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The Audience of the book of Hebrews

As John MacArthur relates in his commentary on **Hebrews**, there are no references to Gentiles in the book. Problems between Jews and Gentiles are not mentioned, so the congregation being addressed was strictly Jewish. To those suffering Jewish believers - and some unbelievers - are revealed the merits of **Yeshua Messiah** and the B'rit Chadashah, in contrast to the Levitical system that they had lived and worshiped for so long. We do not know the exact location of this group of **Hebrews**. Perhaps they were somewhere near Greece. We do know that apostles and New Covenant prophets had evangelized this Messianic community (**2:3-4**). Evidently this congregation had been founded fairly soon after **Yeshua's** ascension. By the time the letter was written, a small congregation of believers already existed there. They were not very mature spiritually, and some were tempted to go back to the entire Levitical sacrificial system.

The book of **Hebrews** was written to **three basic groups of Jews** in the diaspora. If one does not keep these groups in mind, the book becomes very confusing, especially in **Chapters 6 and 10**. If, for example, as some have said, it was written exclusively to believers, there are a number of passages that could not apply to believers. And because it so frequently addresses believers, it could not possibly have been written primarily to unbelievers either. It must have been written to include both. Hence, it is no surprise that there is no greeting to **God's Messianic community** like we find in most of the letters in the New Covenant.

Group One: Messianic Jews: There was a Jewish congregation of true believers in **Jesus Christ**. They had come out of Judaism, in which they were born and raised. They had been born again. The result, as it is many times today, was tremendous hostility from their own people - ostracism from their families, persecution and suffering of all kinds, though not martyrdom (**10:32-34** and **12:4**). They suffered greatly.

They should have anticipated as much and have been mature enough to deal with it. But they had not and were not. They lacked full confidence in the Good News, and, consequently, in the Lord. They were in danger of going back into the Levitical system - not losing their salvation but confusing the gospel with Jewish ceremony thereby weakening their faith and testimony. They could not bring themselves to accept the clear-cut distinction between the New Covenant in **Messiah** and the forms, ceremonies, patterns and methods of

Judaism. They were still hung up, for example, on the Temple ritual and worship. That was why the **Ruach ha-Kodesh** talked to them so much about the new priesthood, the new Temple, new sacrifice, and new sanctuary, all of which were better than the old ones.

They had gone beyond Judaism and received **Messiah** as their **Lord** and **Savior**, but, understandably, they were tempted to hang on to many of the Jewish habits that had been a part of their lives for so long. When their friends and countrymen began to persecute them, the pressure led them to hold on even tighter to some of the old Jewish traditions. They felt they had to keep a foothold in their old and familiar relationships. In other words, it was hard for them to make a clean break.

With all the pressure, together with their weak faith and spiritual ignorance, they were in great danger of mixing the new and the old. They were in danger of coming up with a watered-down faith. **Jesus** had warned **the church** at **Laodicea**, "**Because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I AM about to spit you out of My mouth**" (3:16). They were a whole congregation of **weaker brothers** (**Romans 14:2; First Corinthians 8:9**), who were still calling **unclean** what **God has made clean** (**Mark 7:19; Acts 10:15; Romans 14:12**).

The Ruach ha-Kodesh directed this letter to them to strengthen their faith in the New Covenant, to show them that they did not need the Temple to worship **God** (which in a few years would be completely destroyed by Titus Vespasian anyway, showing that **YHVH** had brought an end to the Dispensation of the Torah). They did not need the old Levitical system. They did not need the continual sacrifices. They did not need the ceremonies. They had a new and better covenant with a new and better priesthood, a new and better sanctuary, and a new and better sacrifice. The shadow was to give way to the reality.

Group Two: Unbelieving Jews who were Intellectually Convinced: We have all met people who have heard the truth about **Jesus Christ** and who are intellectually convinced that **He** is indeed who **He** claimed to be, but are not willing to step over the line from knowledge to faith. In this Jewish congregation to whom the letter was written, there were such unbelievers. It is likely that every gathering of the congregations of **God** since Shavu'ot has had people in it who have been convinced that **Yeshua** is **the Messiah**, but who have never committed themselves to **Him**. Why? Perhaps they loved the approval of men more than the approval of **God** (**John 12:42-43**). But whatever the reason, they were not willing to make the sacrifice required. And so **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** urged them to go all the way to saving faith; to go all the way to commitment to the lordship of **Christ**.

What is the unforgivable sin? They were guilty of acknowledging - but not committing. They

were guilty of the great sin of neglecting to do what one is intellectually convinced is right. The truth of the gospel had been confirmed to them through the apostles, with all the miracles and gifts of **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**. **Jesus** says that **whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin (Matthew 12:31b; Mark 3:29-30)**. The unforgiveable sin is rejecting **Yeshua Messiah**. If someone has heard the Good News, understands it, and is intellectually convinced of its truth, but then willfully rejects **Jesus Christ** as **Lord** and **Savior**, what more can **YHVH** do? Nothing. Absolutely nothing! All **Ha'Shem** can promise is **a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God (Hebrews 10:27)**.

Group Three: Unbelieving Jews: The Spirit of God in the book of **Hebrews** not only spoke to Jewish believers in order to strengthen their faith, and to the intellectually convinced in order to push them over the line from knowledge to saving faith, but **He** also speaks to those who have not believed at all. **He** seeks to clearly show them that **Yeshua** is in fact who **He** claimed to be. This message speaks directly to unbelievers, not Jewish believers or those who had already been intellectually convinced of the gospel. It is given to those who first need to know who **Jesus** really is.

These, then, are the three groups addressed in Hebrews. The key to interpreting any part of the book is to understand which group is in view. If we do not understand that, we are bound to confuse the issues. For example, **the Holy Spirit** is surely not saying to believers: **People are destined to die just once and after that to face the judgment (9:27 CJB)**. We must always understand who **the Ruach** is speaking to. As we study the book of **Hebrews**, we will relate each file to one of those three groups.



The primary message is addressed to Jewish believers. But from time to time **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** interspersed **five warning passages** to the two other unbelieving groups. **To see these links, lick on letters**

[A](#) - The first warning is the danger of neglect: intellectually convinced Jews

As - The second warning is the danger of a hardened heart: unbelieving Jews

Ba - The third warning is the danger of dullness of hearing: unconvinced Jews

Bb - The fourth warning is the danger of falling away: hesitating Jews

Ci - The fifth warning is the danger of apostasy: apostate Jews

In a skillful way **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** speaks to all three groups. There is confidence and assurance for the Messianic Jews. **He** warns the intellectually convinced Jews that they must receive **Messiah** or their knowledge will damn them. Finally, there is a convincing presentation to the unbelieving Jews who were not even intellectually convinced, that they should believe in **Yeshua**. To these three groups of **Hebrews**, the author presents **Messiah, the Author** of a B'rit Chadashah that is greater than the first one. The First Covenant was not bad; it was **God**-given and therefore good (**Psalm 19:7-8 CJB**). But it was incomplete and preliminary. It set the stage for the New Covenant.¹⁰