

HEBREWS

Message 1

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Reading: Hebrews 1:1-4

INTRO: I am undertaking a large project and it is to go through the Book of Hebrews. It is a major undertaking. One needs to have an overview of the book one's mind before beginning. With an overview and outline, I usually diagram the material I will be working with grammatically and that is a very big task. And then one has to seek to understand why the book is written, to whom it was written, what the circumstances of the people were when it was written, and that requires some understanding of the date when it was written. All this needs to be done before beginning.

Let me say this at the outset of this series that I hold to the Majority Text of the NT. Almost, if not all modern translations use what is called the eclectic text. The main reason I do not use those texts is that if the oldest MSS are best, that means for the majority of the Church age we did not have the best texts. I find that unacceptable. So I hold to the view that the Lord divinely protected the best texts, and second, the Lord divinely saw to it that the books that should be in the Bible are in it. That is very brief, but covers the major issues of the NT text.

Now, one of the most difficult points in interpreting the letters of the NT that the writer is writing for a reason or various reasons, and the writer and the readers know what is being addressed. But the interpreter, interpreting some 2,000 years later, not having some or most of that information must try to reconstruct the historical situation.

If you were reading a letter I wrote and it went like this: *We have had good weather for the last two months. We did have one storm but it wasn't bad. Hunting hasn't been good this fall and the moose season is almost over.*

About your question, I always try to make points around the bar and as many as I possibly can. If you can make a prime, you pretty well have it made. Sometimes when you are behind, all you can do is sit back and wait and hope for a chance to shoot. In the meantime you try to make as many points in your inner table

as possible. The big question is always, to blot or not to blot. Good luck.

I would like to know how you made out with your trip to Alaska. Send me some pictures.

And you sign off.

How many of you would know what the other person's question was about? Do I go to the bar? How do you make points at the bar? Well, it is not about a bar that serves alcohol, it is about how the game of backgammon. So to interpret such a letter can be a chore if you do not know the game. Here is the rule of all interpretation: You have only correctly interpreted when you have in your mind what the writer had in his mind when he wrote.

This letter to the Hebrews is difficult to interpret in many ways. It is not helpful that we cannot be certain on who wrote it. Then we cannot be certain to whom it was written. I know it says, "Hebrews." From that and internal evidence it is quite clear that it was written to Jewish Christians. However, we do not know if the title is original or has been added by someone else.

Then to interpret this letter one has to determine why two chapters are given to dealing with angels and why so many warnings are given in the whole letter. And then, why is so much time given to Judaism?

So we ask our first question: Who wrote the book of Hebrew?

AUTHOR:

Charles Ryrie, of the Ryrie reference Bible says, "Many suggestions have been made for the author of this anonymous book - Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Silas, Aquilla and Priscilla, and Clement of Rome." He also says it was not likely Paul because in 2:3, this writer appeals to eyewitnesses and Paul frequently appeals to his own authority.

I don't think you can speculate with any value to interpreting this book who the author is. Origin, called one of the early Church fathers says only God knows who wrote this letter. He lived from 184-253. I think that is correct. I have to say that when I read the letter, to me it sounds a lot like the Apostle Paul. Listen to 10:32-34:

32 *But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings:*

33 *partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated;*

34 *for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.*

The commentator John Gill says this:

"It has been ascribed to different persons, as to Barnabas, to Apollos, to Luke the Evangelist, and to Clement of Rome, but without any just reason. Clement of Alexandria, a very ancient writer, asserts it to be the Apostle Paul's {d}; and his name stands in the title of it, in all R. Stephens's exemplars, and in all Beza's copies, excepting one, and so it does in the Vulgate Latin and Arabic versions; and that it is his, is highly probable from the agreement there is between this, and other epistles of his..." And then he gives a list of referenced to compare.

[...compare **Heb 1:2,3** with **Col 1:15,16** and **Heb 5:12-14** with **1Co 3:1,2** and **Heb 12:1** with **1Co 9:24** and **Heb 13:7,17** with **1Th 5:11,12**, and **Heb 13:9** with **Eph 4:14** and **Heb 13:18** with **2Co 1:12** and **Heb 13:20** with **Ro 15:13 16:20 1Th 5:23** and many other places..."]

So the answer to the question, "Who wrote Hebrews?" our answer is we simply don't know.

RECIPIENTS:

With regard to the question as to whom this letter was written, I think we can safely say that it was written to Jews who had become Christians. As to their location, to quote Ryrie again he says, "Where did they live? Palestine or Italy have been the answers most often given. The preference seems to be Italy, for these readers were not poor (and the saints in Palestine were, 6:10; 10:34; Rom. 15:26)..."

The verse that gives the most help here, as little as it is, is Hebrews 13:24. It says:

24 *Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.*

Ellicott says of the words, "They of Italy salute you": "Unfortunately these words admit of two opposite interpretations. Either the author is himself in Italy, and sends to the Hebrew Christians whom he addresses the salutations of an Italian church; or, writing to Italy, he transmits the message which those 'of Italy' who are now with him send to their fellow Christians at home" (VIII:281). He then questions the possibility if the letter is being sent to Israel somewhere, or to Italy somewhere."

ZPBD says the words, "They of Italy salute you favors the readers being located in Italy."

But I think a third possibility may be considered. Go to Acts 18. There was a time when the Jews were driven out of Italy. Acts 18:1-2 says this:

1 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.

2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them.

Our question is, when did this happen? And the answer is that it took place in AD 49. I do not know where these Jews went but it could be to any place open to them. Let me just slip in here that in 1492, when Christopher Columbus out set for the new land, the Jews were once again being expelled from Italy. It is also possible that Columbus himself was a Jew.

Well, emperor Claudius died in AD 54, and after this the Jews would have been able to begin to return. So let us say these Jews have been expelled from Rome. They could have gone to any possible number of locations. So let us just say, for example, that they were at Alexandria, and that the writer is writing from Antioch. And he says: "They of Italy send their greetings." This would mean that there are Italian Jews at Antioch and they are sending their greetings to the Jews in Alexandria. Well, we cannot know where these Hebrews were, nor from where the letter was sent.

Wherever they have settled, it seems to me that they may be short of leadership and they are discouraged, and more and more they are considering returning to Judaism. The movement of the Church is still quite small and scattered, and the

Messiah is not doing anything to make things better. Life, for the most part is very difficult. They have paid a huge price already, and when they look at their Jewish people who have their traditional synagogues and their movement is kept solid by their traditions, they are beginning to think of going back. As a matter of fact life is very difficult.

So, we do not know who the writer is, nor from where it is written, nor to what place it was sent. What seems evident is that it was written to Jewish Christians who had an Italian background.

Go now to Hebrews 10. It is indicated in the letter that these Hebrew Christians had suffered persecution in the past and this had happened after they became Christians (10:32-34). In Hebrews 12:4 we learn that they had not endured persecution to the shedding of blood.

I would guess that these are Italian Jews who have been driven out of Spain and have settled somewhere else. One would think that things began to build up more and more. Jews were being incriminated more and more. Then talk began to get serious. Then they began to be separated from the others, and eventually Claudius banished them. They were not banished because they were Christians, but because they were Jews.

So it seems to me that the time they endured persecution went on for some time before they were driven out of Italy as one would hardly think that would happen overnight.

DATE:

So, as to the date of this letter, I think it is hardly possible that it could have been after AD 70 because in that year Titus came and destroyed the temple. In the book, from the tenses of verbs used in various places it seems to me that the temple is still in service.

Further I think that it would have been written before AD 67. This is when the first Jewish war took place with Rome. This war lasted from AD 67-73. This war came to an end when Masada fell. If the book had been written after this Jewish war began, I think it would have affected how this letter was written.

From all this I would conclude that the letter would be written somewhere between AD 49 and 67. So either the Roman

ruler Claudius or Nero were in power at the time this letter was written.

OCCASION AND PURPOSE:

With regard to the occasion and purpose of the writing of this letter, the *Zondervan Encyclopedia* says: "The people to whom the letter was sent were in danger of losing their initial enthusiasm. When first they became Christians their exhilaration was such that they rejoiced amid persecution, endured plunder and outrage without complaint (PS Heb. 10:34), and were unstinting in their service of fellow believers, esp. those who were imprisoned. With the passing of the years their earlier zest waned. The parousia, (PS, the return of Christ) which they had ardently expected, seemed as distant as ever; the Jewish establishment and the fellowship of the synagogue, which they had given up for Christianity, continued to flourish and to offer the protection of a religion whose practice was licensed by the Rom. State. Their original impetus slackened off; they were tempted to look backward instead of forward, hence the urgency with which the author exhorts them, using a number of metaphors, not to drift downstream but to row hard against the current, not to flag in the race but to persevere in the faith" (III:87-88).

THE POLITICAL MILEIU: (Climate)

Though one cannot learn much to help in interpreting the letter from who the writer was, or where the recipients lived, one can get more help from the political climate in which these Christians lived. We'll start a long way back and come up to the time the letter was written. Around 635 years before Jesus was born. At this time Nebuchadnezzar took Daniel and his friends captive to Babylon. Later in life Daniel prophesied about 4 world powers. By the way, you might check out on the internet the beast that has been set up at the UN headquarters, and then read Daniel 7:2-4, and you will get an idea of how close we are to the Lord's return.

Well, Babylonia ruled from 626 to 539 BC. While Babylon was in power another kingdom rose and it began to rule in 539 and ruled until 330 BC. While it was in power another kingdom was rising and that was Greece, and it ruled from 330 - 63 BC. While it reached its zenith already another kingdom had been forming and that was Rome and it began to rule in 63 BC and ruled until almost 500 years after Christ.

Let me give a brief account of life in Israel from when Rome began to rule until Christ came from a section in a book called, "A History of the Jews," written by Abram Leon Sacher. I will reduce it and put much of it into my own words.

Rome has just begun to rule the world. This is 63 BC. Herod's father, Antipater, who was an Idumian, was a successful politician. When Pompey died, Antipater quickly turned to Caesar. Antipater became a Roman citizen and ruled Israel. His career was cut short when he was given a cup of poison when he feasted at a banquet. It was then that his son Herod took over. This is the Herod who was in power when Christ was born. Herod had a difficult time taking control, but he managed. He was a very capable man. Thirty nine years before Christ he came to Israel. Israel fought but they were no match, and Rome took over.

In the years of Roman rule before Christ, politically, things were unstable. The land changed hands 4 times and it affected Israel disastrously. The Maccabees, who were Jews, came on the stage and resisted Rome. Many Jews were slaughtered. Then Jerusalem was besieged and there was even more slaughter of Jews. So you can see that politically, it was a very unstable time. Let me quote from the book: "The Roman fury was so great that Herod himself protested." Here is what a cruel man like Herod said: "Would the Romans deprive the city of all its inhabitants and possessions and leave me a king of the wilderness?" Well, he did become king when the Romans were satisfied with their killing. Let me just say that the Jews themselves were not guiltless in some of the disaster that took place. (Quotes from pages 112 and on.)

Well, Herod himself was hard on the Jews. And as if that was not enough, in 31 BC an earthquake shook the land and killed thousands of the inhabitants and destroyed a lot of valuable property. Josephus estimates that about 10,000 men perished from debris falling in houses.

Well, Herod was a strong and able ruler. At that time there were also many bandits in Israel. Then when Herod took over he squelched all that and once more Israelis could farm in peace. They had been through very tumultuous times. The book says this of Herod, "By all the laws of compensation Herod should have been one of the best loved rulers in history. It was his fate to be the most despised. He was popular among the Gentiles of Galilee and Samaria and among the Jews of the

Dispersion, whom he invariably befriended. But his subjects in Judaea hated him. They hated his despotism, though it was no more severe than the Hasmonean predecessor and much more necessary after decades of dynastic bickering." End quote.

But by the time Jesus came on the scene things had changed again. Let me quote once more: "But even more important in awakening the antipathies of the Jews towards him was Herod's unfortunate temperament. Few men in history have stained their hands with so much blood of dearest kin. Towards the end of his life Herod executed mercilessly, almost wantonly, wife, children, relatives, friends, all who opposed him, until Augustus exclaimed: 'Better to be Herod's swine than his son'" (115).

It is into this politically charged time that Jesus Christ was born. You know that not long after Herod killed all the baby boys around Bethlehem. Well, I have told you in other messages of the horrible death Herod died. This is the political scene at the time of Christ's birth. Jews were longing for the Messiah. Today, with covid, our attention is turning more and more to the return of Christ. In those days there was more and more talk of the coming of the Messiah. And when Jesus came, the Jews did not recognize Him as the Messiah. From this time it would be another 30 years before He began His ministry.

Now, Herod knew that when he died nobody would mourn his death. So just before he died he took a number of very important Jews and imprisoned them instructing that when he died they should all be killed. He did this so that people would mourn when he died. He would be content if the Jews were made to mourn even if it had nothing to do with his own death. After he died, his instructions were not carried out. All the glories of his life, and there were many, were soon forgotten.

Well, we are familiar with the Gospels that tell of the life of Christ. John the Baptist was the forerunner and he and Jesus began preaching around 30 years after he and Jesus were born. In the Gospels we learn about the religious climate of the day, but we do not learn so much of the secular politics of the day. However, Jesus did say of the Herod who ruled in His day that he was a fox.

The Herod who reigned when Jesus was born died shortly after having all the boy babies massacred around Bethlehem. He divided the kingdom among three sons. For example, Joseph and

Mary fled to Egypt after Jesus was born, because His life was in danger. But Matthew 2:19-23 says:

19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

20 saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead."

21 Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.

22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee.

23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

The book I have been quoting from says of Archelaus, "While he waited for the Roman emperor to give formal approval to his succession, the Jews broke out in revolt, infuriated by the last executions of Herod. Archelaus inaugurated his reign by massacring three thousand people in the temple court, crowded with Passover pilgrims. 'The people were slaughtered like sheep, side by side with their Temple offerings,' Josephus writes, 'and the Temple was filled with their dead.'" (116). Jesus and John are now a few years old.

Now think of that in light of the present universal upheaval because of covid 19. The instability and division caused by what is called a pandemic is universal. Now think of this. If this book was written in AD 65, some of the Hebrew Christians to whom this book is written, may have been alive from the time of Christ until this book is written. If they did not live in Israel, yet they would know much of this history.

The writer then says, "No sooner was one rebellion crushed then another began and the ten years of Archelaus' reign were a long, bloody feud." End quote. Well the Jews in Israel banded together and were able to get rid of Archelaus. The book I am quoting writes of the Felix mentioned in the book of Acts and says this: "Of Felix, risen from slavery, Tacitus writes: 'He

exercised the prerogative of a king in the spirit of a slave, with superlative cruelty and licentiousness.' He and several of his successors were merciless in the levying of taxes, and those who collected them were hated more than thieves." Do you remember that Matthew was a tax collector? Now this writer says that Josephus said, "The officials of the Roman provinces are like flies on a sore; but those already sated with blood do not (do) such so hard as the new-comers."

Later he writes of Pontius Pilate, "Pontius Pilate, the procurator who sentenced Jesus to death, was such a governor. He ruled for ten years until his recall, A.D. 36, quarrelling almost continuously" (116). So think of this, during the time of Pontius Pilate Jesus was crucified and the Church was born. There was almost continuous political quarreling. And the Church was born into a politically poisonous atmosphere. The book says he smuggled soldiers into the Holy City by night bearing silver images of the emperor on their ensign. The Jews were so incensed that they besieged him for five days and he gave in only when the whole nation was ready to rise up against him."

Think of the history into which the Church was born. If you lived in that day and you thought that Jesus the Messiah was returning soon and things just got worse and worse, soon you might begin to give up on this Messiah. Here is the word from history for us: Do not despair. Yes, you can trust in the return of Christ. But then realize that in our time there may be one such thing as covid come upon us after another. Learn to trust and rejoice regardless of the political events around us. Think big, and long term. Do not get discouraged because of what you see all around us. Remember Peter. Listen to the story:

28 And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

29 So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.

30 But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

31 *And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

May I ask you, in this time of covid, do you rest in the Lord? Do you get all uptight with others because of the division? Oh I have to tell myself to be ever so careful. And then sometimes I find myself get caught up in what I should have let go.

Now I do not know when the Jewish people to whom the book of Hebrews became Christians but many of them likely lived through much of what we are looking at here. You see, from the time the Church was born until this book was written is maybe 30-40 years. And maybe in hopes of Jesus as the Messiah and His soon return they gladly took up this new hope. And then one disastrous event after another took place. Surely they had heard Jesus was returning soon. And yet, more trouble. If these are Jews who have been driven out of Spain, maybe their families are scattered in various countries.

Let me quote from the book again: "Under all the procurators, good and bad alike, there were clashes and the land seethed with rebellion. The most serious opposition came from Galilee, where the Zealots became the leaders. They were extremists who shrank from nothing to bring down their heathen masters. Their watchword was: 'No god but Yahwey, no tax but to the Temple, no friend but the Zealot.' The crucifixions which foiled every unsuccessful flouting of imperial power only had the effect of arousing avengers, who fought on until they too hung in agony on a public gibber."

It is possible that the cry of the Zealots affected the Hebrews to whom this book is written. There were four branches of Jews; the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Zealots, and the Essenes. The Zealots were the religiously zealous people. And group after group rises up against the Romans, and they die like flies on the crosses that lined roads. Rome would not give in to a few religious Zealots.

Now place yourself in that time. You have become a Christian. Christ, so you have been taught, was the Messiah. He had been resurrected from the dead and he had gone to heaven. His half-brother James is pastor in Jerusalem. He was James the Just. Surely he knew the truth. But nothing is going right and the horizon is covered with dark clouds. Our own covid

situation is not as bad yet as this was. Why are we so easily discouraged? Or are we?

I quote from the book again: "Ultimately Roman patience was thoroughly exhausted and the procurators introduced measures of barbarous severity. Soldiers slew on the slightest provocation. Eminent Jewish leaders were crucified, whole villages were razed. All in vain. A fever of martyrdom seemed to seize upon the harassed people. Fanatics went up and down the country, wild eyed and frantic, prophesying the end of the world, and the advent of the Messiah. Multitudes were ready to follow every impossible visionary who claimed inspiration from heaven. Zealots rushed to their deaths crying out in hysterical exaltation. What was one to do with such a nation? The Romans were frankly bewildered. They had dealt with many turbulent peoples, but with none so contrary - so insanely intractable" (116-17). End quote.

We begin to get the picture why the Hebrews of our letter were getting discouraged. So let us say you have dropped Judaism and have become a Christian. Maybe like these Hebrews, you have suffered persecution. People have said bad things about you. Your own Jewish people have rejected you. And the Messiah you thought would come soon isn't coming. You don't even hear anything from Him anymore. There are a few letters floating around in churches and are being read but you hardly know what to believe any more. Should you believe these letters? Or should you go back to the Bible you have known for so long, the OT? And then you see the Jewish synagogues and they all have family members to get together with, and the teaching is like it has been since you don't know when and it all looks so stable, and you begin to wonder, should you go back?

It is evident from the first two chapters in Hebrews that somehow angels have become a big topic to these Jewish believers. It sounds as if they are switching from their hope in Christ for deliverance to a hope in angels. The writer, Randall C. Gleason, in a section titled, "Angels and the Eschatology of Hebrews 1-2" says,

"However, even if the recipients (i.e. of the letter to the Hebrews) lived outside the Jewish homeland, the question of Jerusalem's future would be of vital concern for the Jews of the Diaspora since they continued to see the Jewish capital as their centre of worship. Furthermore, the devastating consequences of the war with Rome were not limited to

Palestine. Josephus records how the wrath of Rome fell on many Jewish communities of the Diaspora. The hostilities against Jews that began at Caesarea quickly spread to the cities of Syria (*B.J.* 2.457-66, 477-9). In Alexandria, Roman legions were permitted not only to plunder and burn Jewish homes but also to kill thousands of Jewish inhabitants (*B.J.* 2.494-8). Following the war, the Jews of Antioch continued to suffer Roman reprisals under Titus (*B.J.* 7.37-8, 46-62). Hence, regardless of their location, the exhortation to seek the heavenly city (11.10; 12.22; 13.14) rather than the earthly Jerusalem would have been meaningful to the Jewish readers" (End quote).

The church this letter is written to is largely Jewish and with all that was happening they are discouraged. They had their hopes raised that Jesus was the Messiah, but no one has heard from Him since He left and everything is upside down in Israel, their home nation. And so what are these Jewish believers to make of the One they had thought was the Jewish Messiah?

And then a teaching comes along and it is growing in numbers. There is hope of deliverance for the Jews from angels, instead of from the Messiah. This is what Hebrews 1-2 is about. The book from which I have been quoting has a section called, "*Angels and national deliverance.*" It says:

"A nationalistic eschatology rooted in OT promises of divine deliverance flourished among various groups within Second Temple Judaism." Let me just insert here that Second Temple Judaism is Judaism from 515 BC to 70 AD. At the writing of Hebrews 70 AD was not far away. I continue the quote now: "This common hope fuelled the rise of nationalism, leading to the first Jewish revolt in AD 66-70. Christopher Rowland explains: 'One factor which played a part in the disastrous events of that time was the desperate conviction that God was going to intervene on the side of his people and destroy those who were so sorely besetting them.' The prominent role of angels in Israel's deliverance is evident in much of the Jewish literature circulating in Palestine by the first century. The clearest example is the *War Scroll* (1QM) found at Qumran.⁵¹ This remarkable text provides a vivid example of the apocalyptic worldview commonly found within contemporary Judaism. It foretells a great eschatological war consisting of seven battles between the sons of light (that is, the members of the community, or *Yahad*), and the sons of darkness (that is, the Romans, or *Kittim*, and wicked Israelites). God

eventually triumphs over 'Belial [i.e. Satan] and all [his] angels' by destroying 'all the men of his forces . . . forever' (1QM 1.14). The elaborate descriptions of this bloody conflict frequently mention the presence of 'holy angels' fighting alongside the sons of light (e.g. 1QM 7.5; 12.3, 8; 4Q491 f1-3.1, 10). In the final battle God sends 'help' (rz[]) through Michael the archangel, who leads them and their angelic escorts to a decisive victory. Another Qumran text (4Q529) records Michael encouraging 'the angels' with the report of an elite angelic force defending Mount Zion, declaring: 'I found there fiery troops.'⁵²"

So we have these Hebrew Christians. They are very discouraged. And now a new hope comes from their fellow Jews of deliverance from their present circumstances by angels, especially the angel Michael. And maybe even some in their fellowship are already slipping away from their Christian faith in Jesus Christ and adopting this view of deliverance by angels.

I quote again:

"As a reward for his victory God promises to 'exalt the authority of Michael among the gods' (1QM 17.7-8). This ensures Michael a prominent role among the angelic hosts in the world to come. The *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* (4Q400-407) found at both Qumran and Masada echo the same theme of angelic troops led by their 'warrior' God (4Q403 f1.1-3) in armed conflict against his enemies (4Q402 f3-4.5-10). As they march out from their military-style camps into battle (4Q405 f20ii-22.7-14), these angelic armies offer continuous worship to God, exalting him for his 'warrior acts' (11Q17 f5-6.3-9).⁵³

"The theme of angels waging war against the enemies of Israel is also prominent within the apocalyptic literature of the same period. The book of the Watchers (*1 Enoch* 1-33) begins by announcing that God is coming 'with ten million holy ones . . . to execute judgement' (1.7). Later Suru'el, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Saraqa'el and Gabriel are introduced as the angels who stand watch over God's people (20.1-7) and lead these holy ones coming to destroy the enemies of God (13.1-21).⁵⁴ The Similitudes of *1 Enoch* likewise predict that in the last days God will send out 'the angels of plague' with 'chains' to execute judgment upon 'the kings and the potentates of this earth' (53.4-5).⁵⁵ Led by 'Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, and Phanuel' (54.6), these angels will usher in a time of peace

when the righteous of Israel 'shall have rest from the oppression of sinners' (53.7).

"The epistle of Enoch (*1 Enoch* 91-105) also promises that when the Most High executes judgment upon the wicked, 'He will set a guard of holy angels over all the righteous, . . . and they shall keep them as the apple of the eye' (100.4-5). The hope of angelic intervention is further indicated in the *Testament of Levi* (second cent.), where Levi's angelic guide identifies himself as the one 'who makes intercession for the nation of Israel, that they might not be beaten' (5.3-6). Similarly, the *Testament of Naphtali* (second cent.) predicts the deliverance of Israel, promising that if they 'be in unity with Levi and Judah [8.2] . . . the angels will stand with' them (8.4). Though the supremacy of God is generally maintained throughout apocalyptic literature, angels are given an increasingly prominent role in fighting on behalf of God's people." <https://www.marquette.edu/maqom/GleasonAngels.pdf>

If the book of Hebrews is written not long before the destruction of the Jewish temple, say between AD 49 and 67, and there is strong Jewish hope of angels delivering Israel, and if these Hebrew Christians were becoming very discouraged, one can see how they might be tempted to fall in with such teachings. The writer to the book of Hebrews then seeks to correct their view on the ministry of angels.

Go now to Hebrews 2. In chapters 1-2 the writer deals with angels. It seems that some hope of deliverance by angels has crept into the thinking of these discouraged Christians. And in the rest of the book it seems they are contemplating going back to Judaism. They have gotten saved but now, with all that is happening it seems the Messiah they had come to trust in is doing nothing for them. Discouragement has set in and they are thinking of returning to Judaism and the synagogue.

In studying Hebrews it seems to me that the writer is addressing two problems. One is that the readers are falling into the problem of certain teachings about angels that is not biblical. This is dealt with in chapters 1-2. The second problem is that they appear to be considering leaving the Christian faith and going back to Judaism. In this book there is warning after warning of not going back.

And in seeking to correct them about their view of angels the writer says this in 2:5:

5 *For He (God) has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels.*

It appears that the teaching they have been considering to follow says that the coming kingdom will be run by angels. But the writer to the Hebrews says that God has not put the world to come in subjection to angels. This is a false hope. And when you read the rest of the letter, returning to Judaism is a false hope as well.