

deSilva, Hebrews, Session 1b, Resources from Notebooklm

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

1. Abstract of deSilva, Hebrews, Session 1b, Introduction to the "Letter to the Hebrews": the Who, What, and Why of the Sermon (Part 2) Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. David deSilva's lecture analyzes the "Letter to the Hebrews," exploring its authorship, audience, and historical context. **DeSilva challenges the traditional view** that the audience consisted solely of Jewish Christians, arguing that the letter's content suggests a mixed congregation of Jewish and Gentile converts. He further posits that the letter's central concern is addressing the wavering faith of some congregants, encouraging their perseverance despite social pressure and hardship. **The text examines** the historical experiences of the congregation, their socialization into Christianity, and their interactions with their non-Christian neighbors. **Ultimately**, the lecture aims to understand the letter's purpose and rhetorical strategies in motivating continued commitment to the Christian faith.

2. 17-minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. deSilva's, Hebrews, Session 1b – 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_Session01b_Intro.mp3

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided source, "DeSilva_Hebrews_EN_Session01b.pdf":

Briefing Document: Analysis of Hebrews (Session 1b, David deSilva)

Document Overview:

This document summarizes the key points from Dr. David A. deSilva's lecture (Session 1b) on the "Letter to the Hebrews." DeSilva focuses on identifying the intended audience, the historical context, and the purpose of the letter by analyzing the text itself, rather than relying on traditional assumptions. He uses careful textual analysis and historical understanding to reveal the author's motivations and the challenges faced by the original recipients. The document highlights that the text is a sermon, not a letter, aimed at a mixed congregation facing a crisis of commitment.

Key Themes & Ideas:

1. Audience Analysis: Challenging Traditional Assumptions:

- **No Clear Address:** The text lacks a typical letter opening, making identification of the audience difficult. The phrase "those from Italy greet you" (Hebrews 13:24) is the only geographic reference, offering limited clues.
- **Rejection of "Jewish Christian Only" Audience:** DeSilva challenges the traditional view that Hebrews was written *solely* to Jewish Christians, despite scribal titles often suggesting so. He refutes common arguments:
- **Old Testament Focus:** DeSilva argues that Gentile Christians were equally familiar with and interested in the Old Testament scriptures, as evidenced by other New Testament texts like Galatians and 1 Peter which have a high concentration of Old Testament references and were written for a Gentile audience.
- **Sacrificial Cult:** The focus on the Levitical cult is not unique to a Jewish audience. Rather, it addresses the core question of how to reconcile the Old Testament's ritual practices with Christian faith for *all* believers, Jewish or Gentile. The author is tackling the chief stumbling block of the Old Testament as sacred scripture for *both* Jewish and Gentile Christians: How to hold on to the texts without practicing the ritual cult that they prescribe.

- **Reversion to Judaism:** While some propose the sermon aims to prevent a reversion to Judaism, DeSilva notes that the author speaks of "turning away from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12), a concept more applicable to Gentiles who turned from idols.

1. Identifying the Audience: A Mixed Congregation

- **Gentile Presence:** Positive indicators suggest a mixed congregation of Jewish and Gentile Christians. These indicators are:
- **Primary Instruction:** The audience was taught "repentance from dead works and faith toward God," "instruction about baptism," and other foundational elements of Christian teaching. This focus on repentance from dead works would be much more relevant for Gentiles (who were coming from idolatry) rather than Jews (who already had faith in God and a concept of judgement and the resurrection).
- **Pauline Mission:** The author is likely connected to the Pauline mission which focused on reaching the nations. Paul's mission involved both Jews and Gentiles; therefore, a mixed congregation is more likely.
- **Location:** The document concludes, based on the phrase "those from Italy greet you", that the letter was composed in Italy, probably Rome, but the location of the recipients is likely to be somewhere within the Pauline mission belt.
- **Social Analysis:** The audience represented a range of social classes. Some had property confiscated, some were able to offer hospitality, and there was concern about ambition to recover status.

1. The Community's History:

- **Charismatic Origins:** The community's origins involved a powerful experience of the divine, including "signs and wonders," confirming the gospel message. This initial experience motivated the audience to break from their old ways, whether Jewish or Gentile.
- DeSilva makes an important point here: The group was invested in with the charismatic legitimation from being put in touch with the divine, which legitimized their foundational world view and story.
- "In this experience of conversion, of hearing the word, the hearers also experienced the divine presence and power."

- **Re-socialization:** New converts were immersed in the Old Testament (read through a Christ-centered lens), and taught about the gospel, baptism, the laying on of hands, and teachings around resurrection and eternal judgement. These are similar to Pauline Churches in other places.
- "They were immersed in the oracles of God, particularly no doubt in a Christ-centered reading of the Old Testament scriptures, and they were immersed in the basic teaching about Christ."
- **Past Persecution:** The community had faced intense hostility from their neighbors, marked by shame, reproaches, imprisonment and confiscation of property. Despite this, they showed courage by showing support for those most targeted by the non-Christian neighbors.
- "Now remember the earlier days in which, having been enlightened, you endured a great contest of sufferings, in part being made a by reproaches and trials, and in part making yourselves partners with those thus treated."
- **Motivation of Neighbors:** Neighbors acted out of a desire to correct what they saw as "deviant" behavior and to bring back those who had defected. This motivation could have been informed by the neighbor's own religious beliefs or desire to enforce community standards.

1. The Crisis: Faltering Commitment

- **No New Opposition:** The text does not reflect a new wave of persecution or a specific doctrinal deviation, but a more subtle erosion of faith and commitment.
- **Withdrawal from Community:** Some members have begun to abandon gathering with the larger Christian group, a key indicator of waning commitment.
- "In Hebrews 10:25, the author says, do not abandon the assembling of yourselves together, as is the habit of some."
- **Accommodation:** Believers are beginning to accommodate themselves to their non-Christian neighbors, abandoning the "heavenly city" they were promised.
- **Primary Danger:** The author's main concern is a "failure of commitment," leading to desertion of the Christian group and a loss of focus on the rewards of Christian faith.
- "The believers have lived too long without honor in the world and without having received the glory that was promised to God's sons and daughters."

1. **Author's Strategy: Motivating Perseverance**

- **Three Key Strategies:** The author's overarching goal is to encourage perseverance and loyalty. He does this through:
 1. **Despising Shame:** The author urges hearers to disregard the social pressure exerted by their neighbors and to pursue a higher, Godly honor.
 - "The author encourages the hearers to despise shame so that they will not feel that social pressure so that they will be insulated from their neighbor's attempts at social control."
 1. **Showing Gratitude:** The author reminds the audience of the immeasurable benefits they have received through God's grace, encouraging a response of gratitude and loyalty to God and Christ.
 - "This is really at the heart of the author's rhetorical strategy to keep the addressees focused on the matchless gifts that have come to them, and that will yet come to them through Jesus' mediation of God's favor."
 1. **Mutual Encouragement:** The author emphasizes the need for believers to support one another, recognizing the importance of community in maintaining their faith.
 - "The author stresses their collective responsibility for each individual's perseverance."
 - **Patronage & Reciprocity:** The author's reliance on the concept of patronage was rooted in the socio-cultural world in which they moved. DeSilva points to the importance of access to resources in this world, which could be granted from a patron in return for loyalty. The author used this as a way to encourage the audience to view God as a patron that grants grace and favor, which should be met with a response of gratitude and loyalty.
 - **Warning Passages:** Warnings against defection are included to highlight the severity of dishonoring God and his gifts.
 - "But the author is simply warning his hearers against outraging so generous and so powerful a benefactor by publicly dishonoring him and his gifts by defecting..."
 1. **Date of Writing:**

- **Before AD 100:** It is generally agreed that the document was written prior to the end of the first century, as Clement of Rome appears to allude to Hebrews in his own letter, dated around AD 96.
- **Possible Pre-70 Date:** DeSilva finds arguments for a pre-AD 70 date persuasive, suggesting that the text's references to ongoing Levitical sacrifices in the Temple are more naturally interpreted in the time before its destruction in AD 70.
- “Such a statement, again, most naturally reflects the ongoing contemporary performance of the Levitical priests of their scripturally prescribed duty.”
- DeSilva does *not* find arguments persuasive that claim the passages on sacrifices could have been written after AD 70, as both Josephus and the Mishnah have an investment in the continuation of these sacrifices, but the author of Hebrews does not share that.

Conclusion:

DeSilva's analysis reveals Hebrews as a powerful sermon addressing a congregation struggling with faltering commitment amidst social pressures. The author skillfully employs rhetorical strategies, drawing upon the community's shared experiences and the wider social framework of the time to encourage perseverance and continued loyalty to Christ. By challenging traditional interpretations, DeSilva provides a more nuanced understanding of the text and its message for its original audience and its relevance today.

4. Hebrews Study Guide: 1b, Introduction to the “Letter to the Hebrews”: the Who, What, and Why of the Sermon (Part 2)

Hebrews: A Comprehensive Study Guide

Short Answer Quiz

1. What is one piece of geographic information we have about the audience of Hebrews, and why is it not definitive?
2. What is the common element found in the titles given to Hebrews by scribes and copyists?
3. What are two reasons frequently used to argue that Hebrews was written for a Jewish Christian audience?
4. What does the author suggest was the primary instruction for the audience after their conversion, and why does this point toward a Gentile audience?
5. According to the text, what was the significance of the community's initial conversion experience?
6. What are the six components of the audience's catechism (basic teachings) in their new faith?
7. How did the community's neighbors react to their conversion, and what were their motivations?
8. What is the primary issue that the author seeks to address in Hebrews, and what evidence is given for it?
9. What are the three principal strategies for motivating perseverance identified by the author, and what does each strategy address?
10. What evidence suggests that Hebrews was written before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70?

Answer Key

1. The only geographic reference is “those from Italy greet you,” which is not definitive because it does not tell us where those being greeted are located, only where the greeting originated.
2. The common element is the assertion that the document was written for the consumption of Christian Jews.

3. Two reasons often cited are the author's thorough interest in the Old Testament and the degree of familiarity with the Old Testament assumed by the author in his audience.
4. The primary instruction was repentance from dead works, faith towards God, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment, which points toward a Gentile audience because Jews were already familiar with the last two components.
5. The community's initial conversion experience was a powerful, experiential encounter with the divine that included receiving the word, seeing signs and wonders, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which confirmed the truth of the message of the gospel.
6. The six components of their catechism include repentance from dead works, faith towards God, teachings about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.
7. The neighbors reacted with reproaches and trials or harassment, motivated by a desire to correct what they perceived to be deviant behavior, to win back those who had defected, and to discourage further conversion to the Christian group.
8. The primary issue is a failure of commitment, evident in some members beginning to withdraw from Christian meetings, which is found in the author's reference to those who "abandon the assembling of yourselves together".
9. The three strategies are despising shame (to combat negative social pressure), showing gratitude to God (to redirect focus to their divine benefactor), and encouraging one another (to provide social support).
10. The author's statements regarding Levitical sacrifices in the temple being ongoing suggests a pre-70 date because the rhetorical question, "Otherwise, would they not have ceased being offered?" implies the sacrifices were still ongoing.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the author's use of the Old Testament in Hebrews, considering both the arguments for and against it indicating a Jewish audience. In your response, address the significance of Old Testament quotations and allusions in the text.
2. Discuss the social context of the audience of Hebrews, including their previous experiences of persecution and the reasons why their neighbors found the

Christian group to be a “deviant” one. How might the author use these experiences in his letter?

3. Explore the author’s understanding of conversion and socialization within the early Christian community, highlighting the key teachings and rituals that shaped their identity. To what extent does this process of re-socialization offer unique advantages to the audience?
4. Explain the rhetorical strategies employed by the author of Hebrews to motivate perseverance among the audience. How do these strategies appeal to the core values of the community and their relationships with God?
5. Evaluate the significance of the potential pre-70 A.D. dating of the book of Hebrews. How does this timeframe potentially change our understanding of the content and purpose of the letter?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Charis:** Greek word encompassing three interconnected meanings: favor (the disposition to give), the gift itself, and the gratitude returned to the giver.
- **Catechism:** A summary of the principles of Christian religion in the form of questions and answers, as used for religious instruction.
- **Dead Works:** Actions or behaviors that are not life-giving, often associated with idolatry or behaviors that lead to death.
- **Gentile:** A person who is not Jewish.
- **Idolatry:** The worship of idols or false gods.
- **Levitical Cult:** The system of religious practices and sacrifices associated with the Levite priests in the Old Testament.
- **Paideia:** The process of education, training, or discipline, often in reference to the formation of character and virtue.
- **Patronage:** A social system in the Greco-Roman world based on reciprocity between a benefactor (patron) and beneficiary, involving mutual obligations.
- **Reciprocity:** The practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit, in the form of gifts and services.
- **Re-socialization:** The process of learning and adopting new values, norms, and behaviors after a major life change, such as religious conversion.

- **Second Temple Period:** The historical period in Jewish history between the rebuilding of the Second Temple in Jerusalem (c. 516 BCE) and its destruction by the Romans in 70 CE.

5. FAQs on DeSilva, Hebrews, Session 1a, Introduction to the “Letter to the Hebrews”: the Who, What, and Why of the Sermon (Part 2) Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about Hebrews

1. **Who is the intended audience of the Book of Hebrews, and how do we know?**
2. The traditional view is that Hebrews was written for Jewish Christians, and this idea comes primarily from scribal titles and the author's heavy use of the Old Testament. However, the author's arguments and the text itself suggest a mixed audience of both Jewish and Gentile Christians. The author assumes familiarity with Old Testament scriptures, which is often seen as a uniquely Jewish trait, but it is clear that Gentile converts were also exposed to the Old Testament within their Christian communities. The inclusion of "repentance from dead works" and "faith toward God" as foundational teachings for the audience points towards Gentiles, as these were core conversion themes for them. Additionally, the author seems to address a community within the Pauline mission, which was primarily focused on Gentiles. The mention of those from Italy sending greetings suggests that the letter may have originated in Italy, possibly Rome.
3. **What is the primary issue or challenge the author of Hebrews is addressing?**
4. The central issue is not a doctrinal deviation or a new wave of persecution but a *failure of commitment* within the audience. Some members were beginning to withdraw from Christian gatherings, likely because they were becoming weary of the social pressure and the delayed fulfillment of their hope. They were potentially seeking to return to their previous lives to regain some social standing. The author is aiming to re-ignite their initial zeal and to solidify their understanding of the value of their faith in Christ, encouraging them to stay the course.
5. **What are the "dead works" the author mentions in Hebrews 6:1, and why is that significant?**
6. "Dead works" are most likely alluding to acts of idolatry. This fits in with Paul's teachings, where Gentiles are described as turning from idols to serve the living God. This also aligns with the use of the term "dead" to describe idols elsewhere in contemporary literature, such as in the Wisdom of Solomon. Additionally, the term may refer to works that are fruitless, those that lead away from life. It is

unlikely to refer to performing the Old Testament law or cultic rituals. The use of this term reinforces the idea that the audience was partly composed of those converted from idolatry.

7. **Why does the author of Hebrews emphasize the importance of holding on to their "boldness" and "original commitment?"**
8. The author repeatedly calls the audience to hold on to the boldness and the commitment that characterized their early faith. The community had experienced a profound encounter with the divine at their conversion and endured social pressures and persecution as a result. The author wants to remind them of this strength and ensure they don't lose sight of the rewards that await them. It's essentially an argument that maintaining their commitment and the social identity of the Christian community will help them to attain the "promise" that is before them. He emphasizes that they must persevere with the same zeal and courage they showed at the outset, not allowing present hardships to diminish their resolve.
9. **How did the audience of Hebrews experience "shame" and what does the author suggest they do about it?**
10. The audience faced significant shame from their non-Christian neighbors. They were reproached, harassed, and even had property seized because they were perceived as deviant for abandoning traditional religious and social practices. The author encourages them to "despise shame". By doing this, they will recognize their value is not defined by their neighbors' opinions, and can be insulated from social control tactics. He uses examples of faithful figures in the Old Testament and Jesus as examples of those who despised shame for a greater reward. He also reinterprets their experience of shame as a noble "contest" that will lead to honor from God.

11. What are the primary strategies the author uses to encourage perseverance among the audience?

The author employs three main strategies: (1) **Despising Shame**: He urges them to disregard their neighbors' attempts to shame them, viewing it as a noble contest to be overcome. (2) **Gratitude to God**: He reminds them of the immense benefits they have already received and will receive through Jesus, aiming to inspire a deep sense of gratitude that motivates their continued faithfulness and reinforces their relationship with God. (3) **Mutual Encouragement**: He stresses the need for the community to support each other, emphasizing their collective responsibility for each member's perseverance and to act as a counter-balance to the social pressures they were receiving from outside the community.

1. **How does the author use the idea of "patronage and reciprocity" in his arguments?**
2. The author leverages the concept of patronage and reciprocity, a central aspect of their social and cultural context. He presents God as the ultimate benefactor who has showered them with blessings. This creates a relationship of gratitude and obligation, as the author seeks to emphasize that the hearers have an obligation to act in ways that show loyalty to God as their ultimate benefactor, even if this action is costly. This framework motivates the audience to remain connected to Jesus so that they might continue to enjoy access to God and the benefits of this relationship.
3. **When was the Book of Hebrews most likely written, and why?**
4. While the exact date is unknown, Hebrews is generally agreed to have been written before the end of the first century AD, and most likely before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70. The reference to the continuing practice of Levitical sacrifices at the Jerusalem temple as if still a current practice and not something in the past, is the most persuasive indicator that the sermon was given before the destruction of the temple. Additionally, early Christian writings suggest the letter existed prior to AD 96. Given that Timothy is mentioned as a figure still fit for travel this would also indicate an earlier time frame.