

# Books of The Bible To Whom Was Hebrews Written?

## Introduction

It is my understanding that the evidence indicates the Hebrew Epistle was written for Jews for the following reasons:

- a) One cannot help but be observant of the similarity between the use of the Old Testament in Hebrews with the same usage of it in Matthew and the preaching to the Jews in the Acts. In all of them there is a constant referring to the Old Testament (Matt. 1:23; 2:6, 18; 3:3; Acts 1:20; 2:17-21, 34; 3:22-26; 13:26-29; 17:2-3; 18:28; 28:23). The Gentiles did not have the Old Testament, consequently, seeking to prove something to them from the Old Testament would not prove anything.
- b) To the Jew, the Old Testament books were the God given sacred writings, not sacred because they were from antiquity, but the very messages of the prophets of God, His historical and spiritual dealings with Israel, and His covenants to them. Therefore, any speaking or writing to the Jews demanded the exposition of the Old Testament in truth. Our Lord provided the evidence for Him being the Messiah and the fulfiller of the prophets in Luke 24:32.
- c) The Holy Spirit had and was using the Old Testament to show the superiority of Jesus beyond the Jewish prophets (Heb. 1:1); angelic beings (Heb. 1:4-6; 2:5-8); Moses (Heb. 3:1-6); Joshua (*the context makes it clear that it was Joshua who could not give them God's perfect rest*, Heb. 4:8); the Aaronic priesthood (Heb. 5:1-8:2). Jesus, by His sacrifice, ratified the new covenant (Heb. 8:6-9:28). One of the main points of emphasis in Hebrews is the demonstration how the Old Testament was its own witness to the inadequacy of the Mosaic system and the coming of that which was superior.
- d) These people had to understand that the old economy was temporary and ultimately having to pass away. This was not a new thought. It is that which their very scriptures taught. Due to this method of teaching, these Old Testament references are not "off the cuff" connections, but validations of the deficiency of the old system contrasted with the sufficiency and validation of the new.

We must never think that these folk were not hard headed bigots, but they were people who were strong in their beliefs. Those beliefs were that:

- a) Judaism was a God given religion, totally distinct from all other religions (Ex. 20:1-17).
- b) Its central creed was unique, "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is One LORD" (Deut. 6:4).
- c) God Himself had made them distinct in that He called them, "My people" (Ex. 3:7) to the exclusion of all others. While others had heard of the power of God, they had personally witnessed it (Ex. 14:1-31); they had the manifested presence of God in the fire and cloud (Ex. 13:21-22) and His prophets. They received His laws, it was they alone with whom He had entered a covenant (Ex. 19:9-24:3). Paul remunerates their blessings (Rom. 19:4-5).

## The Difficulties

One of the difficulties of understanding the dire warnings in Hebrews is in part because we do not know who is being spoken to. Sometimes it seems he is speaking to the unsaved and at other times to believers. The fact is, Hebrews was written to a congregation in which there were a mixture of saved and unsaved. It is observed that Hebrews is not unique in this respect for a careful reading of the following verses show quite distinctly that not all who were in the Christian gatherings were assumed to be believers (2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Tim. 2:19; Titus 1:10-16).

Hebrews was evidently written to those who professed salvation, but profession does not mean possession! That is, Hebrews deals with evidence, as does 1 John. The news which had been conveyed to the penman gave him reason for concern. Thus, while the book was written as an exhortation to those who were saved, the Holy Spirit also knew they were not all saved. There must be given no room for a false assurance for a false profession leads to hell, a place of indescribable pain and an unending existence in an enclosed environment. Being concerned for the spiritual welfare of the congregation, there is within its pages a message for the saved and unbelievers.

It is of great importance that, in reading Hebrews, there are two dangers an individual can fall into:

- a) Staying with the delightful parts, chapter 1, etc.

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- b) Shying away from the dark somber warnings. These warnings must not be watered down. They must be faced for that which they are saying. Other scriptures must not be adjusted to suit our thoughts on that which it means, to “fall away” (Heb. 6:6); “impossible to restore” (Heb. 6:4); the “If’s” (Heb. 3:6, 14).

### The Groups Who Comprised The “Hebrews”

It is my understanding that in this community there were distinct groups of people:

- a) People who were undoubtedly saved and had accepted Jesus as Messiah, yet at times their faith was wavering. They were well established in the Old Testament and the ways of God, and being very comfortable with the Septuagint, most likely would have been Greek speaking Jews. In past days they had godly elders over them but in the passing of time, these men had died. We must not assume that because there were elders it was a New Testament church. Israel had had elders for some 1500 years at this time. Although I do see them as a very loose knitted church, which as I say, those who professed and those who had a profession, but void of evidence.
- b) There were those who had made a profession of salvation, even made a confession, but there is a difference between a heart profession and confession and between an emotional one.

### Those of group “a”:

These individuals stood clear as to their salvation in Messiah, and because of the solidity of their profession, they in particular had been the object of fierce persecution and humiliation. While they had not yet suffered martyrdom (Heb. 12:4), they had known what it was to have lost their meagre belongings (Heb. 10:34). Despite the afflictions, they were developing spiritually. -Having believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, they had rejected the sacrificial system of the old economy.

- a) These were not just emotional or intellectual light issues that were blowing as a reed in the wind of some new thing. They were solid, hold on to the bitter end believers, not compromising any aspect of truth. They would die before they would commit apostasy. How noble they were.
- b) Boldly they stood for what the apostles taught, even when the apostles preached that the crucifying of the Lord had been done in ignorance (Acts 3:17).
- c) Being confident that Jesus was the Messiah the Son of God, they preached and in doing so people were saved. -They also were rejecting Moses, etc. This could not continue and resulted in terrible persecution on two fronts.
  - i) Politically: The failure to acknowledge the emperor as Lord indicating his deity, that meant persecution, as that which happened in the times of Herod and Caligula. Many were sent to death in the coliseums, being ripped apart by the wild animals, or hung on stakes and covered in tar. There they hung all day and at night they were set on fire to give light to the party goers.
  - ii) Religiously: Ofttimes the most severe persecution came from the Jewish leaders (Acts 7:54-60; Acts 9:1, 13, 21, 23, 29). One cannot read the book of the Acts without observing the increasing anti-Christian opposition from the Jewish “spiritual” leaders.

### Those in group “b”:

These were those who were not going on and this caused deep concerns. Were they saved but their faith was wavering, or was it that they were not saved. They had professed belief in the Lord Jesus, but due to their lack of spiritual growth (Heb. 5:12), the writer had very real and genuine concerns.

- a) For them the hurdles to get over were:
  - i) The Lord had promised that He would return. They understood it meant He would soon return and set up His kingdom. For the forty days the Lord had been with them, after His resurrection He would be with them and then away, but always came back. Now time had passed and He had not returned. When would He return and bring the promised blessing to Israel (Acts 1:6)? Were they not to be the head of the nations (Deut. 28:13), the chief of the nations (Jer. 31:7)? That had not happened. This resulted them querying, “Were they wrong in that which they had been told and believed?” Perhaps the Lord had not told the disciples He would return again (Jn. 14:3; 21:22).

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- ii) To make matters worse (from their perspective), Paul was preaching and showing from their own scriptures that God was turning to the Gentiles (Acts 13:8; 18:6). How could this be? What about the restoration of Israel? What about a King, David's Son sitting on the Throne? Had they all been mistaken? The answer was, God was working to His own timetable as He told the disciples (Acts 1:6-7); all the promises will be fulfilled for, "Yet a little while and he that will come shall come" (Heb. 10:37); and while at this time, "We see not yet all things put under Him" (Heb. 2:8-9), it will happen. To them God will, with rebuke and exhortation, encourage them to go on (Heb. 6:1-3).
- b) That which held them back was a satanic multi levelled attack.
  - i) They were very much aware of the persecution and at times the death of those who had openly confessed Jesus was the Christ. The decision then would have been, "Am I willing to have this done to myself?". This was very real and would have been an emotional and material turmoil, apart from possible matrimonial conflict. I remember when in Macedonia, after hearing the gospel a man said, "I know you are right but I am afraid of what it would cost me and my family". For the individual to accept Christ as the only way of salvation, it spelt turmoil of heart and mind for they knew that those family members, dead or alive who had not accepted Christ, there is and was no hope for them relative to salvation. That was an emotional spiritual conflict. They were still undecided, and the crucial decision had yet to be made, thus a need for great encouragement.

A schematic follows on those to whom the author wrote.

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**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.  
John 16:13**

Rowan Jennings, Abbotsford, British Columbia

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