

6 Shepherd of Hermas

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6.1 Introduction to Shepherd of Hermas

6.1.1 Background of Hermas

> Together read Hermas 1-4 and > Discuss

- This is the first of 24 Visions (Hermas 1-25).
- Then the book contains 12 Commandments (Hermas 26-49)
- Finally a group of 10 Parables (Hermas 50-114)

In this book the author seems to wrestle with the question of post-baptismal sin. Can it still be forgiven? His answer tries to balance Gods justice and mercy; yes, repentance is possible, but it must happen quickly as the opportunity may pass. An important issue is also the treatment of poor people in Church. His solution (Hermas 31) stands in opposition to the Sermon on the Mount. The theological distance between Hermas and the New Testament is considerable.



6.1.2 History of documents of the letter

Text is not well preserved. We have four incomplete Greek manuscripts. For Hermas 107:3-114:5 we have no original Greek, but Latin. We have

- *Codex Sinaiticus* – for Hermas 1:1-31:6
- *Michigan Papyrus* – late 2nd century (!) – has 51:8-82:1
- Old Latin or Vulgate translations – perhaps dating from 2^{ns} century –
- Palatine Latin translation – 4th century
- *Codex Athous* -14th-15th century – contains 1:1-107:2
- *Bodmer Papyrus* – ca. 400 AD – contains 1:1-21:4
- Ethiopic and Coptic translations – 4th-6th century
- Many fragments in others papyri from 2nd-6th century

So it is not *well* preserved, but it is *widely* preserved, suggesting the importance of the document in the early Church.

6.1.3 Importance of Hermas in the early Church

Hermas was widely popular in the 2-3rd century. Ireneaus, Clement of Alexandria and Origen accepted the book as Scripture. Tertullian did so as well, but he changed his mind when he joined the Montanist sect; he then rejected it as the 'shepherd of the adulterers' for its 'lax' approach to repentance. Athanasius used the Shepherd and quoted from it. Didymus the Blind saw it as Scripture. In the *Codex Sinaiticus* it follows after the book of Revelation and Barnabas.

6.1.4 Who was the author?

Some have suggested it was Paul (see Acts 14:12) or the Hermas mentioned in Romans 16:14 (suggested by Origen). According to the *Muratorian Canon* (ca. 180-200), the oldest known list of books of the New Testament and early Christian writings, Hermas was the brother of Pius, bishop of Rome (140-154).

In the book itself, the impression is given that he was a Roman Christian, possibly a freed slave. He was not a leader in the Church.

6.1.5 Date of Hermas

Ireneaeus mentions Hermas ca. 175, so it was published before that date. The *Muratorian Canon* suggests a date during Pope Pius (140-154). Others suggest a much earlier date.

If the document is a composite, then parts could be old and other somewhat newer. Information from Hermas 1-24 point to a date at the end of first century, while Hermas 25-114 seems to be of a later date. Final editing may indeed have been done at ca. 150 AD.

6.2 Content of Shepherd of Hermas

6.2.1 How does Hermas view the Church?

Hermas was not a formal church leader but he had a message for the Church. How did he view the Church? > **Read together** 1:6; 3:4; 5:3; 6:6; 8:1-3; 13:1; 17:7-10 and > **discuss**.

> **Read together** Hermas 9-13 and > **Discuss in class**. What does the vision teach us?

6.2.2 How to prepare for persecution?

> **Read personally** Hermas 22-23.

> **Discuss** in class.

6.2.3 How does Hermas view wealth?

> **Read in groups** Hermas 14:5-7; 17:1-6; 40:4-6; 45:1-3.

> **Discuss** in class

6.2.4 The 12 Commandments

The 12 'commandments' of Hermas give us good insight in the morality he preaches.

1. Have faith in God (Hermas 26)
2. Be sincere and innocent (27)
3. Truth (28)
4. Chastity, marriage, repentance (29-32)
5. Patience and anger (33)
6. Two ways and two angels (35-36)
7. Fear the Lord (37)
8. Self-control (38)
9. Double mindedness (39)
10. Cheerfulness and grief (40-42)
11. True and false prophets (43)
12. Evil and good desires (44-46)

A good summary can be found in Hermas 38. > **Read together** Hermas 38 and > **Discuss together**.

6.2.5 Baptism and Repentance

Is there a possibility for repentance if one sins after baptism?

> **Read together** Hermas 31 and > **discuss in class**.

6.2.6 Man has two angels

> **Read individually** Hermas 36 and > **Discuss in class**.

Is Hermas here speaking of man's conscience that is drawn in two directions? It seems that he considers the 'inner voices' toward good and evil as the voices of angels.

6.2.7 How to recognize false prophets?

> **Read together** Hermas 43:7-14 and > **discuss in class**.

How can true prophets be recognized?

How do you recognize an evil prophet?

6.2.8 The ten parables

> **Read together** parable 1 (Hermas 50) and > **Discuss in class**.

Parable 2: (chapter 51), the Elm and the Vine

Parable 3: (52), Trees in Winter

Parable 4: (53), Trees in Summer

Parable 5: (54-60), On True Fasting

Parable 6: (61-65), Danger of Luxury and Pleasure

Parable 7: (66), Affliction and Repentance

Parable 8: (67-77), Willow Tree

Parable 9: (78-110), Twelve Mountains

Parable 10: (111-114), Conclusion