

deSilva, Hebrews, Session 1a, Resources from Notebooklm

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of deSilva, Hebrews, Session 1a, Introduction to the “Letter to the Hebrews”: the Who, What, and Why of the Sermon (Part 1) Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. David deSilva's lecture introduces the Book of Hebrews, highlighting its unique contributions to Christian theology. **The text explores** the book's mysterious authorship, suggesting a connection to Paul's circle but ultimately emphasizing the unknown author's exceptional mastery of Greek rhetoric and deep engagement with the Old Testament's Septuagint translation. **DeSilva analyzes** the author's rhetorical techniques, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of ancient educational and philosophical traditions. **He further examines** how the author interprets Old Testament scripture typologically and morally, connecting it to Jesus' life and teachings. **Finally**, the lecture emphasizes the author's skillful use of Greco-Roman cultural imagery to enhance his message and persuade his audience.

2. 17-minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. deSilva's, Hebrews, Session 1a – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → General Epistles → Hebrews).



deSilva_Hebrews_Session01a_Intro.mp3

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. David A. deSilva's "Hebrews, Session 1a":

Briefing Document: Key Insights from Dr. deSilva on the Book of Hebrews

I. Introduction and Overview

- **Accessibility & Importance:** While often perceived as "inaccessible" due to its complex engagement with the Old Testament (particularly the Levitical cult), the book of Hebrews is a vital text that makes "distinctive contributions to the formation of Christian theology and the vision for discipleship."
- **Unique Perspective on Jesus:** Hebrews offers a unique perspective on Jesus "beyond the realm of his earthly ministry." It explores the Son's pre-incarnate existence and the theological significance of his death, resurrection, and ascension.
- **OT Significance:** Hebrews gives considerable attention to the Old Testament, interpreting it in unique ways to reveal how it testifies to Jesus.
- **Focus on Faith:** The book is well-known for its chapter on faith (chapter 11) and provides insights into the nature and behavior of faith.
- **Addressing Suffering:** It deals extensively with suffering, especially suffering resulting from obedience to God. It provides resources to endure and triumph through such suffering.
- **Summons to Discipleship:** Hebrews calls believers to gratitude, encourages them to seek the "applause of heaven," and emphasizes the importance of a supportive Christian community.

II. Authorship and Identity of the Author

- **Anonymous Text:** Although traditionally attributed to Paul, Hebrews is anonymous and doesn't identify its author.
- **Rejection of Pauline Authorship:** DeSilva argues against Pauline authorship based on two primary factors:
- **Conversion Experience:** The author of Hebrews states that he was converted by the preaching of others, contradicting Paul's claim of direct divine intervention. DeSilva points to Hebrews 2:3-4: *"How shall we escape if we neglect such a great*

salvation? It was declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him..." In contrast, Paul's conversion is described in Galatians 1:11-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:3-10, where he insists that he was directly called by God and not through the preaching of others.

- **Rhetorical Style:** The author's commitment to rhetorical artistry contrasts with Paul's emphasis on plain speech. Paul said, as quoted by DeSilva, that he preached "*not in the loftiness of words or wisdom.*" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). In contrast, the author of Hebrews uses "rhetorical ornamentation to delight the ears of his hearers".
- **Authorship in the Pauline Circle:** The most probable conclusion is that the author was someone "in the Pauline circle" who was not Paul himself. Some speculated it was Barnabas (a Levite) or Apollos (a skilled speaker).
- **Prisca (Priscilla) as Author?** While a possibility, the use of a masculine participle to describe the author in Hebrews 11:32 makes it highly unlikely, since "*it's also highly unlikely that a female teacher in the first century would try to disguise her gender by projecting her identity as that of a male preacher.*"
- **Unknown Author:** The identity of the author ultimately remains unknown, but this doesn't detract from the message. As Origen said, "God knows."

III. The Author's Background and Skills

- **Master of Greek:** The author was a well-educated man, a "master of the Greek language," displaying a sophisticated command of grammar and syntax, evidenced by his frequent use of participles, genitive absolute constructions, and hypotactic syntax.
- **Rhetorical Training:** The author demonstrates "formal training in the art of rhetoric," particularly at the pre-gymnasium level (prior to college).
- **Use of Pro-Gymnasmata:** The sermon follows patterns found in rhetorical school textbooks. As an example of this, he presents a detailed analysis of Hebrews 12:5-11, showing how it follows the classic "pro-gymnasmata" structure involving:
 - Introduction ("You have forgotten the exhortation...")
 - Thesis (Quoting Proverbs: "My son, do not regard the formative discipline of the Lord lightly...")
 - Rationale ("For whom the Lord loves, the Lord disciplines...")

- Restatement of Thesis ("Endure, then, for the sake of formative discipline...")
- Confirmation of Rationale ("For who is the son whom a father does not discipline?")
- Argument from the Contrary ("If you are without formative discipline...")
- Argument from Comparison/Analogy ("Since we have had our biological fathers...")
- Conclusion/Quotation ("All formative discipline... later, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness...")
- Oral Presentation: The author composed the sermon "conscious of the oral delivery of the message and of the oratorical nature of its composition." He assumes his audience will "hear" his message more than "read" it.
- Jewish Cultural Location: The author's primary "cultural resources" are from the Old Testament, especially the Septuagint. He has "a picture of being primarily located in a Jewish environment for the course of his upbringing."

IV. Key Themes and Interpretive Approaches

- Old Testament as Witness to Jesus: The author interprets the OT as a testament to Jesus, showing how "the piecemeal and partial witness of God... becomes a united witness to God's actions in the world in the Son."
- Unique Hermeneutic: The author reads Old Testament texts as:
 - "spoken to the Son"
 - "spoken about the Son"
 - "spoken by the Son"
- Typological Interpretation: The author sees figures and events in the Old Testament as "types" or models that prefigure Jesus. This includes Moses as a type of mediator and the Levitical priesthood as a type for Jesus's priesthood.
- Moral Interpretation: The author uses Old Testament examples as moral models, both positive and negative, for the audience to learn from.
- Greco-Roman Cultural Influence: While rooted in Jewish scriptures, the author also draws upon Greco-Roman culture, including:

- Pedagogical Wisdom: The idea of learning through suffering or experience, "emaphen, epaphen" (as seen in Hebrews 5:8). The author uses the analogy of milk versus solid food to describe different stages of spiritual growth (Hebrews 5:11-14).
- Philosophical Themes: The author presents Jesus in ways reminiscent of Socrates, who faced death to liberate his followers from the fear of death.
- Athletic Metaphors: The author uses athletic imagery of a race and a wrestling match to motivate believers (Hebrews 12:1-4).

V. The Author's Use of the Septuagint

- Primary Source: The author primarily uses the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament rather than the Hebrew text.
- Capitalizing on Translation Differences: The author sometimes uses differences between the Hebrew and Greek versions for his theological arguments (e.g., Psalm 8, Psalm 40). DeSilva gives two examples of this.
- In the Hebrew version of Psalm 8, the phrase "a little lower than the angels" clearly signifies a lower *position*. The Greek Septuagint, however, is ambiguous. The author of Hebrews is able to leverage this ambiguity in Hebrews 2 to suggest that the "little lower" could refer to the *temporal* inferiority that Jesus assumed during his earthly life.
- In the Hebrew version of Psalm 40, the phrase "ears you have dug for me" speaks of the creation of ears for obedience. In the Septuagint version, however, the phrase reads "a body you have prepared for me." The author of Hebrews uses this to highlight how God prepared the body that the Son took on as Jesus.
- Authority of the Septuagint: The author assumes that his audience shares "a commitment to the authority" of the Septuagint as God's Word.

VI. Conclusion

- Well-Rounded Leader: The author of Hebrews was a sophisticated communicator with a strong educational background, well-versed in both Jewish and Greco-Roman culture. He was likely a part of the Pauline evangelistic team.
- Focus on Persuasion: His aim was not just to inform, but to persuade his audience through skillful rhetoric, using Old Testament scriptures and other cultural resources.

This briefing document provides a solid foundation for understanding the complexity, richness, and key messages within the Book of Hebrews, as presented by Dr. deSilva.

4. Hebrews Study Guide: 1a, Introduction to the “Letter to the Hebrews”: the Who, What, and Why of the Sermon (Part 1)

Hebrews: A Deep Dive Study Guide

Short Answer Quiz

1. Why is Hebrews often considered an "inaccessible" book of the New Testament?
2. What are some of the distinctive contributions that the author of Hebrews makes to Christian theology?
3. What evidence exists against the traditional view that Paul was the author of Hebrews?
4. What evidence points to the author of Hebrews being a skilled rhetorician?
5. Explain how the author of Hebrews uses the "pro-gymnasmata" rhetorical pattern.
6. How does the author of Hebrews use the Septuagint to support his arguments?
7. What does the author mean by a "typological interpretation" of the Old Testament?
8. How does the author use the concept of "milk versus solid food" in his sermon?
9. In what ways does the author present Jesus as a figure reminiscent of Socrates?
10. How does the author use athletic metaphors to encourage his audience?

Answer Key

1. Hebrews is often considered inaccessible due to its intricate investigation of the Levitical cult, its connection of these rituals with the work of Jesus, and its extensive interpretation of the Old Testament, often in ways that are unfamiliar to modern readers.
2. Hebrews provides a unique perspective on the pre-incarnate activity of the Son, offers significant theological reflection on Jesus' death and ascension, and explores the importance of the Old Testament as a witness to Jesus with a distinctive hermeneutic.
3. The author of Hebrews states they were converted by the preaching of others, which contradicts Paul's claim of direct divine intervention in his conversion, and

the author's commitment to rhetorical artistry conflicts with Paul's philosophy of preaching.

4. The author displays mastery of the Greek language through liberal use of participles and hypotactic syntax and exhibits formal training in rhetoric through the use of devices like alliteration, antithesis, and the pro-gymnasmata pattern.
5. The pro-gymnasmata pattern, involving an introduction to a thesis, rationale, argument from the contrary, comparison, historical example, quotation, and conclusion, is used in Hebrews 12:5-11 to explore the meaning of God's discipline in a believer's life.
6. The author of Hebrews often capitalizes on the ambiguities and differences between the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old Testament, as seen in his interpretation of Psalm 8 and Psalm 40, to support his claims about Jesus.
7. A typological interpretation finds Old Testament figures or activities as foreshadowing Jesus and his deeds, with those figures acting as "types" or "models" of Jesus' role and significance.
8. The author uses the analogy of "milk versus solid food" to represent different stages of Christian maturity, using it to chide the hearers for their lack of progress and to encourage them to pursue a more mature faith.
9. The author presents Jesus as embracing hardship and death to liberate his followers from slavery to the fear of death, which is similar to the way the philosopher Seneca portrayed Socrates, who refused opportunities to escape death and imprisonment.
10. The author uses the athletic images of a race and a wrestling match to encourage his audience to persevere in their faith. The race encourages endurance, while the wrestling match highlights the struggle against sin.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the author of Hebrews' distinctive hermeneutical approach to the Old Testament. How does he use typological interpretation, and what theological conclusions does he draw from it?
2. Discuss the evidence for the author of Hebrews' rhetorical training. How does his use of rhetorical devices and patterns enhance his message, and what does this reveal about the nature of Hebrews as a piece of communication?

3. Compare and contrast the author of Hebrews' use of Jewish and Greco-Roman cultural resources. How does he integrate these different worlds into his theological arguments, and what does this suggest about his intended audience?
4. Explore the major themes and challenges presented in Hebrews, including the nature of faith, the problem of suffering, and the call to gratitude. How does the author address these issues, and what do they reveal about his understanding of discipleship?
5. Examine the evidence for and against various proposed authors of the book of Hebrews, including Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, and Prisca/Priscilla. Which proposal is the most likely, and what does the enduring mystery of authorship suggest about the book's place in Christian tradition?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Christology:** The theological study of the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- **Atonement:** The reconciliation between God and humanity through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- **New Covenant:** The covenant established through Jesus Christ, replacing the Old Covenant with the law of Moses.
- **Hermeneutic:** A method or principle of interpretation, particularly of biblical texts.
- **Typological Interpretation:** A way of reading the Old Testament in which Old Testament figures or events are seen as foreshadowing aspects of the person and work of Christ.
- **Levitical Priesthood:** The priesthood of ancient Israel, derived from the tribe of Levi, which performed ritual sacrifices and served in the Tabernacle and Temple.
- **Septuagint:** The Greek translation of the Old Testament, used by Greek-speaking Jews in the ancient world.
- **Pro-gymnasmata:** A series of exercises used in Greco-Roman education as a foundation for rhetoric.
- **Rhetoric:** The art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing.
- **Alliteration:** The repetition of the same sound or letter at the beginning of closely connected words.

- **Antithesis:** A rhetorical device in which two opposite ideas are put together in a sentence to achieve a contrasting effect.
- **Homo-arcton:** A rhetorical device that involves beginning words or phrases with the same series of sounds.
- **Homo-taluton:** A rhetorical device that involves ending words or phrases with the same series of sounds.
- **Hypotactic Syntax:** The use of subordination in sentence construction, which places greater emphasis on the main clause.
- **Paratactic Syntax:** A style of writing or speaking in which clauses are linked together with conjunctions without necessarily subordinating one to another.
- **Paideia:** The Greek term for education and the shaping of character, particularly through formative discipline.
- **Karpos:** The Greek term for "fruit," often used metaphorically to represent the outcome or result of something.

5. FAQs on DeSilva, Hebrews, Session 1a, , Introduction to the “Letter to the Hebrews”: the Who, What, and Why of the Sermon (Part 1) Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about the Letter to the Hebrews

- 1. Why is the Letter to the Hebrews often considered a challenging book of the New Testament?**
2. The Letter to the Hebrews is often seen as inaccessible because of its complex engagement with the Levitical cult, the Day of Atonement ritual, and its intricate interpretations of the Old Testament. It requires a deep familiarity with Old Testament concepts to fully understand its message and may seem strange to modern readers unfamiliar with those traditions. The author uses a variety of rhetorical devices, and the overall style is that of a carefully crafted sermon rather than a personal letter.
- 3. What unique contributions does Hebrews make to Christian theology?**
4. Hebrews provides a profound exploration of Jesus's person and work, particularly his pre-incarnate existence, his death and ascension, and their significance for the atonement. It uniquely focuses on the heavenly ministry of Jesus, and how the new covenant, inaugurated through Jesus, surpasses the old covenant of the Law. Hebrews establishes the importance of the Old Testament as a foreshadowing of the person and work of Jesus, presenting a distinct hermeneutic for interpreting its passages. It also offers a compelling vision for discipleship, highlighting faith, gratitude, perseverance through suffering, and community support.
- 5. Why is the authorship of Hebrews debated?**
6. While traditionally attributed to Paul, Hebrews is actually anonymous and lacks the usual features of a Pauline letter, such as self-identification and greetings. The author's description of their conversion as coming through the preaching of others clashes with Paul's claim of direct divine revelation in Galatians. Additionally, the author's sophisticated rhetorical style differs from Paul's emphasis on plain speech. Despite this, many early church fathers proposed that the author was within Paul's circle, considering people like Barnabas, Apollos, or even Prisca as possibilities. Ultimately, the true author remains unknown.
- 7. What can we discern about the author of Hebrews, even if we don't know their name?**

8. The author of Hebrews was a highly educated individual and a master of Greek, exhibiting advanced linguistic skills, and an awareness of ancient rhetorical techniques. They were deeply rooted in Jewish scripture, especially the Greek Septuagint version, which shaped their interpretation of the Old Testament. They were also familiar with Greco-Roman philosophical, pedagogical, and athletic concepts, which are evident in their writing. The author was undoubtedly part of the Pauline missionary circle and had an established relationship with the audience, as shown by references to past interactions.

9. How does the author of Hebrews use the Old Testament in their argument?

10. The author uses the Old Testament extensively to demonstrate that its promises and prophecies find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ. They interpret the Old Testament through a variety of methods including typology, demonstrating how the people, institutions, and events of the old covenant foreshadow the realities of the new covenant in Jesus. The author interprets some Old Testament passages as referring directly to Christ or as being spoken by Christ himself. They also use moral interpretations of Old Testament narratives to provide examples for their readers to emulate or avoid. It's also important to note that the author bases their arguments primarily on the Greek Septuagint, capitalizing on its differences from the Hebrew texts.

11. What is the significance of the author's use of rhetoric in Hebrews?

12. The author of Hebrews is a skilled rhetorician, employing sophisticated devices such as alliteration, parallel structures, antithesis, and quotations from well-known sources, to engage the audience's ears and minds. This underscores that Hebrews was written as a sermon meant for oral delivery and appreciation. The author's use of rhetorical forms, such as that found in the pro-gymnasmata, demonstrates their training in persuasive argumentation. Rhetoric serves not just to present information but also to move the audience to embrace the message of the Gospel.

13. How does Hebrews address the issue of suffering?

14. Hebrews explores how to understand suffering as a part of one's obedience to God. It frames suffering as a form of God's formative discipline that leads to spiritual growth and draws on a wide range of examples to model endurance and faithfulness. The author uses Jesus as the prime example, who learned obedience through suffering. Ultimately, Hebrews provides resources to understand

suffering not as an obstacle but as an opportunity for spiritual maturation and a powerful sign of our allegiance to Jesus.

15. What are the central themes of Hebrews for Christian discipleship?

16. Hebrews urges believers to cultivate gratitude for God's grace, recognize the obligations it entails, and allow it to transform them into loyal servants of God. It encourages a focus on heavenly approval rather than earthly praise and emphasizes the importance of a supportive Christian community for spiritual perseverance. Central to the theme of discipleship is the call to unwavering faith, active obedience, and the courage to resist the pull of shame and to endure suffering for one's allegiance to Jesus.