

## INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE BIBLE (9)

### The Book of Hebrews

In our last lesson we learned about the terms Hebrew, Israel, and Jew. They all described the same people. However, in the time of Jesus the term "Hebrew" was not only the name of their language, it was applied specifically to Jews who lived around Jerusalem. When the book of Hebrews was first written (63 A.D.), these Jews had been Christians for over 30 years. The church in Jerusalem began in 30 A.D. (see Acts 2) and soon endured severe persecution (Acts 4-5, 7-8) at the hands of their own countrymen. The Jewish religion (a mixture of Old Testament teaching and long held tradition) was the national religion in Judah during the days when the Roman army occupied their land.

The Jews who did not believe that Jesus was the promised one of the Old Testament, insisted to the Romans that the followers of Jesus Christ were a new religion and should be punished. It was against the law in Rome to have a new religion. Christians maintained that they were the true religion that all the Old Testament had looked forward to. They argued that they were not a new religion, but the true one that was the fulfillment of the Jewish Old Testament (the 39 Old Testament books in the Bible).

Even the Jews who believed in Christ and became Christians did not see a contradiction between the Old Testament and what they were now practicing as a Christian. The Old Testament was a historical record of God's working in history to bring Jesus Christ into the world. So they continued to use the temple of the Jews, kept their holy days, their diet restrictions, and practiced all the teachings of Moses including the command to be circumcised. So even though the believers in Jerusalem were Christians, to most eyes (especially the Romans) they were still Jewish in race and religion. They simply had the "strange" belief that Jesus (a poor man, a carpenter's son, crucified by the Romans) was the son of God and the one promised to come to save the world. 30 years after the church began, the Christians in Jerusalem were still practicing the law of Moses and honoring Jerusalem as a Holy City and the Temple there as the house of God (See Acts 21).

The apostles of Jesus Christ saw trouble coming because of the Christians loyalty to these old ways. There was also political trouble coming between the Jews and the Romans. There was talk of war or a Jewish rebellion against Roman rule. Jesus had predicted during his ministry (26-30 A.D.) that within one generation after his death Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed (Matthew 23:19-24:34). Jesus had warned during this time of trouble that only those who were willing to get out of Jerusalem would be spared.

But in 63 A.D., there were so many Christians who were loyal to the Jewish state, they were more willing to fight the Romans than to flee like Jesus had warned. The book of Hebrews was written during this time. The writer had to show the Christians how superior Jesus Christ is to the Old Testament system. The priesthood, sacrifices, and rituals were not to be compared to what we have spiritually in Jesus Christ. He is the only priest we need. He is the only sacrifice we need for sin. God does not live in physical temples but in each believer. The Law of Moses was a temporary law written only for the nation of Israel. It was never intended to rule over other nations. Christianity is for people from every nation in the world and will flourish in any century. It is a religion based on the spiritual, not the carnal, fleshly, physical ordinances of the law of Moses. The law of Moses was a mere shadow of what we actually have in Christ (Hebrews 10:1-4; Colossians 2:14-17).

As the war against Rome got closer, the patriotism of the Christians in Jerusalem was so strong that they were in danger of choosing Jerusalem and the temple over Jesus Christ. If they chose to pay attention to Jesus' warning to get out of Jerusalem, they were accused of being traitors by their family and friends and were, therefore, persecuted. The book of Hebrews was written to convince them to make the right choice. To stay and fight meant not only physical death (Rome would win), but it showed unbelief in Jesus Christ who said to leave the city and temple behind. Their UNBELIEF meant separation from Christ. Their BELIEF meant separation from family and country. Their continued loyalty to both family and country meant they would not only die in the war but would also miss heaven because they were rejecting Christ.

The Book of Hebrews, however, is very relevant for us today. It reminds us of how much better Christianity is than any other religion. It is better because it is based on what Jesus Christ has done and continues to do for us. It also serves as a warning about unbelief. Hebrews is a great book about faith and the importance of faith (see Hebrews 11).

#### QUESTIONS:

1. The Jews or the descendants of Israel who lived in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus Christ were also called \_\_\_\_\_ because they continued to use the old language.
2. In 63 A.D. when the book of Hebrews was written, the Jews were about to go to war against what world empire?
3. 33 years before, Jesus had predicted that the Jews would (win or lose)?
4. Christians had to choose loyalty to \_\_\_\_\_ more than loyalty to family and nation.