

“Remembering Those Who Have Gone Before”

Hebrews 13:6-9



It is my conjecture that the book of Hebrews was written in the awkward year and a half of 68-70 following the death of Nero. The persecution of Christians began in the year 64 following the massive fire in Rome. The writer was an associated of the Apostle Paul and from his letter has just been released from incarceration as has Timothy [Hebrews 13:23]. The letter likely was going to Christians in Asia Minor.

Emperor Nero [54-68 AD] Age 16 at coronation
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The descriptions of the circumstances [especially in chapter 13] seems to fit the time just after Nero’s death. It was during this time that the Christian leaders that had survived the executions under Nero were released during the protracted Roman civil war that filled the political landscape of the year following Nero’s death. Many of the 1st Generation leaders had been executed in the social turmoil. We know Peter, Paul, James and Barnabas had died.

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It is likely many more died as well. This left the 2nd Generation leaders at loose ends. A few of the Apostles had survived, but they were still underground or outside of Roman jurisdiction [John, Matthew and Thomas]. The Jewish War was still engaged. Christians were unmoored from their apostolic leaders and disconnected from the Jewish faith that had provided a secure backstop. Greek philosophic ideas and eastern religious ideas began to filter into the faith.

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3 **Remember** those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

4 Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

5 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

6 So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my **helper**; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" *[Psalm 118:6-7]*

7 **Remember** your leaders, those **who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.**

8 Jesus Christ is **the same yesterday and today and forever.**

9 **Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.**

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Marconi who invented wireless telegraph by 1906 recognized the need for an international distress call. He settled on CQD an anacronym for for a French phrase meaning “Safety in Danger”. The Telegraph signal for this combination of letters was easily confused. Telegraph operators wanted a simpler code. In Berlin in 1909 at the 1st International Radiotelegraphy most of the world adopted SOS because of its simplicity [it is not an anacronym]. The British and Marconi continued with CQD. This was unfortunate in April of 1912 for the Titanic. Other ships near it were confused by the distress signal.

Marconi in 1906 selected CQD as a distress call.

SOS was chosen for its simplicity in 1909 at the Berlin International Radiotelegraphy Conference. The British shipping continued with CQD until 1912.

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The Greek Word for helper is a word that means “run to the cry”. A person can not respond to a cry when the message is unclear. In the 1920’s the same problem developed with audio radio transmissions. In 1928 “Mayday” a sound alike word to a French word for “distress” was chosen for its simplicity and clarity in radio transmissions. In Psalm 118:6-7, the Psalmist speaks of his distress and is confident that God is his helper. Coming out of the persecution the writer of Hebrews reflects on this Psalm.

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Psalm 118:1-9 *6-7 [ESV]

1 Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!

2 Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

3 Let the house of Aaron say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

4 Let those who fear the LORD say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

5 Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me free.

6 The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?

7 The LORD is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.

8 It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.

9 It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.

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This word is also used in Mark 9:24 and Hebrews 2:18.

In Mark 9 a Father has brought his demonized son to Jesus because he is self-harming and attempting suicide. He is desperate. He asks for Jesus to heal his son but struggles with his unbelief, “help my unbelief”. It is a cry that Jesus answers.

In Hebrews 2:14-18 the writer indicates that Jesus as God in flesh came to the cry of humanity to save us.



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Mark 9:21-25 *24

21 And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood.

22 And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

23 And Jesus said to him, "'If you can'! All things are possible for one who believes."

24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

25 And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."
rich.

Hebrews 2:14-18 *18 [ESV]

14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,
15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

16 For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.

17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

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Midyat, Turkey. The spire in the center is an Armenian Christian Church. Christians have lived in this community for nearly 2000 years.

Midyat, Turkey. It is just across the border from northern Syria. It has been occupied since 900 BC [almost 3000 years]. Less than 3 years ago while doing some renovation on basements of ancient dwellings workers discovered the opening to a massive underground city.

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Archeologists working in the underground city below Midyat. The rooms discovered so far include a synagogue and a church. The city included wells, airshafts and granaries. There were likely stables as well. Pigeon coops have been found in other underground cities.

Only 5% has been explored but it is believed to have had a population of 60-70,000. In Turkey there are a number of ancient underground cities [around 40] – this is the largest discovered and it appears to date to the 2nd Century and housed a largely Jewish and Christian populace. In the middle of the 2nd century [around AD 150] severe persecutions of the Christian community broke out in Asia Minor [modern Turkey].

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These underground cities appear to be designed to protect a population fearful of unrest, persecution or oppression. There is a great deal of speculation if these were designed to protect Christian and Jewish people from a deeply antagonistic Roman population. Christians moving into the 2nd century had a great deal of trepidation. Gnosticism was infiltrating Christianity even as Roman culture became intensely hostile.

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Hebrews 13:17 [ESV]

17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Hebrews 6:11-12 *12

11 And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end,

12 so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Relation 6:9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.

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The writer of Hebrews anticipating this struggle in the coming decades encourages his fellow Christians to remember their founding leaders. To recall how that lived their lives out to the end and then pattern their lives according to them. The faith passed down was central to their identity as Christians. And at the center of this belief was the divinity and humanity of Jesus [Hebrews 2 and John 8:58].

John 8:56-59 *58 [ESV]

56 Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."

57 So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?"

58 Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

59 So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

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Midyat, Turkey. The spire in the center is an Armenian Christian Church. Christians have lived in this community for nearly 2000 years.

The Christian faith persists in spite of Roman, Gnostic and Islamic attempts to destroy it.

Paul writing to the Colossians some time around AD 61 warns them of the dangers he sees for the Christian faith in the coming decades. He tackles the foundations of human philosophy, Gnostic spiritualism, false doctrine and antagonistic culture. For Paul the Christian must be deeply committed to Christ if he or she is to stand.

Colossians 2:6-10 [ESV]

6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,
7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,
10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

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We should trust in God, honor and emulate Christians who have gone before, confident because Jesus Christ is always the same and with these things in mind keep and guard the faith entrusted to us.



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