

Possible Authors of the Book of Hebrews

By Daniel Stanfield

January 24, 2021, rev 2022

BibleSanity.Org

Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	3
1.1.	References Used	3
1.2.	Dating the Book of Hebrews	3
2.	Qualifications of Authorship	4
2.1.	The Internal Biblical Qualifiers	4
2.2.	External Factors	6
2.2.1.	Excellent Knowledge of Jewish History, Sacrifice, and Worship.....	6
2.2.2.	Greek Quality and Style of Writing	6
2.2.3.	Historic Church Traditions.....	6
3.	Proposed Authors	7
3.1.	Why None of the 12 Disciples are Considered Possible Authors.....	7
3.2.	Why Paul has been Popularly Held to be the Author of Hebrews.....	7
3.3.	Why Paul is Not Considered a Possible Author.....	8
3.3.1.	Internal Considerations.....	8
3.3.2.	Regarding the Written Word Itself	8
3.4.	Why Luke is Not Considered a Possible Author	9
3.5.	Who was Clement of Rome?.....	10
3.6.	Consideration of Apollos.....	10
3.7.	Consideration of Barnabas.....	11
3.7.1.	The Internal Criteria	11
3.7.2.	The External Criteria	12
3.8.	Consideration of Mark	13
3.9.	Consideration of Priscilla and Aquila	14
3.10.	Consideration of Silas.....	14
4.	Conclusion.....	15

1. Introduction

This paper represents my personal investigation, based on clues from Scripture and some historic commentary and traditions, in order to present what we can ascertain about the author of the Book of Hebrews. Diligent examination highlights the fact that we cannot decisively establish this identity, however, we can reasonably eliminate some proposed authors and comparatively evaluate the most likely authors.

Internal evidence from Scripture is taken to be the inerrant Word of God, with full authority in a literal, verbal, plenary sense. Note that this authoritative inerrancy is ascribed to the original writings of Scripture, not to any particular translation. Historic commentary and traditions are not vested with any such authority, but are still valuable considerations.

The **proposed authors** examined here include the following: Paul, Apollos, Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Luke, Mark, Priscilla and Aquilla, and Silas. Also discussed is the scriptural disqualification of any of the direct disciples of Jesus Christ.

1.1. References Used

For **language-based considerations**, I primarily reference Steven Ger's commentary on Hebrews, "The Book of Hebrews, Christ is Greater," part of the "Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series" (2009). Other sources were not recorded.

For **Church Father commentary**, I have utilized various online sources which I did not record, and digital copies of the actual writings from Ages Digital Library, v5.

For **dating purposes**, it is my personal habit to utilize three primary sources, all of which are in general agreement with mainline conservative dating.

- James Ussher's "The Annals of the World" (2006 ed of 1658 publication)
- Unger's Bible Dictionary, 1988 ed. (First pub 1957)
- Wilkinson & Boa's Talk Thru the Bible (a Bible Outline reference set, pub 1982)

1.2. Dating the Book of Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews does not quote other New Testament Scriptures, nor does it discuss New Testament period events, nor does it address particular conflicts churches were facing. It supplies only a few clues in regard to dating.

We know that the Book of Hebrews precedes the destruction of the temple. This is understood based on the fact that Hebrews describes the ministering of the priests in present-tense, especially in chapters 9 and 13 (9:6-7, 13:10-11), which would not be the case after the temple had been destroyed in 70 AD.

A much better internal evidence for the dating of the Book of Hebrews is that it was written shortly after Timothy had been released.

Know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. – Hebrews 13:23 (NASB)

Scripture does not explicitly identify a period of imprisonment for Timothy, but Paul's first Roman imprisonment lasted for two years, we know Timothy was with him at that time. This is our best case for

a period of imprisonment for Timothy. In “Annals of the World,” Ussher states his belief that Timothy was in prison with Paul and sets his release in 64 AD. Other references date Paul’s release at 62 AD.

Note that the author of Hebrews completed the book while waiting for Timothy to come to him, and we know that the author is also in Italy (Hebrews 13:24), so this is a necessarily short time after Timothy’s release. Thus, if Timothy was released with Paul in 62-64 AD, then Hebrews was written (completed) in 62-64 AD.

Of course, the ‘release’ referred to could coincide with Paul’s second imprisonment. This is much less likely because Timothy was not with Paul when he was arrested the second time, and it is uncertain that Timothy was able to join Paul before his execution. If Timothy had joined Paul, and was subsequently also arrested at this time, it would have been less likely that he would have been released. Note that if this later date is indeed the case, then Hebrews would have been written around 67-69 AD, which still precedes the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

In conclusion, the Book of Hebrews can be dated 62-69 AD. It was probably written around 62-64 AD, with an alternate dating of 67-69 AD, and it was by no means written after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

2. Qualifications of Authorship

2.1. The Internal Biblical Qualifiers

There is a small set of qualifiers that we can know from Scripture about the author.

We know that the author was not saved by the direct witness of Christ, but was evangelized by others. This is revealed by Hebrews 2:3, as the author (“to us”) received salvation as witnessed by “those who heard,” i.e. from the disciples of Christ.

How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard. – Hebrews 2:3 (NASB)

We know the author was a Jew. Hebrews 13:10 & 13 refers to the Jews using inclusive language, which identifies the author as being Jewish, as the larger context deals with Jewish worship and sacrifice.

We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat...So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. – Hebrews 13:10, 13 (NASB)

We know the author was in Italy at the time Hebrews was written. Hebrews 13:24 uses the identifying phrase, “those in Italy,” in closing salutation. Because this is the only greeting given, it is understood to be inclusive of the author.

Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. – Hebrews 13:24 (NASB)

We know that the author was known to the recipients of the Book of Hebrews from 13:18-19.

Pray for us...so that I may be restored to you the sooner – Hebrews 13:18-19 (NASB)

NOTE: The fact that the recipients of the Book of Hebrews knew the author contradicts any theory of intentional anonymity of the author or suppression of authorship by the church. The author was known at the time the book was authored and first circulated.

The argument of anonymity or suppression has been applied to Luke, hiding his identity because he was a Gentile, to Barnabas, hiding his identity because he was at odds with Paul, and recently has been applied to Priscilla, hiding her identity because she was female. However, intentional anonymity equates to deception by the author of Scripture, and is therefore an untenable theory. Likewise, because the author was known to the recipients, suppression of authorship by the early church would likewise be deceptive and is also an untenable theory.

Why then, no name?

Rather than assume intentional anonymity or suppression, we need to realize that about half the New Testament authors did not name themselves within the content of their book. There are nine New Testament authors (counting Hebrews as the ninth). Four authors; Paul, James, Jude, and Peter, named themselves in the content of their books. John named himself only in Revelation, but not in the Gospel of John or in 1, 2, or 3 John, and Matthew, Mark, and Luke (like the author of Hebrews) did not name themselves as author in the content of their books. Therefore, it should not be seen as unusual not to have the author's name given within the book, and the absence of a name does not indicate any sort of imagined author-audience perception problem.

Now let's go back to John. Of interest to the Book of Hebrews is that in 2 & 3 John, the author identifies himself in a way the churches will recognize, "the elder" without giving his actual name. Further, 2 John is addressed to "the chosen lady and her children." An easy assumption is that specific names are being avoided as a caution against persecution, but perhaps not – note that 3 John is also written by "the elder," but is addressed specifically to Gaius. At any rate, it is not dissimilar to the Book of Hebrews being sent without specific written identification, but with greetings from "those in Italy."

It seems clear that the author was a church-planting missionary. This is evident from the benediction of the book, i.e. Hebrews 13:15-35.

- The author has been with the recipients and is planning to return – vs 19-23
- Recipients admonished to support their leaders – vs 17, 18, 24
- Exhortation to daily walk and the work of the ministry – vs 15, 16, 21
- An associate of Timothy (vs 13:23), who was a church-planting missionary vs 13:23

We know that the author was an associate of Timothy, and we know the author was not Timothy himself, from Hebrews 13:23.

Know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. – Hebrews 13:23 (NASB)

Reasonably, we can deduct that the author of Hebrews is someone known to us from Scripture. This is indicated by these last three points:

- The author was known to the recipients of the Book
- The author was involved in church-planting ministry

- The author was an associate of Timothy, and therefore a probable associate of Paul, and/or others including Luke, Mark, Barnabas, Peter, and Silas.

The missionary church-planting ministry of Paul and others are well-represented in the Book of Acts, and it seems that someone who met these three qualifications, would probably be someone we know of from the Book of Acts, and/or the Epistles of Paul. This is an assumption, but one justified by significant evidence to oppose the idea that some unknown individual could easily be the author.

2.2. External Factors

2.2.1. Excellent Knowledge of Jewish History, Sacrifice, and Worship

Whoever the author is, had a formal Jewish education and an excellent understanding of Jewish sacrificial law and worship. While it is understood that any orthodox Jew of that time period could understand these things well enough to author the book, the systematic arrangement of these ideas as a thesis argues for a thorough understanding of the subject matter as well as a formal education, so the qualification has merit.

2.2.2. Greek Quality and Style of Writing

Eloquent Greek Writing

The Book of Hebrews has a very eloquent style and an extensive Greek vocabulary.

In his commentary to the Book of Hebrews, Steven Ger says the following:

... (the author's) command of the Koine Greek language is exquisite, arguably superior to any other New Testament author, with perhaps the exception of Luke

And Ger cites Luke Johnson's comments on the author's vocabulary:

... 154 words not found elsewhere in the New Testament, 90 found (only one other time)

Ger also presents Origen's objections to the Greek language of Hebrews being translation based:

...the document revealed no indication of having been translated from Hebrew, and that it was, contra translation, characterized by a healthy excess of Greek idiom.

Comparison to other Books Written by the Same Author

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and also Clement of Rome have writings which can be compared to the Book of Hebrews. Differences and similarities can be evaluated for any factor that seems relevant. It is important to consider these observations as clues, not as singular determining factors. It is worth noting that for Apollos, Barnabas, and Silas we do not have examples of written works which could be compared to Hebrews.

2.2.3. Historic Church Traditions

Irenaeus (130-202 AD) Irenaeus made a point of establishing all four of the Gospels as Canon, and declared the Gospels of Mark and Luke to be the work of John Mark and Luke, who accompanied Paul. He did not, however, consider Paul to be the author of Hebrews.

Clement of Alexandria (150-215) Stated expressly that the Book of Hebrews was originally written by Paul in Hebrew and translated by Luke into Greek. This idea seems to be at the root of the eventual assignment of Hebrews to Paul at the Council of Trent.

Tertullian of Carthage (155-240) The expressed opinion of Tertullian was that Barnabas was the author of the Book of Hebrews. In “On Modesty 20” (207-208 AD), Tertullian references a then-extant manuscript of Hebrews which named Barnabas as the author, from which he quotes Hebrews 6:4. Considering that the manuscript could not have been more than 160 years removed, this comment rates a degree of respect.

Origen of Alexandria (185-254) was opposed to the concept that the Book of Hebrews was translated into Greek from Hebrew, and seems to lean away from Paul, but is actually rather ambivalent on the whole subject.

If I gave my opinion, I should say that the thoughts are those of the apostle, but the diction and phraseology are those of someone who remembered the apostolic teachings, and wrote down at his leisure what had been said by his teacher. Therefore if any church holds that this epistle is by Paul, let it be commended for this. For not without reason have the ancients handed it down as Paul’s. But who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows. The statement of some who have gone before us is that Clement, bishop of the Romans, wrote the epistle, and of others that Luke, the author of the Gospel and the Acts, wrote it. But let this suffice on these matters.

The other various Church Fathers were divided or silent in their opinions regarding the authorship of Hebrews. Among the writings I have surveyed, the most noteworthy are the four above.

3. Proposed Authors

3.1. Why None of the 12 Disciples are Considered Possible Authors

The primary reason that all of **the original disciples of Christ are excluded** as possible authors is because of Hebrews 2:3 which makes the author someone who received the gospel indirectly, “After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard.” This would not be the case for any of Jesus Christ’s disciples, including both Matthias (Acts 2:21-26) and Paul (Acts 9).

3.2. Why Paul has been Popularly Held to be the Author of Hebrews

There are two very strong proponents for Paul being the author of Hebrews. They are the Roman Catholic Church and the King James Bible.

The Tradition of Pauline Authorship using Luke or Clement of Rome as a translator/scribe is a tradition that was held by some of the Church Fathers. This answered how Hebrews could be authored by Paul, when it was clearly not his Greek writing. This was primarily advocated by Clement of Alexandria (see above).

The Roman Catholic Church declared Hebrews to be a Pauline epistle in the Council of Trent (1545-1563). This is a very late date to make such a determination (1,500 years late), but marks the ‘establishment’ of Paul as the author.

The King James Version (KJV) of the Bible was published in 1611, just 50 years after the Council of Trent. The King James Version reflected this decision by the Catholic Church by titling the book, “The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews,”. Since the KJV is the de facto historic Bible of the English language, virtually without peer for over 350 years, its assignment of Paul as the author has been generally accepted.

Paul meets several other criteria. Paul was a Jew, and was exceptionally well-educated in the Law, he was a church-planting missionary well known to many churches, he worked with Timothy and was in Italy at the time Hebrews was written. Additionally, while there are marked distinctions in the writing of the Book of Hebrews, the systematic logical progression of well-organized ideas is very similar to the Book of Romans.

Finally, casual reading presents an ‘Occam’s Razor’ mentality that since Paul authored so many of the other Books of the New Testament, then he must be a good default guess for the authorship of Hebrews. This assumptive perspective presupposes a lack of information to the contrary.

3.3. Why Paul is Not Considered a Possible Author

There are two primary reasons why Paul is not considered a possible author of Hebrews:

- The biblical exclusion from Hebrews 2:3, as he was not saved by the testimony of other believers, but through his personal encounter with Jesus Christ.
- The sophistication of the Greek writing of Hebrews is undeniably distinct from the Greek writing of Paul’s epistles, being more comparable to the polished Greek writing of Luke.

3.3.1. Internal Considerations

Exclusion by Hebrews 2:3

First and foremost is the aforementioned exclusion by Hebrews 2:3. The author of Hebrews received salvation from the testimony of other witnesses, but Acts 9 tells of Paul’s conversion experience and it was a direct encounter with God. He was blinded by God’s light and addressed verbally by God.

Now as he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting – Acts 9:3-5 (NASB)

Timothy’s Travel

We also have the complication of Timothy traveling to the author after his release. While it is possible that Paul was released before Timothy, and that Paul had then left for some other place in Italy, there’s no scriptural indicator of such a scenario. A more natural understanding is that Timothy is going to meet someone else upon his release from his imprisonment with Paul. This point is not decisive, but is noteworthy.

3.3.2. Regarding the Written Word Itself

First is the Eloquence of the Written Greek (see discussion in section 2 above) - As educated as Paul was, he was not a sophisticated Greek writer. Paul’s known writings, i.e. all his epistles, do not compare

similarly to the Book of Hebrews. The obvious nature of this distinction is the reason that early church traditions regarding Pauline authorship paired him with either Luke or Clement of Rome as scribes.

Secondly, Paul's characteristic salutation is missing - Paul begins each of his epistle with personalized salutation, or greetings.

- Romans 1:1, 7 – Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God... to all who are beloved of God in Rome...
- I Corinthians 1:1-2 – Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God... to the church of God which is at Corinth...

This is true for all Pauline epistles; Romans, I & II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. In over half of these (8 of 13), he also declares himself an apostle in this salutation. Paul went to great lengths to establish his authority as an apostle (2 Corinthians 11), and it goes against this effort to author a single epistle without identifying himself at all.

Compare this personal identification and specific address to the opening of the Book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 1:1-2 – God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers... has spoken to us

Hebrews skips the salutation altogether and does not personally identify the author OR specifically address the body, although it does contain personal dialogue in the benediction.

Thirdly, Paul's Characteristic 'Signature' is not Evident - Paul dealt with the problem of letters written by others who falsely claimed to be from Paul. Paul therefore had a practice of writing all or part of each epistle in his own recognizable handwriting. He declares this practice as shown below:

- I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write – II Thessalonians 3:17
- I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you. – Colossian 4:18
- I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand... - Philemon 1:19
- ...I am writing to you with my own hand. – Galatians 6:11
- The greeting is in my own hand – Paul - 1 Corinthians 16:21

Not all of Paul's epistles have statements like this, but we know from II Thessalonians (above) that he did not practice anonymity in his authorship.

3.4. Why Luke is Not Considered a Possible Author

Church traditions involving Luke primarily consider him, along with Clement, as possible Greek translators for Paul, under the theory that Paul originally authored the book in the Hebrew language.

Luke is well established as a Gentile from the benediction of Colossians 4:7-18, especially verses 10-11 and 14, where Paul names three coworkers in the ministry as the "only" ones of the circumcision, and then sends greetings from Luke a few verses later, ergo, Luke is not a Jew.

As a Gentile, Luke cannot be the author of Hebrews as the entirety of the book is comprised of addressing fulfillment of Jewish sacrifice and worship, and especially, he is excluded by Hebrews 13:10 and 13:13, both of which use inclusive language which specifically identifies the author as being Jewish.

3.5. Who was Clement of Rome?

Clement of Rome was a contemporary of the Apostles living from 35-99 AD. He is held to have been consecrated by Peter as Bishop of Rome. Clement is accepted as the author of I Clement, which was included as canon in many early (before 300 AD) collections of Scripture.

There is no scriptural or historic reason to believe that Clement was or was not Jewish, but like Luke, Clement is held in church tradition not so much as a likely author of Hebrews, but primarily as a likely Greek translator for Paul's Hebrew.

In regard to possible authorship, there is no reason to believe that Clement traveled, being historically associated only with his birth-city of Rome, so the concept of him being known to recipients in another location, ostensibly from involvement in church-planting ministry, is unsupported.

It must be noted, however, that Paul does mention a 'Clement' in Philippians 4:3, as someone who had labored with Paul and was working in the ministry at Philippi. Because Philippi is over 800 miles from Rome, it is highly unlikely that this is the same person as Clement of Rome.

3.6. Consideration of Apollos

Apollos is a reasonable contender for authorship of the Book of Hebrews with **one significant disqualifier**, in that we have no ability to associate him with "those in Italy."

There is no association of Apollos to Italy in Scripture or in church tradition. He is originally from Alexandria, Egypt, and has been identified with Crete, and locations in both Greece, and Galatia, but never Italy. This does not mean he did not go to Italy, but we are given no reason to believe that he did. Particularly, in the timeframe of Paul's first Roman imprisonment, Apollos would have been in Corinth, so definitely not one of "those in Italy."

In favor of Apollos is primarily the reports in Acts 18:24-28

Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was proficient in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was accurately speaking and teaching things about Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began speaking boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the way of God more accurately to him. And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

Apollos continued in the evangelistic ministry of church-planting, spending time most notably in Crete and Corinth, and is mentioned briefly in 1 Corinthians, where Paul includes Apollos as an apostle (Ch 3-4, esp. 4:9) and he is also mentioned in Titus. He was clearly a strong apologist and is described as an eloquent man proficient in the Scriptures, and he would have been an associate of Timothy.

3.7. Consideration of Barnabas

Barnabas is arguably the best-qualified consideration for the authorship of the Book of Hebrews. He meets all of the criteria above, what we know of him from Scripture argues well for the possibility, and we have significant historical evidence pointing to Barnabas.

3.7.1. The Internal Criteria

Not Saved via direct witness of Christ – there is no Scriptural evidence that Barnabas was one of the disciples of Christ, so it follows that there is no reason to believe that he was not saved through the testimony of these other witnesses, as accounted in Hebrews 2:3. I note that Clement of Alexandria held that Barnabas was a disciple of Christ, and one of the 70 which were sent out, but neither claim is substantiated from Scripture.

Was a Jew – We know from Acts 4:36 that Barnabas was a Levite.

Was Known to Recipients, Was Church-Planting Missionary – We know from various passages that Barnabas was a church-planting missionary, first with Paul (Acts 13-14), and then separate from him with Mark (Acts 15:39).

Was in Italy? – We have good reason to believe that Barnabas was NOT in Rome, but we know from Scripture that Mark was, and we have a historical tradition that places Barnabas in Milan, Italy at the time. His presence in Italy is a distinct possibility, but not a surety.

Mark is relevant to Barnabas because they were known from Scripture to be blood-relatives to one another, and to have done at least two missionary journeys together. It makes sense that where Mark is seen, Barnabas could be expected to be nearby.

For placing Mark in Rome at the time, the first Scripture is Colossians 4:10, which plainly names Mark as being with Paul at the time Colossians was written, which was during his first Roman imprisonment. We also have the verse, I Peter 5:13 where Peter sends his greetings as “She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark.”, where Babylon is typically understood to actually indicate Rome, and the dating would be perhaps a year or two later.

Obviously, since both Paul and then Peter named Mark in Rome, but neither named Barnabas, we can be confident that Barnabas was not with Mark in Rome. This does not mean, however, that he was not also in Italy.

Historic tradition places Barnabas founding the church in Milan, Italy after his missionary trip with Mark to Cyprus (Acts 15:39). Milan has a strong tradition of Barnabas founding their church and he is still honored to this day as the first Bishop of that city. If Barnabas was occupied with the church at Milan, it would explain why he did not join with Paul or Peter.

More importantly, if Barnabas was in Milan when Timothy was released from Rome, Timothy would have to travel about 300 miles (over 2 weeks on foot) to get to Barnabas, making perfect sense of the statement in Hebrews 13:23 which has the author waiting for him to arrive.

Note that the tradition of Barnabas being in Milan is not without opposing traditions (including an early martyrdom in Cyprus), but the tradition of Barnabas being in Italy at the appropriate time does exist.

Was an Associate of Timothy? – Barnabas was separated from Paul when he first encountered Timothy, on his second missionary journey with Silas. It is certain that Barnabas and Timothy would know OF one another, and it is not unlikely that Timothy would join Barnabas if there was a reason to do so, in this case to visit various churches.

Was Named in Scripture as a Prophet and an Apostle – Barnabas is named as a prophet and an apostle.

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers:
Barnabas... - Acts 13:1a (NASB)

But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. – Acts 14:1 (NASB)
(Apostles is plural here, and can only refer to Paul and Barnabas.)

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it... - Acts 14:14a (NASB)

Note that being named a prophet means that Barnabas spoke the Word of God, and being named an apostle means that he was “one sent,” a representative of God. Neither of these mean that Barnabas authored any Scripture, but the two terms both being used of him IS an indicator that he was qualified, and that his writings could easily have been accepted by the church as Scripture. Note that others, including Silas and Apollos, were also called apostles and/or prophets in Scripture.

Character from Scripture – While any candidate for authorship of the Book of Hebrews should be easy to establish as a Spirit-filled Christian, below are a few verses which distinctly highlight Barnabas’ character:

Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), owned a tract of land. So he sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet. – Acts 4:36-37 (NASB)

The news about them reached the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and faith. And considerable numbers were added to the Lord. – Acts 11:22-24 (NASB)

3.7.2. The External Criteria

Had Excellent Knowledge of Jewish Sacrifice and Worship – We know that Barnabas was Jewish, and moreover, a Levite. He was in Jerusalem for Pentecost and was in Jerusalem when Paul first came to present himself to the disciples after his conversion. This is enough for us to expect a solid understanding of the subject matter of the Book of Hebrews.

The fact that Barnabas presented Paul to the disciples indicates that he was already acquainted with Paul. Easton’s Bible Dictionary speculates that perhaps they had been students together under Gamaliel, which would indicate that he, too, had a top-tier education. This is not substantiated, but is a valid possibility.

Was Barnabas an “Eloquent” Greek Writer? In short, we have no way of knowing. We have no other works known to have been authored by Barnabas, so there is nothing besides the Book of Hebrews to look at.

It must be noted that there are three pseudepigraphal works, The Epistle of Barnabas, The Gospel of Barnabas, and The Acts of Barnabas, none of which are canonical, and none of them are considered to be written by the biblical Barnabas, but rather much later, after his lifetime.

The assignment by Tertullian – As noted above, Tertullian of Carthage wrote in 207-208 AD that he had an extant manuscript (of Hebrews) which named Barnabas as the author. The reported manuscript would have been less than 160 years past the original writing, minus whatever the age of the manuscript was, so there’s a reasonable expectation that the manuscript reported known information from the time when it was written.

Of course, we no longer have the referenced manuscript to examine, but as to Tertullian himself, he was a conservative Christian theologian and writer who interpreted Scripture literally, opposed infant baptism, and wrote in opposition to the gnostic heresies. If we assume honesty and any degree of diligence on Tertullian’s part, then his testimony of the manuscript is worth much.

When we remember that 7 other New Testament books are attributed to their authors based solely on historical tradition, and having no opposing reports of manuscripts naming other authors, then the early claim by Tertullian is as reasonable of an assignment as we can get, while still acknowledging that it is a single historical comment.

3.8. Consideration of Mark

Much of what has been said of Barnabas applies directly to Mark, who is also an excellent candidate for authorship of Hebrews. There are a few considerations against Mark as the author of Hebrews, but none will disqualify him from being a possible author.

The first significant detractor is that we have the Gospel of Mark to compare in regard to Greek writing style, and like Paul, Mark’s gospel lacks the sophistication of Hebrews and is written in a simple and direct style.

The second significant detractor is that there is no historic tradition pointing to Mark. This is, of course, a rather weak detractor, until compared to advocates of authorship by Paul, Barnabas, or Luke, who have very strong supporting traditions.

One minor detractor is that we know Mark was with Paul and Timothy during the authorship of Colossians, i.e. during Paul’s first imprisonment, which means that Mark waiting for Timothy to travel to him becomes awkward. One can easily speculate that Mark was not imprisoned with Paul and Timothy, and by way of this liberty, was not in Rome at the actual time of their release.

On all other points, Mark is an excellent choice. We know he authored other Scripture, he meets all the internal criteria given above, and Mark would have been a much closer associate to Timothy than Barnabas, having been with Paul and Timothy during at least part of their imprisonment.

3.9. Consideration of Priscilla and Aquila

No scriptural reference indicates that Priscilla and Aquila should be considered for authorship, and there is no church tradition assigning them as possible authors.

Only in modern times have this pair been considered, with a primary justification being that if Priscilla had been named, it would have discredited the epistle because she was a woman. This argument meets the aforementioned objection that the author was known to the original audience, equating anonymity or suppression to intentional deception, which is not an acceptable theory.

Additionally, there is a question raised as to whether Priscilla was Jewish, based on Acts 18:2. A separation occurs between “a Jew named Aquila” and then later “his wife Priscilla” which seems to be a specifying distinction. This does not seem to be much of an argument, but Hebrews 13:10, 13 requires that the author be Jewish, so this does raise additional doubt.

More importantly, there are two scriptural disqualifications to either Priscilla or Priscilla and Aquila authoring Hebrews.

First, although originally from Rome, like Apollos, they cannot be associated with “those in Italy,” as they were first in Corinth (Greece), and then later in Ephesus (Asia Minor/Galatia). Scripture does not allow the possibility of them writing from Italy.

Secondly, there is a gender-issue in the language of the text, demonstrated particularly in Hebrews 11:32. Steven Ger, in his commentary on Hebrews has the following comment:

Ultimately, however, it is difficult to accept a team authorship or even, as some propose, a predominantly feminine authorship of Hebrews in light of the very clear masculine singular participle used in 11:32. There is simply no satisfactory means to circumnavigate that enormous linguistic roadblock.

3.10. Consideration of Silas

Silas, or Silvanus, is another valid and reasonable consideration as a possible author of the Book of Hebrews.

Silas was a prominent Jewish church-planter who accompanied Paul on his first and second missionary journeys. In regard to his spiritual calling and character, Silas was included in the plural identification of apostles with Paul in I Thessalonians 2:6 “...as apostles of Christ we...” where the antecedent is provided in I Thessalonians 1:1 as “Paul, and Silvanus and Timothy”.

The Book of Acts gives no further information regarding Silas after his visit to Corinth during the second missionary journey, but Peter reveals that I Peter was written “through Silas” which places Silas in Italy at the right time for authorship of Hebrews.

Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you...
- I Peter 5:12a (NASB)

This also evidences Silas’ writing ability, but I Peter should not be used for literary comparison to Hebrews, due to the fact that it was a scribal work of Peter’s authorship.

Another interesting point is that Paul surely would have mentioned Silas if he had been with him in Rome, and yet we know he was there slightly later with Peter – so it again makes better sense for Timothy to need to travel to him, wherever he was at the time.

There seems to be **no historic tradition** of authorship by Silas – none that I have seen other than his mention in lists of possible authors.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, there are two individuals which seem to be strong possibilities for the authorship of Hebrews; Barnabas and Silas, with Barnabas being more likely due to the claim made by Tertullian. Mark is also possible, but less likely. Clement of Rome is a doubtful candidate, and authorship by someone not mentioned in Scripture is also doubtful. Those who can be eliminated by scriptural disqualification include Paul, Luke, Timothy, Apollos, Priscilla and Aquilla, and all of the direct disciples of Jesus Christ (including Mathias).