

CHANGES AND BACKGROUND FOR THE HEBREW CHURCHES

(Recipient Background for the Book of Hebrews)

Remember the first several chapters in the book of Acts show that those that believed on Jesus Christ were all Jewish. On the Day of Pentecost 32AD (Acts 2) the Holy Spirit came in power upon the house where the Apostles were gathered. There was a great sound that attracted a crowd. This crowd included Jews and converts to Judaism from Asia, Africa and Europe. Thus the beginning of the Church was made up of all Jewish members. As time passed more and more Gentiles believed on Christ. Thus, Gentiles believers, not Jewish became the majority. The Jewish believers, as the recipients of the book of Hebrews, were likely Hellenistic Jews. They were a form of Judaism in the ancient world that combined Jewish tradition and elements of Greek culture. The major literary product of these Jews was the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible.

CHANGES

Change in Leadership

- The original leaders are passing away (Hb.13:7). Many in this group had come to faith in Christ through the preaching of others who heard Jesus (Hb.2:3-4). James had been beheaded, Peter and Paul were in prison awaiting to be executed.

Change from Oral to Written Tradition

- Teachings from Jesus and Apostles becoming published. They were used to studying the Hebrew Scriptures, but now “new” books were written on the same authority they had studied.

Reorientation of Jewish System to Christian

- Jews worshiped only in synagogues
- Christians eventually forced out of Synagogues
- They used to travel to Jerusalem for special feasts. Now, they do not do that any more. The real takes the place of picture.

Churches Became More Gentile in membership and Character

- Separation between Jews and Gentiles growing
- Christians were no longer perceived as a sect of Judaism which was protected. Hence as a Christian they became a political target of Rome. Thus, an increase in persecution. Concepts: Exclusivism and Evangelism.
- Hebrew thinking slowly replaced by Greek thinking.

PERSECUTION

Persecution of Jew and Gentile Believers

- The ruling council of the Jews, the Sanhedrin, initiated a harsh persecution of Jewish Christians. It began with the stoning of Stephen, that turned against the whole church in Jerusalem (Ac.7:54-8:3). This scattered the Jewish Christians throughout Judea and Samaria . Paul, before his conversion, was the chief agent in carrying out the persecution of those Jewish Christians (Ac.8:3; 9:1-2).
- The unbelieving Jews persecuted both Jews and Gentiles in the regions of Galatia and Macedonia who embraced Christianity and the spread of the Gospel (Ac.13:44-50; 14:1-6; 14:19; 17:1-14).
- These Jewish new Christians were tempted to abandon their faith in favor of Judaism (He.13:9-14), so they would be spared from further persecutions (Hb.10:32-36). Some had already repudiated Christ, the Son of God, and had become apostate (Hb.6:4-8). The possibility of more doing the same prompted the writer to encourage them to remain faithful, and realize the superiority of Christ over Judaism.

THEOLOGICAL

Expectation of Christ's Return

- People were starting to doubt and re-interpret their traditions. Notice Hb.1:2, “last days” has lasted a long time now.