

dividing line makes Rome impossible. As for Jerusalem, it would seem a grave insult to the twelve to suggest they had been so incompetent that, after all their years of ministering in Jerusalem, Paul had to come along to convince the Jews there who believed in Christ that He deserves the highest place. Moreover, it would have been insulting for Paul, or any one of his helpers, to suggest to Jerusalemites that they had not yet resisted sin unto blood, since Paul himself was partially responsible for Stephen's execution, and the leader of the persecution that followed it. Hence, Jerusalem also seems to be an impossible suggestion.

From the facts we have gathered from the Word of God, we conclude that the most likely city for the Hebrews to have dwelt in is clearly Thessalonica. Paul was only there around three weeks. Acts states he impressed on them that Jesus is the Christ and revealed His death and resurrection, but it makes no mention of his ministry advancing to the important truth that Christ is also God. In Thessalonica, persecution fell on the Thessalonians, not on Paul and his entourage. They were humiliated and their goods were plundered, but none of them were killed at that time. All of these facts fit perfectly with the details we can gather about the Hebrews. Moreover, there is evidence in I Thessalonians to suggest it was written later than Hebrews, and to the same audience. In I Thessalonians 3:1-5, Paul was concerned with how they were standing up to the persecution. In I Thessalonians 3:6-8, Timothy visited them again without Paul, and then returned to Paul with good news of their faithfulness. In I Thessalonians 3:9-10, Paul stated that he knew there was something lacking in their faith, probably because of the short time he was there with them.

In conclusion, the experience of the Hebrews at the city of Thessalonica aligns with all the facts pertaining to the audience of the book of Hebrews, while no other major city that Paul visited does. We could always speculate about some city that is not recorded in the book of Acts, but this would just be conjecture. Of the cities that we know, the best (and really the only likely) candidate is Thessalonica. We cannot be certain, of course, but I propose that Hebrews is most likely "Zeroth Thessalonians," written before I Thessalonians to the same recipients.

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WHO WERE THE HEBREWS?

By Nathan C. Johnson

One of the mysteries of the New Testament that causes a great deal of controversy and speculation is the context of the book of Hebrews. This book does not name its author, nor does it give any clear indication as to who its audience was. This has led to varied opinions as to the answers to two important questions: (1) Who were the Hebrews to whom the book was written? And (2) Who wrote the book of Hebrews? In this study, we will limit ourselves to a consideration of the first of these two questions.

The issue cannot be settled for certain, since the Word of God does not plainly say who the audience was. Yet if we are going to make a case as to who the Hebrews were, we need to advance a proposal that is based on all the facts to be gleaned from God's Word, and not promote an idea against which there is clear, Biblical evidence. A simple examination of the facts as they appear in Hebrews is enough to eliminate many of the guesses that have been suggested. Let us consider those facts and what they tell us about who the Hebrews could not have been.

One of the clues leading us to the audience of Hebrews is the overall message of the epistle. A brief outline of the subjects covered in Hebrews will help us to understand this. In Hebrews 1:4-2:16, it is proven that Christ is greater than the angels. In Hebrews 2:17-3:1, it is shown that Christ is greater than the High Priest. In Hebrews 3:2-6, the author declares that Christ is greater than Moses. In Hebrews 3:7-4:13, he argues that Christ offers a greater rest than Joshua afforded Israel by bringing them into the land. In Hebrews 4:14-5:11, he proves that Christ is greater than the Aaronic priests. In Hebrews 5:12-6:8, he reveals that the recipients of the letter had heard enough to become teachers, but had not absorbed it as they should have. In Hebrews 6:9-19, he declares that the recipients of the letter have worked and labored in love toward the Name of the Lord and have ministered to the hallowed ones. The question that remained was whether or not they would come into the full assurance of hope.

Returning to the subject of the superiority of Christ in Hebrews 6:20-7:4, the author reveals that Christ, of the order of Melchizedek, is greater than Abraham. In Hebrews 7:5-19, he proves that Christ, of the order of Melchizedek, is of a higher order of priests than the Levites. In Hebrews 7:20-28, he presents Christ as the priest of a covenant superior to the old covenant. In Hebrews 8:1-13, he shows that Christ ministers in a better tabernacle than that on the earth. In Hebrews 9:1-10:18, he demonstrates that Christ offers a better service and a better sacrifice than that which Moses gave. In Hebrews 10:19-39, he encourages the recipients of the epistle to accept these truths and not draw back. Finally, in Hebrews 11:1-40, he sets up faith as the supreme possession of the hallowed ones.

What conclusions can we draw from the topics covered in the book of Hebrews? First of all, we can establish that the recipients of the letter had already believed Jesus to be the Messiah, since the author takes this for granted from the start. Yet he clearly questions if they have fully grasped that He is also the Supreme One, God Himself, and if they have really given Him the place above all else. This indicates that the ministry among them was not complete nor was their faith fully mature, indicating we are looking for a location where the proclamation of the gospel was interrupted early on. We can also clearly see that the audience was intimately familiar with the Old Testament, indicating that the recipients were largely Jews, as the name "Hebrews" implies.

Another fact about the Hebrews can be gathered from Hebrews 10:32-39. The recipients endured a great struggle of sufferings after they were illuminated regarding the Christ, verse 32, which included being made a spectacle or gazingstock, verse 33, and also included a plundering of their goods, verse 34. However, from Hebrews 12:4, we learn that the recipients of the epistle to the Hebrews had not yet resisted sin to the point of shedding their blood in battle. Of course, the way Christians shed blood in the battle against sin was by martyrdom. Therefore, we conclude that there had been persecution among the Hebrews, which included humiliation and monetary loss, but no one had yet died for his faith. That may well have come later, of course.

A final, important fact is found in Hebrews 13:23. We learn there that the recipients knew Timothy, Paul's young helper and companion, and that he was about to come to see them again, along with the author of Hebrews. So, leaving aside the question of who the author was, we would conclude that the Hebrews were probably in one of the cities that Paul ministered to.

Having gathered these facts from the book of Hebrews, we are left to determine which of the cities where Paul ministered was characterized by three criteria: 1. The city had Paul's ministry interrupted so they may not have fully grasped the truth about Christ, 2. The city had suffered persecution, but no one had yet died as a result of it, and 3. Paul ministered to the city after Timothy had become one of his entourage.

Considering the major cities of Paul's ministry beginning in Acts 13, we can quickly eliminate Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, since Paul's ministry in these places was with Barnabas and before Timothy had joined them to become one of Paul's companions. Therefore, we can move ahead to consider Paul's second apostolic journey, beginning with the city of Philippi. The persecution that interrupted the ministry there appears to have all been aimed at Paul and Silas, and there is no indication that the Philippians suffered humiliation or the loss of their goods.

The next major city was Thessalonica. Paul was only there three Sabbaths, during which he explained to the Thessalonians that Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and that Jesus is the Christ. After that, his ministry was interrupted by persecution. Jason and some brethren were humiliated by being dragged before the city rulers. They had to pay a fine to be released, and then the apostles left immediately. This city meets all three of the criteria. Let us regard it as a possibility and continue to examine Paul's remaining cities.

Of Berea, we learn that the Bereans searched out what Paul said, but persecution from Thessalonica forced Paul to leave. In Athens, we read of no persecution. In Corinth, Paul taught for more than a year and a half, and had plenty of time to impress upon the Corinthians the proper position they should give Christ in their thinking. The persecution in Corinth was all against Paul, and it was unsuccessful. In Ephesus, Paul stayed for a short time, during which there is no persecution recorded, and then he left to attend a feast. He later returned and was there for over two years. Again, Paul had ample time to impress on the Ephesians the proper place to give Christ in their thinking. Finally, he came to Rome, yet Paul did not leave there until after the Acts period had ended. That means that he or someone in his entourage could not have written an Acts period book after his visit there, as the author of Hebrews clearly did, so the recipients of Hebrews could not have been the Romans.

Mr. Otis Q. Sellers, our ministry's respected founder, suggested (following R.C.H. Lenski, 1864-1936) that the Hebrews could have been from Jerusalem or Rome. As we have already seen, the Acts 28:28