

Hebrews

Dr. Charles “Buddy” Parrish
March 29, 2023



Hebrews – Introduction Part 2

Recipients

- If we are to say that Hebrews was either written by Paul or one of his associates and that it was written sometime around 80 AD and that it was most likely written from Rome, than to whom was it written and for what purpose?
- We know from Acts that many of the Christians in Jerusalem fled the persecution that arose following the death of Stephen. Further, we know from history that the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem from April to September 70 AD, sending Jews and Christian alike fleeing for their lives. Yet the author seems to have intimate knowledge of the Great Temple and freely uses imagery from the Temple. So Hebrews must have been written to people who had also been very familiar with Temple. At the same time the author also leans heavily on Greek language and thought. So where might there be a Christian community that was not too far from Jerusalem, but far enough away to avoid being slaughtered by the Romans in 70 AD? One suggestion has been the church in Alexandria, Egypt. The city had long been home to a strong Jewish community and by the late first century a strong Christian presence as well. It was a center of Greek education and home to one of the world’s great libraries, holding as many as 400,000 books. A second suggestion has been the area called the Decapolis or The Ten Towns. Established just after the death of Alexander the Great, this was an area not unlike our modern cities, where you have ten individual cities but they are so close together they create one large metropolitan area. This area was the center of Greco-Roman life in Palestine. It was an area traveled by Jesus Himself (Matthew 4; Mark 5), so it was an area with a Christian presence yet totally immersed in both Greek and Hebrew cultures. In Jesus time the Decapolis was an independent Roman colony, so it became a perfect place for refugees of the war with Rome in 70 AD. Another suggestion as to who might Hebrews be written is the community at Qumran on the Dead Sea. Located on the northwest coast of the Dead Sea, just east of Jerusalem, it had long been a hideaway for religious outsiders. One community there known as the Essenes produced The Dead Sea Scrolls and by the time Hebrews was written there

were Christian Essenes as well. Further, much of the language of the Dead Sea Scrolls sounds very much like the book of Hebrews, especially concerning the Old Testament figure of Melchisedek.

- But in the end, like the question of authorship, there is nothing in the text of Hebrews itself that tells us for certain to whom it was written. Again, Hebrews is unlike all the epistles of the New Testament. It is likely a sermon and not a letter like Ephesians and Philippians are letters.

Purpose

- The author of Hebrews, like any good preacher, has three main points. First, he is concerned about the religious drift of the people in the early church. Already by the late first century church worship was developing a certain formalism which included particular acts, rites, and ceremonies. The author wants them to see the majesty of God, rather than just going through the motions. “Draw near to God. Step into His glory”, the author wants to say. “Our faith is all about a relationship, not a ritual. And don’t ever take it for granted or treat it lightly. Don’t you remember who Christ is and what He has done for your salvation?” Second, he is concerned about their loss of enthusiasm. Persecution and the delay of the Second Coming had taken the wind out of the sails of many. People were becoming disillusioned. The church had made the mistake of putting great emphasis on the immediate return of Jesus, seizing on a few select words of Christ that may point that direction while ignoring many others that point the other way. Mark 13:32 was clear that no one knows the hour except for the Father. Finally, there is the loss of courage. The writer sees the church of his day as being like the people of the Exodus. Despite all that God had done, they were still so frightened and found it so easy to compromise with paganism around them. The people of Hebrews were somewhere between Egypt and the Promised Land. Like Moses, he wants to remind them that there is no turning back. “The city of God is this way!”