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You Have Become Dull of Hearing The Third Warning - 5: 11-14 The Danger of Dullness of Hearing: Unconvinced Jews

You have become dull of hearing DIG: Where do the warning passages occur in Hebrews, and what do they warn unbelievers about? Who is the mediator of the New Covenant? Who was the mediator during the Dispensation of the Torah? Describe the warnings given in the book of Hebrews. Is there any difference between them? What should have been the response of the Jews who had been under the teaching of New Covenant truth in Messiah?

REFLECT: Can you be a believer in Christ without being made righteous in Christ (see the commentary on *The Life of Christ*, **to see link click Bw - What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith?**)? Who do you know who has become dull of hearing about Jesus? What can you learn from this warning? How can you help others?

The central theme and message of the book of Hebrews is to contrast the superior, perfect, once-for-all-time sacrifice of Messiah to the inferior, never-ending sacrifices of the Levitical priesthood. This is the key that unlocks every section of Hebrews, and to use any other key is to make a forced entry.

As we have already noted, interspaced throughout **Hebrews** are several warnings to unbelieving **Jews**. These warnings could also function as an encouragement and counsel to **the Israelites** who had trusted in **Christ** as **their Lord** and **Savior** but were being tempted to turn back to **Judaism** because of doubts, criticism, and, for some, even persecution. The first warning was about neglect the gospel (**to see link click Al - How Shall We Escape If We Ignore So Great a Salvation**), and the second was about hardening **their** hearts to hear it (see **As - Today, If You Hear His Voice, Do Not Harden Your Hearts**). The main thrust of this third parenthetical warning concerns spiritual **maturity** - the danger of staying with the elementary truths of the Levitical priesthood, now that **the Great High Priest, Yeshua Messiah**, had superseded it. Those **unbelieving Jews** knew a great deal about the gospel, but they had not stepped over the line from knowledge to **faith**. This is the third of **five warning passages** (see **Ag - The Audience of the Book of Hebrews**).



About Melchizedek we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull (Greek: *nothros*) **of hearing (5:11)**. Who is the author talking to here? There are, of course, many exhortations in the New Covenant for immature believers to grow up. But I don't think that is what's being given here. He is saying to hesitant, **unbelieving Hebrews** still hanging on to **Judaism**, "Come to completeness, to **maturity**, in the B'rit Chadashah." The warning and the appeal, as the two warning passages before, are evangelistic. **The maturity** being spoken of is that of an unbeliever coming into **faith** - into the full-grown, mature truths and blessings of **Messiah** as **the Great High Priest**. It is the same **maturity**, or **perfection** (from the Greek root *teleo*) as seen in **10:1**, "**For this reason the Torah can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect** (Greek: *teleo*) **those who draw near to worship,**" and **10:14**, "**For by one sacrifice He has made perfect** (Greek: *teleo*) **forever those who are being made holy.**" This can only refer to salvation, not the spiritual maturity of believers.

So, as John MacArthur relates in his commentary on **Hebrews**, before they could possibly understand the significance of **Yeshua's** priesthood being like Melchizedek's, **the Jewish** unbelievers needed to get beyond **their** limited understanding of **YHVH**. A key indication of their spiritual immaturity was simply **dullness of hearing**. The relation of Melchizedek and his priesthood to **Messiah** is rich and meaningful, and important to the flow of the book, but it cannot be understood by **unbelievers**, even the ones who intellectually accept the gospel: **But the unbeliever does not welcome what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually (First Cor 2:14 HCSB)**. These unbelievers were being told that there was no use going into the deeper things of the New Covenant at that time, because they had become **dull of hearing**.

When people are spiritually **dull**, they are difficult to teach. Those **Hebrews** had been lulled into sleep because of the neglect and hardness of heart, and they would have to awaken and become alert if they were to ever appreciate the truth, significance and necessity of

Christ's once-for-all-time sacrifice. They could not truly understand the gospel, of course, until they put their trust in **the Author** of the gospel. In order to understand this, they needed to spiritually "wake up and pay attention."

The implication of **5:11** is that **those** who were **dull of hearing** had once been alert and interested, perhaps even eager, to learn more of the gospel. But over time they lost interest. **They** didn't start out **dull**; **they** became **dull** gradually. **These** were undoubtedly among the ones who had **once been enlightened** and had **tasted of the heavenly gift (6:4)**. At one time **they** had been stirred and moved and open to the gospel. **They** were once on the brink of salvation. By now, however, **they** had sunk into a rather comfortable spiritual stupor.¹³⁹

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food (5:12). Because of the length of time they had been under instruction of New Covenant truth, **they** should have known enough to be teaching it **themselves**. But because **they** had never truly accepted it, **they** had not grown in it - and really, *couldn't* grow in it. **They** had been exposed to a great deal of **God's** truth, most of which **they** could probably have passed a quiz. **They** had the truth in a certain factual and superficial way, but the truth did not have **them**.

Rabbi Sha'ul wrote to the believers in Rome: **But if you call yourself a Jew and rest on Torah and boast about God and know His will and give your approval to what is right, because you have been instructed from the Torah, and if you have persuaded yourself that you are a guide to the blind, a light in the darkness, an instructor for the spiritually unaware and a teacher of children, since in the Torah you have the embodiment of knowledge and truth; then, you who teach others, don't you teach yourself (Romans 2:17-21a)?** In other words, **they** prided **themselves** in the idea that **they** were great religious teachers. **Hebrews** states explicitly what is implicit in the passage from **Romans**. Those **Jews** were not only unqualified to teach, but **they** needed to go back to kindergarten. They didn't even understand the ABC's of their own **faith**. This was obvious by **their** unwillingness to recognize the TaNaKh's clear fulfillment in the B'rit Chadashah.

Because **they** had become spiritually **dull**, the informed but unbelieving **Jews** needed **someone to teach** them **again**, and start all over with **the basic principles of the oracles of God**. These were **Jews**, and to them **the oracles of God** was **Torah**. **They** needed to go back to the basics. **They** had had considerable exposure to the New Covenant, but **they** couldn't even comprehend their own TaNaKh, as evidenced by their lack of ability

to handle the deeper truth about Melchizedek. Because of progressive revelation, the TaNaKh was the basics of the **faith**, where the B'rit Chadashah is the complete, **mature** message.¹⁴⁰

Does this mean that the legal part of the Torah stands in opposition to God's promises? Heaven forbid! For if the legal part of the Torah that God gave had had in itself the power to give life, the righteousness really would have come by legalistically following such a Torah. But instead, the Torah shuts up everything under sin; so that what was promised, being given through faith in Yeshua Messiah, might be given to those who believe.

Now before the coming of this faith, we were imprisoned in to the system that results from perverting the Torah into legalism, kept under guard until the faith that was to come would be revealed. Accordingly, the Torah functioned as a custodian until Messiah came, so that we might be declared righteous on the ground of trusting and being faithful. But now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian (Galatians 3:21-25 CJB). The Torah was the custodian that taught the first and basic truths about YHVH. But we are not under a custodian anymore. Christ has arrived, and the shadows have been replaced with substance.

By neglecting the gospel, and gradually turning away from it because of pressure or persecution that **they** were under, **they** had come to a place where **they** could only absorb **milk**, or the basic teachings of the TaNaKh, not solid food, the deeper teachings of **faith in Christ** for salvation. The types point to the coming of **Christ** had given way to the reality of **Christ**, but **they** couldn't see **Him**. **They** needed to start all over again from the bottom up, gradually increasing **their** spiritual understanding.

For everyone who lives exclusively on milk is not accustomed to the Word of righteousness, since he is an infant (5:13). We must be careful to understand that the Greek word **infant**, *nepios*, meaning *immature*, carries no implication of salvation. The phrase, "babe **in Christ**" is used today to refer to a new believer. Take a look at Sha'ul's use of it: **Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly - mere infants in Christ (First Corinthians 3:1).** There, the word **infants** needed the qualifying phrase "**in Christ**" to indicate that those **Corinthian infants** were saved. Consequently, the word "**infants**" in our **Hebrews** passage cannot be made to show that the people referred to are believers. It has no birth relationship to it. Therefore, **the central theme and message of the book of Hebrews** requires that we understand "**infants**" to refer to unsaved **Jews** who, because of **their**

neglect of the gospel and **their** turning away from it, have again become spiritually immature **living on milk**.

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil (5:14). The Greek word for **practice**, *hexis*, refers to a habit of the body or mind, and speaks here of the habitual use of the spiritual senses that are being **constantly** exercised. This results in the ability to **discern** between **good** and **evil**, and in this context, between **good** and **evil** spiritual teaching. Those unbelieving **Hebrews**, however, had abused **their** spiritual senses and rejected the gospel, the new light given to **them**, and were turning back to the Levitical system.¹⁴¹ It was as if the writer of **Hebrews** was saying to them, "Leave the Levitical system behind, and, in the instant of salvation, be **mature** and eat **solid food**." The Levitical system was the **infancy they** needed to leave in order to go on to the maturity of **faith** in **Christ**. **His** priesthood was superior to the Levitical priesthood; **He** is a better priest than Aaron; **He** operates in a better Covenant; **He** has a better sanctuary and **He** is a better sacrifice. In other words . . . grow up.

Lord God, You are the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. You know all things and hold our lives in Your hands. You know the future as you know the past. You say in your Word that you will guide our steps (Psalm 37:23; 119:133). Help us to look to You and you alone for direction. Help us not to rely on old past ways to seek You, but to move forward as we follow what You say in your Word - that You alone are our Savior and path to heaven. In Yeshua's name and thru the power of His resurrection, Amen