HEBREWS - A BETTER WAY

**DATE:**

**THE “WRITER”**

**II. THE “RECIPIENTS”**

The second question we want to ask by way of introduction is -

*To whom did the author write?*

The answer to this important question will help solve many of the so-called *“interpretative problems”* within the book

Jew or Gentile?

Were they saved? Unsaved?

Did the author think that they were saved but in reality they were not?

Where did they live?

First of all -

**A**. **The Author Regarded his Readers as Believers**

He addressed them as ***“brethren”*** in **3:1,12**

And as ***“beloved”*** in **6:9**

To him, they were ***“partakers of the heavenly calling”*** in **3:1**

And ***“partakers of Christ”*** in **3:14**

The warnings given to them would only apply to genuine believers - **3:12,13 …**

Unbelievers are already possessed with an evil heart of unbelief

And nowhere are we commanded to exhort unbelievers

**B. Second, they were Immature – 5:11-14 …**

It seems they had been saved a long time …

***“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers”***

… But had not grown much spiritually

They were unable to receive the meat of the Word because they were on a milk diet

They did not have enough knowledge or experience to make adult distinctions between right and wrong choices

The writer saw them as spiritual ***“babes”* – vs.13,14 …**

**C. Third, they were Wavering in their Faith – 10:32-34 …**

After their conversion -

- They had endured persecutions

- Identified themselves with other oppressed believers

- Saw their material possessions destroyed

- And had compassion over the author's imprisonment

However, their present conduct did not manifest that initial attitude any more

They grew tired of their persecutions and failed to trust God as they once did

Look at what the author says in **10:35-38 …**

**D. Fourth, they were Apparently well known to the Author**

He planned to visit them after his release from prison

**13:23 – *“Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you”***

He tells them to ***“pray for us”*** in **v.18**

In the hope of his soon return to them

**13:19 – *“But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner”***

There is a hint here that he had been with them at least on one other occasion

The key word is ***“restored”*** – to bring something back

**E. Fifth, Where did the Readers Live?**

The letter is definitely written to Jewish believers

But where did they live, what area?

Some say Rome, others the Holy Land

**13:24** - In his closing salutation, the author writes –

***“They of Italy salute you”***

Does this mean that the author was in Italy, perhaps Rome …

And that the Italian believers wanted to send greetings?

Or, as some think

Does it mean that Italian believers, outside of their homeland, wanted to be remembered to their Christian friends back in Italy?

Opinions are divided over the issue

Advocates of the author writing to believers in Rome,

Point out that the readers were known for their financial generosity

**6:10 – *“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward His Name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister”***

Whereas, they say, the church at Jerusalem was marked by poverty

[**Acts 11:27-30**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ac+11%3A27-30) **…**

[**Romans 15:26**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ro+15%3A26) **…**

However, I’d like to point out that the Jerusalem believers did …

… unselfishly share their material possessions

[**Acts 2:44-45**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ac+2%3A44-45)**;** [**4:32-37**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ac+4%3A32-37) **…**

Even the Macedonian churches were known paradoxically for both their poverty and liberality

[**II Corinthians 8:1-2**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=2Co+8%3A1-2) **…**

The readers' had an obvious knowledge of the sacrificial rites

Or else the author would not have used the illustration of them so extensively

So, whether the letter was written to Jews in the Holy Land or out of the Holy Land doesn’t really affect the letter’s authority and truth

**III. “TIME AND PLACE”**

As indicated before, the readers had been saved for a rather long period of time

**5:12 – *“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat”***

They had been verbally assaulted and had suffered the loss of personal property for their faith …

But they had not yet been beaten or killed

**12:4 – *“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin”***

However, the threat of such severe persecution now loomed in their immediate future

It might have been the imminent Jewish-Roman war that prompted this threat

As Jewish Christians they faced a personal dilemma

Should they identify themselves racially with their fellow Jews in possible combat against the Romans and thus gain the favor of their countrymen?

Or, should they remain identified with the Jewish-Gentile Christian assembly and assume a neutral position politically?

Especially since Christ predicted the destruction of Jerusalem with its temple because of her rejection of Him

[**Matthew 23:37-24:12**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Mt+23%3A37-24%3A12) **…**

This latter action would incur the wrath of their fellow Jews

They thus faced this question –

Shall we go on with Christ and His people even though it means persecution and possible death,

Or shall we go back to be identified with Jewish national and religious life again and thus avoid this persecution?

Some had already made their decision and had defected from the Christian assembly

**10:25 – *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”***

The majority had not yet made up their minds

The author, aware of the situation, wrote to admonish them not to take this drastic step of disobedience

But to endure patiently and faithfully the persecutions while they anticipated the imminent coming of Christ

**10:22-25 …**

There is good evidence that the book was written just a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

This would fall within the time table of Paul’s death

For many believe that Paul was martyred sometime between 65-67 A.D.

It had to be composed during the lifetime of second-generation Christians who themselves had been saved for some time

**2:3,4; 5:11-14**

Timothy was still alive

**13:23**

The author uses present verbal tenses and participles to describe the ritual service of the priests

**8:4,13; 9:4,5; 10:1,8,11;13:10,11**

This would seem to indicate that the temple was still standing

However, some try to say that the use of the present tense was only a literary device

And it was employed in the early church father’s writings after 70 A.D.

They further claim that the author was comparing the priestly ministry of Christ with that of the Mosaic tabernacle,

Not that of the Zerubbabel-Herod temple

The natural reading of the text, though, seems to refer to a comparison of simultaneous ministries on earth and in heaven

If the book had been written after 70 A.D., certainly the author would have referred to the destruction of the temple in his arguments

His silence argues for the earlier date

**IV. “PURPOSE”**

**V. “DISTINCTIVE FEATURES”**