

## **Naked Bible Podcast Transcript**

### **Episode 173**

### **Introducing the Book of Hebrews**

**August 26, 2017**

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This episode launches the next book study on the podcast: the book of Hebrews. After discussing some preliminaries about the book, the episode preps listeners to the fact that Hebrews is a book that draws heavily on the Old Testament. That strategy of the anonymous author means more than simply quoting the Old Testament. Rather, there are more significant hermeneutical issues to consider—issues that will reverberate throughout the book.

### **Transcript**

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 173: Introducing the Book of Hebrews. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you?

**MH:** Good... good. We finally got here!

**TS:** We finally did! Into the winner... I know something about winning, so it's nice to get into the book that won our poll. We appreciate everybody that voted. And here we are... Hebrews!

**MH:** Yeah, here we are. You had to throw that in again, didn't you?

**TS:** Mmmmm.... every day until football kicks off, I guess! I don't know.

**MH:** Well, on to better things. [laughs]

**TS:** Which would be... ?

**MH:** Which is the book of Hebrews!

**TS:** Oh, oh, okay. The winner. The one that was the winner. Gotcha.

**MH:** You can stop now.

**TS:** So from one winner to another one... Gotcha.

**MH:** [laughing] Right. That's just what I was thinking.

As we do when we get into book studies, we always take the first episode to introduce the book. So we aren't going to actually be getting into chapter 1 today. This is going to be backgrounding. As we introduce the book of Hebrews itself, we're going to talk about a few things about the book that down the road will matter, as far as how we might be influenced to think about this or that word or this or that turn of a phrase or this or that context of something. So it's important, even though it is introductory.

We might as well just start in with the authorship, as most people are going to know that Hebrews doesn't ascribe itself to any authors. It doesn't begin with a claim of authorship; it's anonymous. That isn't necessarily a big deal because the "flavoring" of the content—the Jewishness, if I can use a broad term like that—is still going to come through. So who exactly the author is doesn't really matter. Some people might think it matters if it's Paul. (We'll talk about that in a little bit.)

What I'm going to do is I'm going to read some excerpts from a couple of sources here that are from scholars that have spent most of their careers on the book of Hebrews. We've got Lane and Guthrie—they'll be the two that I draw on, for the most part. But the specific authorship... The Pauline question is part of this bigger question. Granted, that might make a difference to some people because there will be a propensity, or at least some sort of urge to compare what's said in Hebrews to something else that Paul might have said. But, honestly, we're still going to do that because it's all the New Testament. We believe that the New Testament writers are going to present a consistent theology, so in my estimation, not having certainty on a specific author isn't that big of a deal. But we'll jump in here. It's still kind of interesting.

Let me read a little bit from Lane here. I'm trying to remember what source it is. I'll try to look that up as I'm reading here and give people that, just so that if they have the source they can go look at more. But Lane writes:

Hebrews is anonymous, and the identity of the author has been veiled from the earliest period of the church. Although it has been suggested that the author was Priscilla or some other woman, we are well advised to refer to the author as "he" in light of the masculine ending of the participle *diēgoumenon* in Hebrews 11:32.

Let me just stop there. Priscilla is one of the candidates. If you took a course, for instance, on the book of Hebrews and you go over authorship, Priscilla will come up. There's some discussion that she might have been the person who wrote this. What Lane is saying (I'll supplement here) is that there's nothing in the book that would claim a female authorship or exclude a female author explicitly, but

Lane's argument is that there are a couple of places (and he points out this participle in Hebrews 11:32) that suggest a masculine hand. Here's what he means. If you go to Hebrews 11:32, this is the verse that says:

**<sup>32</sup> And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—**

5:00

What's the big deal? Well, the little part of that verse that says "to tell" is a participle in Greek, and it's a masculine participle. Greek participle forms have gender and so this is one of the few indications in the book where you could actually (because of a particular form that the writer uses to refer to himself)... Time would fail me to explain to you of this, that, and the other thing. He uses this participle to refer to himself and he picks the masculine form instead of the feminine form. That's Lane's argument. There are going to be things like this. Not many of them, admittedly, but this is his example. And so he argues that we don't really know who it is, but we know it's not a woman because of this self-reference using a masculine form. That's a reasonable argument. You'd wish there were more than that, but it's still reasonable. Back to Lane here:

The writer was known to the community he addressed (Heb 13:19), but the brief personal notes in Hebrews 13 are not specific enough to reveal his identity. The author clearly was not Paul...

There are a lot of people who would say Paul was the author, and it's probably fair to say there are an equal number of people who say it wasn't. Lane is in this group.

The author clearly was not Paul, though presumably he moved within the Pauline circle and expected to travel with Timothy (Heb 13:23).

If you go to Hebrews 13:23, we read:

**<sup>23</sup> You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.**

People have latched onto this verse to say this must be Paul. Timothy, apparently, gets out of jail and he's going to go join Timothy. Well, we don't really know that because Paul could have been in jail, too. He spent a lot of time in jail. Based upon the dating of this epistle there's a good chance that Paul was in jail. Some would say this couldn't really be Paul talking about Timothy and that doesn't make much sense. Lane is going to argue that it was somebody who knew Timothy and he if knew Timothy, chances are good that he knew Paul. So the verse doesn't really solve anything. It could be Paul and it could also not be

Paul. Lane lands on the side that it's not Paul. He continues here in the paragraph:

[The writer] classed himself as one who had not heard the Lord deliver the message of salvation (Heb 2:3–4). [MH: He wasn't one of the twelve.] He was capable of writing some of the finest Greek in the NT, far superior in vocabulary and sentence construction to that of Paul.

I think this is probably the best argument against Paul. Paul has patterns, just like any writer. There are certain predictable things in Pauline epistles that are going to mark the reality that these multiple texts that we're looking at show the same features, ergo, they were written by the same person. This person is identified in epistles as Paul. We look for these patterns. If we see anything else written with the same patterns, we're going to assign it to Paul because how would you fake that? What Lane is saying here is that when you read Hebrews it's a lot different than what Paul writes, in terms of his vocabulary and sentence structure. And that's true. I think, personally, this is the best argument against the argument being Paul. Lane continues:

He also employs a distinctive range of images that are not found in Paul (Heb 2:1; 4:12, 13; 6:7–8, 19)...

Let's look at 4:12, for instance. Hebrews 4:12 says:

**<sup>12</sup>For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**

In Paul's epistles (the ones that we know he wrote), he never really talks about the Word this way. So this is a different image—a different way of talking about something that Paul *does* talk about but doesn't use the same image. And this is just one example; he has a string of verse references here (2:1; 4:12-13; 6:7-8, 19). So the argument becomes that the writer of Hebrews is not Paul. Lane and others would say that we're probably not looking at Pauline authorship here. He also adds:

[The author] moves easily within the conceptual world of priesthood and sacrifice, emphasizes that are foreign to Paul's letters.

The point there is not to say that Paul never talks about sacrifices or priesthood. He does, but there's such a heavy emphasis in this book that Lane thinks this is an argument against Pauline authorship. You could argue on the other side that Paul is a Pharisee and would therefore know what's going on with the Levitical system. So I think that part of the argument isn't great. Going back to what I said

10:00

a few moments ago, I think the best argument against Pauline authorship is the vocabulary and the sentence structure of the Greek. If you went to seminary and got a degree, either a Th.M. focused on Greek or a doctoral program where you basically have to translate the whole New Testament, you're not going to be looking forward to working in Luke or Hebrews because the Greek is quite different than anything else. It's very elevated. It's literary. It has a higher literary quality. It's like the difference between reading Shakespeare and *Left Behind*. [laughs] It's that kind of thing.

Those sorts of differences show up when we're looking at Greek, so it's very evident that it's different than any of the Pauline letters. Again, I think that's the best argument. Some people, for that reason, have actually proposed Luke because Luke is kind of the same way. They propose Luke as an author. That doesn't make a whole lot of sense because Luke is writing to a Gentile friend. His name is Gentile. He's not one of the twelve. How would he know about Leviticus and the priesthood and all that kind of stuff? So it doesn't really make any sense that Luke would write it, but he gets talked about as an author for that reason. Lane jumps in here and says:

The writer's educational level may be compared with that of Philo of Alexandria and probably reflects training in a gymnasium or a private rhetorical school.

Philo was a very well-known writer in the first century—a well-trained academic. There's going to be content items in the book of Hebrews that are going to hearken back to certain things that Philo wrote and thought about. Some people would say that whoever wrote this had to be sort of schooled the way Philo was. Probably, as Lane says, it reflects training in a private, rhetorical, fancy school. You say, "Well, Paul was taught by..." Paul was taught by Gamaliel, a Pharisee. That's a little bit different than Philo. Philo was not a Pharisee. It's another argument against Pauline authorship here. Lane discusses another issue that matters to people:

Luke's description of Apollos as "an eloquent man" (Acts 18:24), a designation associated with formal rhetorical training and so used by Philo (see Philo *Poster. C.* 53; *Leg. Gai.* 142, 237, 310; *Vit. Mos.* 1.2), has suggested to many scholars that Apollos was the author of Hebrews.

Philo refers to people that were trained the way that he was as "eloquent men," so the fact that Apollos is described this way, and the fact that the Greek itself and some of the content hearkened back to somebody trained in this manner, is used as fodder for many scholars to say that they think Apollos wrote the book of Hebrews. You may wonder how. Lane continues:

The writer was an intensely devout man whose subconscious mind was steeped in the cultic categories [MH: ritual stuff from Leviticus] and language of the

Septuagint. He was also a pastoral theologian who shaped early Christian tradition into an urgent appeal to a community in crisis. He was a gifted preacher and interpreter of salvation, a covenant theologian whose spiritual insight, scriptural exegesis and situational discernment provided encouragement, admonition and pastoral direction. He presents himself as a charismatic leader whose effectiveness did not depend on office or title.

You could say all those things about Paul, but you could probably say them about Apollos, too (the way Apollos is represented in Acts 18, especially the eloquence and the way that ties into Philo). For those who are not on the Pauline side of this, there are a number who think Apollos is a reasonable candidate. But the reality is that we don't really know. Nobody really knows for sure. Lane's material came from the *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*. It's one of the IVP series that I recommend a lot.

I want to quote something from Guthrie's introduction to Hebrews about the same topic (the authorship). He says:

The anonymity of the text is an immediate difficulty for Pauline authorship...

In other words, the fact that the letter begins with no personal greeting, no personal claim, "I Paul, am writing to this or that church." Paul does that all the time, and the fact that Hebrews doesn't do that (Guthrie suggests) is really an argument against Pauline authorship. Why wouldn't he do that here when he does it everywhere else?

The anonymity of the text is an immediate difficulty for Pauline authorship, since nowhere is there any suggestion that Paul would have written anonymously. [MH: Again, in all the other stuff he gives his name.] An apostle who meticulously claims authority in the introduction to the existing epistles attributed to his name is not likely to have sent a letter without reference to that special authority vested in him.

The whole point is that if Paul wrote Hebrews, he doesn't do what he does everywhere else. So it just doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

15:00

Moreover, there is no suggestion in the way that the author of Hebrews writes that he has known the same dramatic experience as Paul underwent at his conversion, which is never far from the surface in his letters...

Of more modern guesses, Apollos has had the most supporters, mainly on the supposition that as an Alexandrian he would have been familiar with the ways of thought of his fellow Alexandrian, Philo, which are supposed to be reflected in the epistle.

So we don't really know who wrote it. There's no reflexive reason to think that Paul wrote it just because it uses the Old Testament a lot. There are some significant disconnects with Paul. I think that's all we really need to say. Whoever wrote it knew his Old Testament well, knew Greek very well, and used the Septuagint a lot. That's going to be an issue of importance as we proceed through the book—using the Septuagint intentionally in certain ways to make certain points.

As far as the audience, who is it written to? Let's read a little bit more from Guthrie here. He says:

The first point to note is the definition of the word 'Hebrews'.

The book opens... let's just read the introduction to the book here. The superscription is "Hebrews," but then we've got:

**Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets...**

You've got a very Jewish context. This is why the book is going to get the superscription it does: "The Letter to the Hebrews." From the get-go, it's oriented to "our fathers," "by the prophets." It's oriented to a Jewish context. Back to Guthrie:

It could be used specifically of Jews who spoke Hebrew (or rather Aramaic),

Maybe the superscription of the book... There's a Jewish context, but are they Jews who spoke Hebrew? Did they speak Aramaic? Are they Hellenistic Jews? There's still a question there because they didn't all think the same. So Guthrie says it could be that he's addressing Jews who spoke Hebrew or Aramaic...

...in which case it would distinguish them from Greek-speaking Jews [Hellenistic Jews]. This suggestion has some other New Testament support (cf. Acts 6:1; 2 Cor. 11:22; Phil. 3:5), but there is no means of knowing whether the traditional title to this epistle was intended in this sense. It may have meant no more than Jews (i.e. Christian Jews), whether Aramaic or Greek speaking.

"Hey, it's written to Jews out there who have become Christians, regardless of whether you speak Aramaic, regardless of whether you speak Hebrew, regardless of whether you speak Greek. You're all Jews and you've become Christians now." The assumption is that Jews speaking any of these languages would have known the Old Testament well, and they could have. They have the Hebrew Bible, they've got Aramaic Targums, and they've got the Septuagint. The

fact that we're addressing Jews is really sort of more broadly important than which group of Jews is being addressed. You can't really know. There's just ambiguity there. Guthrie continues:

In view of the very general nature of the traditional title, it is significant that certain indications are given that a particular community was in mind. Certainly the author knows something of their history and background. He knows they have been abused for their faith and that they have reacted well to the plundering of their property (10:33, 34).

So whoever the author is, he's aware of some of the things that are going on with this group, whoever the group is.

He is aware of his readers' generosity (6:10) and knows about their present state of mind (5:11ff.; 6:9ff.). Certain practical problems such as their attitude to their leaders (13:17) and matters of money and marriage (13:4, 5) are mentioned. It seems most reasonable to suppose that the writer has personal knowledge of the specific people he has in mind throughout the epistle (cf. 13:18, 19, 23). If this is true, the vague character of the title is clearly misleading. [MH: "just a bunch of Hebrews"] One further feature which confirms this is the specific mention of Timothy in 13:23, for Timothy also must have been known to the readers.

So whoever the audience is, they would have known Timothy because the author mentions Timothy, and chances are the author knew this particular group. So it's not random. It's not just Jews anywhere. "Hey, if you're a Jew, you better read this." Yeah, there's a lot of Old Testament in it. It doesn't really matter what language they speak because they're going to have a knowledge of the Old Testament by their primary text or translation, like the Septuagint. But it's not random; it's not just thrown out there. Still, if you're a Jew, you can get a lot of the book, yet the author has a particular group in mind. That's all Guthrie is saying.

20:00 Again, we don't specifically know who that group was. Obviously, they're under persecution. This becomes sort of an issue (and it will become sort of an issue) when we get to certain passages about what's going on with this particular group. To go back to Guthrie, he says:

Still further indication of the nature of the group may be deduced from such references as 5:12...

**<sup>12</sup>For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food..."**

... and 10:25.

**<sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.**

The former is addressed to those who ought by now to be teachers and this has given rise to the suggestion that the readers [the intended audience] were a small part of a larger group of Christians. The most favoured suggestion is that they formed a house group which had broken away from the main church. The exhortation in 10:25 would support this view. There the writer urges the readers not to forsake the assembling of themselves together. It seems reasonably conclusive that the whole of a church would not have been thought of as potential teachers, and it is highly probable that a separatist group might have considered themselves superior to the rest, especially if they were endowed with greater gifts. The closely argued theme in this epistle is in line with the suggestion that a group of people of a more intellectual calibre is in mind.

What Guthrie is trying to do there is he's taking these two passages and saying that even though this is the way it gets preached, "Look, it's kind of unlikely that a whole entire church would be told that they all ought to be teachers by now." Is that really true anywhere? *Some* people in the congregation, sure, should be teaching. They ought to know more content and be more mature. Would the author really say that to every last believer? Probably not. And if that's the case, then who is he addressing? Well, he's probably addressing a subset—perhaps a group within the church or, because he references the assembling together in chapter 10, maybe there's a smaller group who left the bigger group and he's talking specifically to that smaller group. And what he says is, "Well, you're really not teachers. You really need to be taught the basics of the faith." Basically, "You're not as versed as you think you are. There's some potential here for some problems."

And then there's the comment in verse 10 as being still part of a member of a larger group, which might be an issue. All of that can make sense and be coherent but ultimately, again, we're not really told those specifics. But I will say that I think it's reasonable to think that the author is addressing a subset of "Jews" or "Hebrews." He does have a particular audience in mind. I don't know that it's a separatist group or a breakaway group. Maybe it's just a group who believes a certain thing or is struggling with a certain thing. Who knows? But it does make sense that it's not random, it's not just sort of thrown out there to every blasted Jew that to become a Christian you should all be teachers. "This book is addressed to all of you." It makes more sense that the writer has a specific group—specific subset—in mind, whoever the writer was. Be that as it

may. We just can't have complete clarity on that. And that becomes an issue when we get to passages in the book that talk about apostasy—forsaking the faith and that sort of thing. Guthrie, again, says:

It must be admitted that the warning passages say nothing about apostasy *to* Judaism, but only apostasy *away from* Christianity...

On the whole the view that posits the threat of an apostasy to Judaism among certain Jewish Christians, whether former priests or not, has generally more to commend it than alternative views.

25:00 What he's angling for there in that quote is that if the author is writing to Jews (and a subset within that larger group) when he talks about apostasy, they're already Jews. They've made a decision to follow Christ. So the warning passages—very logically, then—are reflecting a concern that they give up their Christian faith. If he's speaking to Jews, then, even though there's nothing explicit about it, the feeling you get is that there could be a problem with certain Jewish people who have accepted Jesus as messiah and are discouraged for whatever reason. They're under persecution and there are certain passages that mention them losing property and stuff like that. Those Jewish converts to Christianity might be reconsidering and might be wanting to go back and become Jews again, forsaking the faith. Guthrie says that's a realistic way to look at this, as opposed to Christians who didn't come out of Judaism but now they're deciding they want to give up their faith and become Jews. That's a different issue. What Guthrie is saying (and I agree with him) is that this makes less sense than, let's say, Gentiles who say, "Well, I did this Christian thing and now I want to become a Jew. Christians are persecuted. If I just became a Jew, I'd get rid of the persecution problem." That's one thing, where you have a Gentile who now wants to convert to Judaism. That's less coherent than saying, "Okay, you've got people who came from the Jewish community and became Christians. They're now under persecution so they're thinking about going back." That makes a little more sense.

We're going to have to think about that as we go through the book because some of you are probably thinking, even now, "Does that have certain points of analogy to maybe the Judaizing problem in the New Testament, like in what Paul writes about, where you had certain Jews that came to the faith and are now insisting on certain practices by Gentile converts?" I would say yeah—there probably is some relationship to that, as opposed to just Jews being cranky. "We're okay that you became a Christian, but you've got to do this, that, and the other thing," or "You just forsake the gospel and you come back and become a convert to Judaism." Those are two related but different things. Which one makes more sense? Paul has this problem—the so-called "Judaizing problem"—in his letters that is going to surface here. In other words, if you're the writer of the book of Hebrews and you're devoting a lot of space to demonstrating that Christ is

superior to the law—that the priesthood of Melchizedek is superior to the priesthood of Levi and Aaron... If you're making these arguments, you're arguing against forsaking your embracing of Jesus as the messiah and just going back to Judaism. I'm agreeing with Guthrie here that this scenario makes more sense than just Gentiles being seduced to become Jews now. It makes more sense that if you've already been part of this community and you've left it to embrace Jesus and now you're wondering if you did the right thing or if you made a mistake here—whatever is going through your mind—that is probably more of the issue than the alternative.

We're going to touch on some things that are probably going to take some listeners into, "Well, what about the Hebrew Roots movement now?" Yeah, I think there are issues there. Frankly, some of the more extreme things going on in the Hebrew Roots movement look a lot like a Judaizing problem to me. Is it more than just sort of pretending to be experts at the Old Testament or something like that just to draw an audience, or whatever? Or, "I want to feel Jewish. I like dancing, so let's do this or that." There are all sorts of gradations. I have really good friends who are pastor in Messianic congregations. They're not Hebrew Roots people. In fact, they're opposed to it. So I'm not going to conflate Messianic congregations with Hebrew Roots. I think a lot of listeners are going to know the difference there—they're two related things, yet they're still different. But I think the more extreme manifestations of the Hebrew Roots thinking... yeah, I think some of what we're going to run into in the book of Hebrews is going to tread on that. It's going to drift over into that territory and that kind of stuff really needs to be addressed.

So who's the audience? It's probably fair to say, obviously, that it's Jews, but there's still some subset group here that has specific problems or concerns.

There are others who say, "Well, does that exclude Gentiles? Can't we have Gentile readers in here that are also in view?" And the answer is, sure! It's the Body of Christ. It's the first century. They've been taught that we're all part of the family of God now. We don't exclude Gentiles. You're certainly going to have Gentiles that are part of this mix. That shouldn't stop us, though, from seeing a Jewish orientation of the audience, because if Gentiles are in the Church and the Word of God is being taught, they're going to be taught from the Septuagint. They can read it. There's no language barrier there. Everybody reads Greek. This is the post-Alexander, Hellenistic world. Everybody's going to be able to read Greek who can read at all. This isn't an obstacle (the fact that it's heavily Old Testament in context, therefore it's heavily Jewish). That's not an obstacle to Gentile folks. There was no New Testament at this time. Their Bible *is* the Old Testament. Whether you're a Gentile or not, if you are a member of the believing community, when you meet to study the Word of God, you are studying the Old Testament. That is just the way it is. You might get lucky, "Hey, a letter of Paul showed up last week! Let's read that thing and then copy it and pass it on." Chances are, you're going to have some of those episodes. But there's no full-

30:00

blown New Testament. The Word of God for the Church in the first century *is* the Old Testament. So Gentiles are going to learn that. There's no obstacle to churches being typically mixed to what we're thinking about in terms of audience. The audience ("our fathers" in verse 1) is going to be oriented to Jews who have become Christians, but that is not to exclude Gentiles who are going to be familiar with the Old Testament. There are a lot of those people out there. We have to remember that, as well.

Let's cover occasion and date. We'll say a little bit about this. We're going to go back to Lane here. I think Lane has some worthwhile things to say about this. He writes:

The writer is alarmed at the group's attraction to traditions that he regarded as inconsistent with the word of God proclaimed by their former leaders (Heb 13:7–9).

**<sup>7</sup>Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. <sup>8</sup>Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. <sup>9</sup>Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.**

The reference to food there is interesting. Does that mean sacrifice to idols or is that Jewish dietary laws? People have argued both sides of that. Back to Lane, who is talking about the writer's concern about this group that is being attracted to and drawn away by traditions that he regarded as inconsistent with what they had formerly been taught. Lane says:

This may account for the tension between the community and their current leaders (Heb 13:1, 17–18)...

The writer of Hebrews has to tell them to respect their leadership. So there's something going on there. There's just something going on there.

...and it may also explain their apparent isolation and lack of accountability to the larger network of house churches (Heb 13:24).

So the supposition is that you have a network of these house churches. Hebrews 13:24 says:

**<sup>24</sup>Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings.**

The fact that it's plural (leaders and holy ones—other believers) leads some scholars (Lane is one of them) to think that we have a network of house churches here. Maybe there's something going on there, too.

These factors would have exposed them to the corrosive impact of their sociopolitical and religious environment.

In other words, if you get something going on in one of these groups, everyone is going to get exposed if you have this network. The writer is concerned that there's something going on there that is inconsistent with what they had been taught before, and it's causing some problems here. He continues:

We should probably understand Hebrews to be addressing the concerns of second-generation Christians. The root of the problem may have been the delay of the Parousia (Heb 10:25, 35–39)...

That's the Second Coming. "Why hasn't Jesus come back?" So he's saying the root of the problem may have been that. He references Hebrews 10:25 here, which talks about, "Keep meeting together, and so much the more as you see the day drawing near." It shouldn't be news to anybody listening to this podcast that the early Church described in the New Testament was made up of believers who thought the Lord was going to return really soon. The longer that takes, you can have people be discouraged by that or think, "What's going on? Why are we suffering? Why isn't the Lord coming back?" Lane suggests that the root of the problem, whatever it was—that they were being drawn away by other teaching or their being discouraged (there's a lot that gets talked about in the book of Hebrews about being discouraged or falling into unbelief)—that the fact that the Lord hasn't come back yet might have something to do with the circumstances of their persecution. It very well could be. Back to Lane again:

35:00

A significant symptom was the faltering of hope (Heb 3:6; 6:11, 18–20; 10:23–25; 11:1), and the writer sensed the grave danger of apostasy among some members, which he defined as turning away from the living God (Heb 3:12) and subjecting Jesus Christ to public contempt (Heb 6:4–6; 10:26–31). Once the sacred covenant bond between God and his people was violated, they would be excluded from covenant fellowship. Weaker members might reject the grace of God and forfeit participation in the new covenant through personal carelessness (Heb 3:12–13; 4:1, 11; 6:4–8, 11; 10:26–31; 12:15–17, 25–29).

He's trying to put in modern words what goes on in some of the passages. We're going to be talking about all these passages—these apostasy passages, the warnings about falling into unbelief, and all that sort of stuff. We don't know specifically what's going on here, but Lane is trying to build the case here that it

has something to do with turning away from Christ—maybe even turning away from God altogether—and there has to be some reason for that. Again, he's thinking it's persecution and the delay of the Second Coming. So he says:

These factors might well account for the urgent tone and pastoral strategies adopted by the writer.

We don't know for sure, but all of that is reasonable to think. He also adds:

In assigning a date for the composition of Hebrews, we must first allow for the fact that both the writer and his audience had come to faith through the preaching of those who had heard Jesus (Heb 2:3–4) and had subsequently served as leaders during the formative period of the community (Heb 13:7).

Again, it's this second generation. We're in the first century and, probably, it takes a little time for the original twelve and the early church, then that church gets dispersed (Hebrews is going to touch on that circumstance a little bit)... It's probably going to take ten or twenty years or so after the crucifixion for this set of circumstances to manifest itself. But you have second generation converts here, who are Jews coming to the Christian faith and accepting that Jesus is the messiah. That takes a little bit of time. So to date the book, you've got to think in those terms.

Further, we learn that the present members had been believers for an extended time (Heb 5:12). If we allow that at least three or four decades have elapsed since the beginning of the Christian movement [the resurrection], the earliest date we can assign for the composition of Hebrews would be around A.D. 60.

A lot of scholars are sort of oriented by this thought. A.D. 60 seems to be a preferable number for a lot of them. Why? To summarize a lot of material, it's before 70 [laughs] and the destruction of the temple. We have this whole problem that there's nothing specific about the destruction of the temple in the book. It's also considerably after the resurrection. 60 is going to become a number that's also preferred because of some other things. We have Timothy's imprisonment and he was connected with Paul and the chronology of Paul's life (his death is usually sort of fixed around the mid-60's, we'll say just to use round numbers here). There's this assumption that we're probably around 60. In regard to the 70, let me throw this out from Lane:

Some scholars have set an upper limit at 70, the year in which the Jerusalem temple was destroyed by Titus. This conclusion is based on the writer's referring to cultic activity in the present tense [MH: stuff that goes on in the temple] (e.g., Heb 7:27–28; 8:3–5; 9:7–8, 25; 10:1–3, 8; 13:10–11) and the presumption that cultic activity was being carried out in Jerusalem. But the writer shows no interest

in the Jerusalem temple or in contemporary sacrificial [practices]. In Hebrews 9:1–10, for example, the focus is on the tabernacle in the wilderness rather than the temple. Since the sanctuary is considered in relation to the old and new covenants and the contrast between the two, the writer refers to the tabernacle (and its association with the old Sinai covenant) rather than to the temple (see Heb 8:5).

40:00

What Lane is saying there is that you can't really take the language about temple practices as indicating for sure that the book was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, but you would think if it was written after the destruction of the temple that something would have been said. This kind of talk goes on for a lot of dating of New Testament books because it's hard for us to imagine the impact of the destruction of the temple on this community at this time. It would be like... what could we compare it to? I guess for Catholics it would be like seeing the Vatican destroyed. You would think that everything that you wrote about your faith after that point would somehow reference that because it would just be so dramatic (or the end of the papacy or something like that). For modern political times, it would be like the White House gets burned down or something like that. It's an event of such magnitude that if you're discussing anything related to, in the one case religion and in the other case your political system, you would reference this event in some way. You wouldn't just say nothing. It's an argument from silence, but part of me thinks that's kind of reasonable, too. It is so dramatic that you think you would have said something. So I'm comfortable with a date for the book prior to 70. I'm comfortable with that, and I don't think we need to look for anything beyond 70.

If you get into the authorship, something called the "Edict of Claudius" is going to come up. This was a decree where there were a lot of Jewish Christians expelled from Rome by the Emperor Claudius in A.D. 49. Some Hebrew scholars think that Hebrews 10:32-34 refers to this event. Let me just read you the verses.

**<sup>32</sup> But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, <sup>33</sup> sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. <sup>34</sup> For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.**

Some think this is a reference to the Edict of Claudius, where Jewish Christians are just being driven out of Rome. We know from the book of Acts in chapter 18, which specifically mentions this... I'll just read Acts 18:2. This is the account of Aquilla and Priscilla.

**<sup>2</sup> And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.**

There's a direct reference to it in the life of Paul, and it links to Aquila and Priscilla. Some people think Hebrews 10 might be referring to the same thing, and that means the book had to be written after A.D. 49. So you give it awhile, you're pushing 60 again, and 60 becomes the orienting point.

There are others (and Lane is actually included in this) who think Hebrews 10:32-34 (collectively) do not refer to the Edict of Claudius. He thinks it refers to something more severe like the persecutions of Nero, which are going to be in the early 60's. So he dates the book of Hebrews before 70 but still a little bit after what Nero is doing. Again, we don't know.

I think just for round numbers, 60 is not bad—early 60's. It's an imprecise thing. It's far from a perfect science. But that's what you're dealing with. Ultimately, if you're a Jew, you're going to be familiar with how your people have been persecuted, and specifically how Jewish Christians have been persecuted. They are the targets, whether it's Claudius or Nero. So when the book does talk about persecution, that helps you orient the audience to a Jewish context (and maybe still a subset here, depending on whatever circumstance the writer happens to be talking about—whether it's struggling with giving up the faith or persecution or what-not). There's still something to be said for the Jews as a whole and then drilling down into that situation of Jewish Christians that are under a specific set of circumstances. They find themselves under persecution or having other specific problems that causes a date around 60 to make sense. There's nothing that would be really getting in its way, but we just don't know for sure.

That was all backgrounding for the book. The other thing we should comment about that really gets into interpretation... One of the big deals that we're going to run into in the book of Hebrews (and I mentioned it before) is the Septuagint. The book makes heavy use of the Old Testament. No question, the writer knows his Old Testament well and quotes the Old Testament all the time. He's comparing the superiority of Christ to lots of things in the Old Testament, so you're going to have to quote the Old Testament for that. You're going to have to have a deep knowledge of the Old Testament to make those points. It's very obvious.

45:00

Generally, when the writer quotes the Old Testament, he quotes the Septuagint. This is the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. In other words, he does not quote the traditional Hebrew text. There are going to be places in the book where a theological point is going to extend from (or be based upon or at least oriented around) something the Septuagint says—the way the Septuagint renders whatever text its own creators had in front of them. And that text may be different than the traditional Masoretic Text. We're going to run into cases where

it is. We're also going to run into cases where it's not clear if the writer had a different text or if he's just being really elastic in his translation (whoever the Septuagint translator was, and then the New Testament author picks that up). We're going to run into situations like that. Heads-up on that.

The other thing that's related to this is just general interpretation. When you start quoting the Old Testament and you say, "this passage meant this" and you're making arguments out of it, there are going to be places where we wind up in the Old Testament... let's just say something in the Psalms about the messiah for the sake of illustration. There's going to be something going on where the writer will say something, he'll quote something from the Old Testament (chances are, out of the Septuagint), and you're going to look at the passage, and even if we can be sure it's a pretty literal rendering and he probably had the same text as the traditional Hebrew text and he put it into Greek, you're going to be looking at what the Old Testament says and then you're going to be looking at what the book of Hebrews says and you're going to think, "What is that guy thinking? How in the world does he extract that theological point out of that verse? It just doesn't look like the Old Testament is saying what this guy is saying it says!" We're going to run into those situations. And that's going to take us into something called the *sensus plenior*—the "fuller sense" problem/controversy issue in interpretation.

I'm going to read a little section from Donald Hagner, who was a professor at Fuller for a number of years. He has a book called *Encountering the Book of Hebrews*. This is an undergraduate textbook, but I like his discussion of *sensus plenior* here. He says:

Given the fulfillment that has come to God's people in Jesus Christ, the Old Testament is seen to possess a fuller or deeper sense, a *sensus plenior*. The recognition of this fuller meaning of the Old Testament that goes beyond the intention of the original authors does not open the door to arbitrary and frivolous exegesis (or "eisegesis"), as is sometimes alleged...

One is able to compare the Old and New Testaments and repeatedly say, "This is that." This type of interpretation is called *peshet*, and is found also in the Qumran community, which (wrongly) understood itself to be on the verge of eschatological fulfillment, and which, of course, lacked Christ as the key to the Scriptures...

We've talked about that in relation to Melchizedek in relation to the *11QMelchizedek* text. So there are some places where you can look at the Old Testament and our writer says "this is what it means." Sometimes it's going to be clear and other times you're going to be wondering what in the world is going on. If you remember *11QMelchizedek* in the Melchizedek podcast episode, for some reason whoever wrote *11QMelchizedek* linked Melchizedek to the *elohim* of Psalm 82—the one presiding over the group of *elohim*. He sort of deifies the

figure. What in the world is he talking about, and how is he getting that out of Psalm 82? We talked in that episode about how there are different threads that extend from Melchizedek (this whole idea of kingship and that gets tied into messiahship, and the messiah is cast as more than a man). You have all these layers or small thoughts that lead into one big thought, and then that big thought becomes the basis for another thought. This is what you see going on in the Second Temple period and how certain people interpret the Old Testament.

50:00

What Hagner is saying here is that there's some relationship between Qumran scribes (or other scribes in the Second Temple period) who look at the Old Testament and they don't just see the words in front of them. They see all the ideas that have preceded. And they just sort of glom all that together and then they come up with an interpretation out of that single passage that leaves the reader thinking, "Where do you get that?" They actually get it from lots of places, but they're packing it into this one verse. It's still biblical, but you couldn't get all of that just from the words of this one verse. The words of this one verse sort of build upon lots of other verses from other places and ideas that have preceded it. And that all gets packed into that one verse and the writer just says what he says based upon looking at that one passage.

What Hagner is saying is that the *sensus plenior* idea... We're living on the other side of the cross and we can see that the full impact of some of what the Old Testament says really can only be discerned after the cross with the story of Christ and all that. So these Old Testament passages say what they say but they have a fuller sense. We're going to run into a lot of those kinds of situations in the book of Hebrews. He actually has an extended discussion on *sensus plenior*, and I think it's really worth reading the whole thing. It's three paragraphs. I think it will maybe give you a little bit better idea of what we're dealing with here. Then I'm going to throw in a couple thoughts of my own at the end. This is good, but I think there's just something that needs to be added to it (actually two things). Hagner writes in his little sidebar in the books called "*Sensus Plenior* in the Interpretation of the Old Testament":

In the vast majority of Old Testament quotations in Hebrews, as throughout the New Testament, we encounter an understanding of texts that does not grow out of grammatico-historical exegesis—that is, out of the actual meaning intended by the original authors for the original readers. Because of this, the use of these quotations in Hebrews often has been questioned or even rejected by scholars as arbitrary and frivolous. [MH: In other words, some scholars say the New Testament authors are just making things up.] These texts, it is alleged, simply do not mean what the New Testament authors take them to mean.

It is a fact that the New Testament writers find more meaning in texts than the original authors intended, or even could have known. In this they follow an already established Jewish practice wherein certain texts were regarded as having

more meaning than was realized in their particular historical contexts, as, for example, in the so-called messianic psalms. These texts pointed beyond themselves to the future. The first Christians, all of them Jews, read their (Old Testament) Scriptures differently after they had encountered the risen Christ and the fulfillment he brought. From that time on, Christ was the hermeneutical key that unlocked the meaning of the Old Testament—their interpretation became christocentric. Many texts (not all!) were now seen to point to Christ and what had happened, was happening, and would happen through him in the future.

The meaning of texts now seen retrospectively through the new prism of Christ often is called *sensus plenior*, a fuller or deeper sense. Here, the original author alluded unconsciously to things beyond his purview, the ultimate meaning of which could be known only at a later time by those who experienced the fulfillment brought by Christ.

Now two thoughts of my own on this. On the one hand, there's obviously something to this because of Christ. If you read both Testaments, what you read in the New Testament is invariably going to influence your thinking in some way at some point of the Old Testament. You just can't help for that to be the case. So that's on the table. I get it. I think that's going to be something that's easy to see.

55:00 As far as what Hagner has to say about that, I have a couple thoughts. I would say the Old Testament statement may have meant more than the Old Testament authors understood. We get that. But it can't mean less. And it can't mean something contrary. I think a line does need to be drawn there. It can mean more. What the Old Testament writer is writing down (and he didn't realize it) is going to mean more than he thinks it means. That is true. But it's not going to mean less. In other words, the original intent is not going to be violated. It's not going to mean less and it's not going to be contradictory.

My second thought is that I personally think the issue of how the fuller sense operates (its connection to Christ) would actually be better understood when we interpret the Old Testament in its ancient Near Eastern context. If we do this first, then we don't impose Christ on the Old Testament. I would argue that we don't need to do any kind of imposition like that. My view is that the fuller sense of what the New Testament is saying actually becomes more comprehensible if we take the Old Testament in its own original context in the first place. That is, we can see how the thought process proceeded more clearly if we really understand what's going on in the Old Testament.

To try to put it yet another way, *sensus plenior* is the idea that here's something the New Testament writer is saying, he quotes the Old Testament, and you look back at the Old Testament and think, "How could he get that?" I think that's a problem for us because we can't think as abstractly about the Old Testament as they could. The reason they could is because a lot of what the Old Testament

text says inherently is hooked into a wider worldview—a wider way of thinking. It's a supernaturalist worldview with a certain cosmology. People in the ancient Near East are not used to thinking the way modern Bible students and pastors and scholars are taught to think, where you take the text apart syllable by syllable (the grammatical-historical-exegetical method), where you concord results and compare "he uses this word 17 times and this one only three." Nobody's doing that in the ancient world. That's just the way it is. Modern scholars don't like to hear that, but it's the truth. Nobody is reading texts that way in the ancient world. When they read texts, they know there's an initial way to understand the words (a first thing that pops into your head). I don't want to use the word "literal" because it's so misunderstood, but there's this first reflex way of reading it in your immediate setting and circumstances. But they know that to really understand this text, the meaning of a lot of the language here is going to be apparent only if you're aware of the wider frame of reference of the writer and the people he's writing to. They're going to use words that are just *packed* with theology—that are just *packed* with layers and layers of meaning. A metaphorical reading—a symbolic reading—of the Old Testament is going to be more reflexive... Old Testament people would go there earlier than we would. They're just going to gravitate to that because they can look at the words on this piece of paper, on this parchment, on this animal skin (whatever it is)... they're going to look at the words there and because of their worldview they can grasp the full range of possible meanings more easily than we can. And a lot of what falls in the full range of meanings is going to be abstract—it's going to be metaphor or symbolic. They're just going to have that sort of loaded into their heads at the outset. And we don't!

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So when we look at the way a first century person quotes a text that was written a millennium earlier, and the person who wrote it a millennium earlier is culturally, religiously, and ethnically part of the same group, they are able to understand how this text that they are quoting could have been understood or read. They are able to discern terminology and pick up on the semantic baggage—the metaphorical baggage—and all of the meanings that could be loaded into a term much more easily/reflexively than we can. They're just going to see things that we don't. They're going to see connections. We look at a term and we're going to think two or three possibilities. They're going to think five or six. And some of those five or six are going to be built on metaphor, intellectual framework, cognitive frame of reference, worldview, cosmology, and all this stuff.

So I actually think this problem of *sensus plenior* is in some ways (not in every case, but in many ways) an outgrowth of our inability to read the Old Testament the way an Israelite would have read it, and also it's an outgrowth of generations of people who have gone before us being taught not to read it that way. I'm a scholar. I'm not an enemy of doing what we call the "grammatical-historical" method of exegesis because we deal with texts. This is what we have. We need to examine them in every way that we possibly can. But getting the meaning of a text is not about bean-counting. No meaning of any passage is going to hinge on

how many times an author uses a lemma. But that's the way we're taught. That's useful, depending on how you use the data. But word counts and even syllable counts, statistics... they are not going to get you where you need to go in a number of cases. In fact, they could actually mislead you. They actually become obstacles to being able to think widely and being able to think more abstractly.

Lest that idea scare you, I'm talking about being able to think like an Israelite would have thought. There are lots of people in the church that think of a dinosaur when they come across Leviathan because they've been taught that. Nobody in Israel is thinking of a dinosaur when they come across Leviathan. Nobody. Even if they believe that there was a great sea dragon out there somewhere that could chomp down on their ship, they know what Leviathan means. It means "uncontrolled chaos and bad stuff that can happen to you." It's a metaphor. Even if they assign reality to the metaphor, it's still a metaphor. It still operates on that level. We just don't read stuff that way because we're modern.

So I actually think our lack of modernity and, in some cases, our resistance to a supernatural worldview of the Bible generally, has made the *sensus plenior* idea a tougher pill to swallow than it ought to be. I would not say, and I don't think Hagner lands here... I think what he says needs to be qualified a little bit, which is why I'm adding these two thoughts. Just go back to the little ditty: the Old Testament can mean more than what the Old Testament writer could have had in their head. I'll grant that, even though I think a lot of the stuff that scholars think the Old Testament writer didn't know they may have had floating around in their heads because they read a text a different way. They could read it, again, against the broad ancient Near Eastern backdrop.

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But I'll still grant that there are things in the New Testament because of Christ—the specific outcome of themes like kingship and messiahship and royal ruling and priestly mediation and cosmic mountain stuff and divine council/family metaphors... We know that has its ultimate culminative end-point in Christ. We know that, so I'm not saying the Old Testament writer could have known that. But they could have known a lot more about that because they're linking what they're writing back into that world. I think they deserve more credit. The Old Testament guys deserve more credit than Hagner is giving them and than other scholars give them. I will admit that, yep, there are some things they couldn't have known the specifics about—Jesus of Nazareth and how this played out. So the Old Testament could mean more than what the authors could have thought, but it is not going to mean less. It's not going to be violated. It's not going to be contradictory. The New Testament meaning that it extracts is not going to be contradictory to something that could have been discerned if you were an Israelite living in an Old Testament world. That's the part I'm sort of objecting to and I think needs to be qualified. Yep, they couldn't have know every precise point because that requires Jesus, but the stuff that the New Testament writers are saying about Jesus is going to, in fact, be linkable to an Old Testament worldview that Old Testament writers really could have discerned and had

floating around in their heads. But we don't, so we think they didn't see it, either. And I don't think that's the case. I think we need to give the Old Testament a little more "cred" than a lot of scholars give it.

Again, we are moderns and we are taught to think about texts in certain ways. We do not read the Old Testament like Israelites read those books. We need to do that, and the more we do that, I think the *sensus plenior* will make more sense. We'll actually be able to see how someone could have thought that way. We've already seen a little bit of that with Melchizedek. You look at some of the stuff said about Melchizedek in the New Testament (this whole way he's described) and you look back in the Old Testament and think, "none of that's in the Old Testament." Well, it depends on how you think about what's written in the Old Testament. If you're just thinking about words and looking up meanings of the words in dictionaries, then you might have a problem. If you're able to understand those words against the backdrop of a certain worldview, then the journey is not so far.

So we're going to run into stuff in the book of Hebrews that's going to take us down a lot of these paths. I think I can safely say it's going to be interesting. You're going to see things in the text that you may not have seen before, and you're certainly going to be forced to think thoughts—you're going to have to go through a thought process—that you haven't gone through before in the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. So for this audience, I think that's going to be fun. I think we'll learn a lot. I hope we'll become more appreciative about how to get away from a rigid, blinders-on sort of literalistic approach to the biblical text. You're going to learn when we study this book that this is not what they were doing. The writer of Hebrews is just going to blow your mind. If you're a rigid literalist like that, he's going to lose you pretty quickly. You've got to be able to think outside of that box and try to think more abstractly and set the ideas against the backdrop of the ancient Near Eastern worldview. If you can do that, you're going to see how the writer could get where he landed and how Christ is a big factor in that and how it doesn't violate the Old Testament itself.

**TS:** All right, Mike. We will be looking forward to chapter 1 next week.

**MH:** Good stuff! Angels already... [laughs] How can you not want to talk about angels?

**TS:** Absolutely. We're looking forward to it. All right, Mike, I just want to remind everybody out there that if you haven't subscribed to our podcast, please do so at Google Play or iTunes or anywhere else you subscribe to our podcast. If you can, leave a review. For this book of Hebrews, please grab a friend, neighbor, maybe your neighbor's dog or cat, I don't know... somebody... to listen to the podcast with you. It's a good time to jump on board with the book of Hebrews.

With that, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast!  
God bless.