

HELP THOU MINE UNBELIEF **(Mark 9:23-24)**

I. To whom was it written?

- A. This is a hotly debated topic because unlike most books of the New Testament, there is no area or congregation mentioned.
- B. There is internal evidence to show that it was written to a group of Jews who had been converted to Christianity.
 - 1. Hebrews 1:1 - mentions the fathers.
 - 2. Hebrews 4:1-2 compares the forefathers to the writer's audience.
 - 3. Hebrews 4:15 mentions the high priest.
 - 4. There are at least 100 references to the Old Testament, which is more than any other book of the New Testament.
 - 5. There are no references to anything Gentile in nature or historically.
 - 6. Chapter 8 contains a lengthy quotation from Jeremiah 31.
 - 7. Chapters 9 and 10 contain great detail about the work of high priest and the sacrificial system of Judaism, which would mean little to a Gentile convert.
- C. There is also external evidence, evidence outside the book from religious writers and manuscripts, which indicate it is a Jewish audience.
 - 1. The title "The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews" is found on all the most ancient of manuscripts.
 - 2. The church historians of the 2nd century wrote this as well.
 - 3. Every one of the those historians wrote that it was written to a Hebrew audience.
 - 4. This would indicate that the audience was in or around Jerusalem, because other Jews were called Hellenists, not Hebrews.
- D. For our purposes, we will say the audience was Jewish Christians somewhere in Palestine.

II. Why was this book written?

- A. There is literally no debate as to why this book was written.
- B. The purpose was to try and keep these Jewish Christians from going back into Judaism because of persecution.
 - 1. This supports the idea that it was written to Jewish Christians in Palestine.
 - 2. What better group to go back into Judaism than those who were still surrounded by family who were still Jews and all the trappings from their former way of life?
 - 3. Why did Lot's wife look back? Because she was leaving all that was familiar and known to her.
 - 4. Why do those who come out of denominationalism or sin sometimes go back to those things? Because those are the familiar things to them.
- C. One writer said it would be like leaving the Mormon Church and living in Salt Lake City, only worse.
- D. It seems that these brethren were wondering if leaving all they had known was really worth it.
- E. This is probably the reason that the focus of the book is on the fact that Jesus is better than all things.

1.The word for better or superior is found 15 times in this book.
2.Jesus and the New Testament are shown to be better than at least 12 things.

- a.The prophets (1:1-3);
- b.The angels (1:4-2:18);
- c.Moses (3:1-19);
- d.Joshua (4:1-8);
- e.The rest found in Canaan (4:9-13);
- f.Aaron (4:14-5:10);
- g.Mosaic priesthood (6:13-10:18);
- h.Mosaic covenant (8:6-10:18);
- i.Animal sacrifices (9:1-10:18);
- j.Mosaic way to God (10:19-11:40);
- k.Mosaic relationship to God (12:1-29);
- l.Mosaic work and worship (13:1-21).

F.Br. Curtis Cates wrote an introduction to Hebrews in a lectureship book I have.

- 1.In it, he wrote that when persecution or difficult time comes, we often forget our blessings.
- 2.The Israelites came to miss Egypt because of the food they had there.
- 3.They wanted to go back to what they knew.
- 4.It may have been the same for these Hebrew Christians.
- 5.If they lived in Jerusalem, they had to smell the daily sacrifices, go past the temple in their daily lives.
- 6.They probably had family members who were active Jews.
- 7.The Sanhedrin made it very difficult for those who left Judaism.

G.The Hebrews writer was inspired to place great emphasis on faith in Christ because He is far better than anything Judaism had to offer.

III.When was the letter written?

A.There are a few clues in the book that give an idea of the time of writing.

B.It seems to have been written before the destruction of the temple.

- 1.The writer mentions the daily sacrifices.
- 2.He also writes as if the high priest was still in power and at work.
- 3.It was also written after the church had been established for some time.
 - a.Hebrews 5:12.
 - b.Also, there is reference to persecution (10:32-34).
 - c.It seems to have been written from Italy (Hebrews 13:24).

C.Most writers believe it was written between 60-69 AD.

- 1.More than likely it was more toward the middle 60's, 62-65.
- 2.There is no mention of the Roman army being near.
- 3.There is a reference to the day approaching (Hebrews 10:24-25).

D.We won't talk about the author yet, but if you believe Paul wrote the book, this time frame definitely fits.

- 1.It would be after his first imprisonment.
- 2.He had been waiting for Timothy to get out of prison (Hebrews 13:23).

IV. Who was the penman of Hebrews?

A.We could talk all night about who possibly wrote the book.

- 1.Paul, Luke, Barnabas, Apollos, Priscilla, Clement and others have all been set forth as the penman.

2.I like what Origen had to say hundreds of years ago: “But who wrote the epistle, to be sure, God only knows.”

B.I know brethren who are dogmatic that Paul wrote the book.

1.There is evidence for it in the book.

a.The writer was a traveling companion of Timothy.

b.The writer had extensive knowledge of Jewish worship and the work of the high priest.

c.It was written from Italy where Paul had been or was in prison.

2.Much external evidence points to Paul in the form of the early church historians all pointing to him as the penman.

C.The fact that it does not have Paul’s name on it really does nothing to hurt a belief in him being the penman.

1.The people in and around Jerusalem had very hard feelings towards Paul.

2.They remembered him killing and imprisoning many of their family members.

3.Clement of Alexandria wrote that Paul “very wisely did not repel them at the beginning by using his name.”

D.In reality, it does not matter because the Holy Spirit inspired whomever was the human penman.

E.I generally always try to say the Hebrews writer said this or that and not even refer to any person.