acquainted with details of Mosaic ritualism (Heb.13:13) He was acquainted with Greek philosophy or rather Alexander thought. The author of this epistle has been in prison in the locality where the ones addressed render (Heb. 10:34) He was at the time in Prison in Italy (Heb.13:23) When Paul was in Rome he used Timothy to carry message and sent him on trip from the West to East (Philippians 2:19) Although theses suggestions are not conclusive but who could better fit this description than Paul?” (McGee 1978, 149) According to Dr. Ironside we can be conclusive as to its human authorship of Hebrews, “We have the well-known statement of the Apostle Peter, which would seem conclusive as to the Pauline authorship. ‘And account that the long suffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles speaking in them of these things, in which wee some things hard to be understood, which they that are learned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” (2 Peter 3:15-16). We know that Apostle Peter writes to Jewish believers and he stated “Our beloved Paul…hath written unto you” according to Dr. Ironside, he believes that Peter is referring to book of Hebrews. (Ironside 1952, 10).

Regarding the external evidence, Origen himself stated that no one really know who the human author of Hebrews. Although he believed the thoughts are Paul’s but the phraseology and composition are someone else. Evidently it was the opinion of the earliest church in the East that Hebrews was Paul’ epistle. It was not until later in third and fourth century that Pauline authorship was denied in Rome. We do know that
whoever wrote Hebrews was well known by the readers that his authorship needed no special clearance.

As far as others suggestions, the name Apollos suggested as author was originated with Luther. Many present day scholar favors Apollo as the possible writer of Hebrew. He seems to fit the profile well. He was a Jew, born in Alexandria, a learned and cultured man, well versed in scripture (Acts 18:24). Pricilla and Aquila, Paul’s friends led him to a fuller knowledge of Christ. Apollo did not see or know Jesus personally (Heb. 2:3). However, the greatest weakness of this suggestion is its complete lack of any early historical testimony. “It is surprising that there is no hint from Alexandria, a great center of Christian learning since Pantaenus, Clement, and Origen, that one of its son had penned this outstanding epistle” (Kent 1972, 21) “It is strange, if Apollos were the author, that the Alexandrian Church never seems to have heard of it, and yet Apollos was of Alexandria. How natural that this church should have had a holy pride I the recognition of his work, and never have permitted his name to be forgotten as the chosen instrument.” (Ironside 1952, 8).

The suggestion of Barnabas was first by Tertillian of Carthage, among reason for supporting this theories are, Barnabas was a levite, there are plenty words of encouragement, he might have contact with Alexandrian, and he acted as mediator between Jewish Christians and Paul in Acts 9 (Kent 1972, 19) According to Dr. Ironside, “So far as Barnabas is concerned, there is not scintilla of evidence that he was its author” (Ironside 1952, 8).

Although some in Origen’s day considered Luke to be the author of the epistle. Clement of Alexandria thought that Luke translated the epistle from Paul’s Hebrews. It
is not possible to be certain of Luke as author in view of present evident. Regarding the possibility of Clement as the author, his writing was too different from Hebrews. As far as Philip is concern, there is no certain evidence, this does not explain the Hellenistic approach in the letter. As for Priscilla and Aquilla and others suggestions they are less likely to be the author than Paul.

I can not be dogmatic or conclusive regarding the human author of the book of Hebrews. Since the writer of the book of Hebrews did not pen his name on the book. It is important to know human author, know that that human authors are instrument of God, but above researching for human author we want to be sure and accepted the ultimate author and authority; God. Many will struggled and disagreed with me regarding the human author of Hebrews. The problem will exist no matter who I am suggested to be the human other of Hebrews. There are objections to every possible suggestions and candidates. I understand and know that this research paper will not resolved centuries old debate regarding the human author of Hebrews. But it is the result of my intensive research regarding why I believe Paul to be the most possible for human author and my substantiation. From what I have discovered I believe Paul to be the best, by far the most prominent candidate possible candidate and others are less likely to be a candidate than Paul. There are internal considerations in favor Paul as the author of Hebrews We know that Apostle Peter writes to Jewish believers and he stated “ Our beloved Paul…hath written unto you” (2 Peters 3:15-16). Therefore, we know that Paul did write to Jews, was it Hebrew? Some believe it is. The characteristic in closing of the epistle of Hebrews is similar to thirteen other epistles written by Paul with ending signature of something similar to “grace be with you” (Hebrews 13:15; cf II Thessalonians 3:17-18). These well
know closing signature of Paul proved to be unlike any other epistles by James, Peter, John, or Jude; none of them have this type of closing statement. The profile of Paul as a Jew, a Pharisee and who no doubt acquainted with details of Mosaic ritualism (Heb.13:13) He was acquainted or exposed to Greek philosophy or rather Alexander thought. Paul has been in prison in the locality where the ones addressed render (Heb. 10:34) He was at the time in Prison in Italy (Heb.13:23) When Paul was in Rome he used Timothy to carry message and sent him on trip from the West to East (Philippians 2:19) Although these suggestions are not conclusive but who could better fit this description than Paul?”
Bibliography


