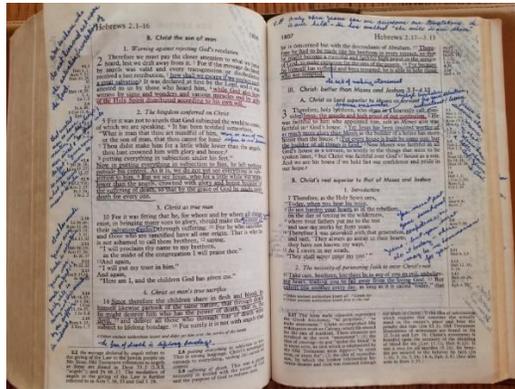


# Introduction: Letter to the Messianic Jews (Hebrews)

## Why Study the Letter to the Messianic Jews? <sup>1</sup>

The easy answer is because it's the Word of God. But for me, it's personal. After I committed myself to accept Yeshua as my Lord and Savior, I devoured the Gospel of John. That is still my favorite book of the Bible, and someday I may do a verse-by-verse study of that.

Shortly after finishing that study, I picked up my RSV and Barclay's Commentary and dove into the **Epistle to the Hebrews**. For many years, I was eager to learn about the Jewishness of my faith, and I thought that would be an excellent place to start. It turned out to be very influential in my later becoming involved in the Messianic Jewish Movement.



My notes on Chapter 2

So why now? As has been my approach to the topics to share with you, I pray for God to reveal to me where He wants to take this blog. And He kept reminding me of my early study, and I kept running into more and more citations from **Messianic Jews** within my daily devotions and readings in other blogs.

## Who Wrote Messianic Jews?

We don't know for sure who wrote it. The majority of modern scholars believe **Sha'ul did not** write it. One reason is that in Rome, where the letter was known from an early date, Pauline authorship was rejected; additional ideas are well presented in other studies. David Stern <sup>2</sup> points to one piece of internal evidence, **Messianic Jews 2:3b**, where the author writes, **"This deliverance, which was first declared by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him."** It is thought that **Sha'ul** could not have written these words since he heard and saw Yeshua himself (Acts 9:3-6, 1C 15:8).

Authorship candidates for whom there is no conflict with **Messianic Jews 2:3b** include Apollos, an educated, courageous Hellenistic Jew who was apparently a charismatic leader (Ac 18:24-19:1; 1C 1:12, 3:4-5); Priscilla, who is mentioned in the New Testament before her husband Aquila four times out of six, notably in connection with teaching when **"they took Apollos aside and explained to him the Way of God in greater detail"** (Acts 18:26; also Acts 18:18, Romans 16:3, 2 Timothy 4:19); Clement and Luke.

We do know that the author was well known in the early church and that Timothy was with the writer (13:23). **"The people from Italy send greetings to you"** (13:24) may indicate that the letter was written from Italy, although this is not a necessary conclusion. But whoever the author was, as a literary work **Messianic Jews** is superb: orderly and logical, **"in balanced and resonant sentences of remarkable precision, rising to wonderful heights of eloquence."** Personally, I would not be surprised when we get to Heaven to discover that **Priscilla** was indeed the author.

<sup>1</sup> Today one rarely hears Jews called "Hebrews."

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this series, I will frequently be quoting from the Jewish New Testament Commentary by David Stern.

## To Whom Addressed

This letter and those of **Ya'akov, Kefa, Yochanan,** and **Y'hudah** are known as the General Letters since they are thought of as being written to the entire Messianic Community, rather than to Gentiles only (like the majority of **Sha'ul's**) or individuals (like the four Pastorals). However, there is a stream of biblical scholarship which holds that of these eight letters, all but **Yochanan's** three were written to Messianic Jews. For the present letter the argument is overwhelming.

Its Greek title, found on several of the oldest manuscripts, "*Pros Ebraious*" ("**To Messianic Jews**"), is not part of the original document but must nevertheless be very early. Clearly it is meant to indicate that the book concerns itself with topics of interest to believers in Yeshua who are Jewish ~ the *cahanut* ("priesthood"), the sacrificial system, angels, Malki-Tzedek, Avraham, Moshe, the Israelites in the wilderness, the biblical covenants, the **Tanakh's** men of faith, the role of **Torah** in the Brit Hadashah, and so on. More specifically, the author wrote to a particular community of Jewish believers whom he knew well and whose spiritual condition he monitored (see 5:11-12, 6:9-10, 10:32-34, 13:18-24).

## Date

The content of the letter makes it clear that it was written before a.d. 70, when the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple put an end to the Jewish sacrificial system. The author consistently uses the present tense ("is," "are") when speaking of the Temple and the priestly activities connected with it.

## Purpose <sup>3</sup>

One of the reasons for this letter was to prepare Messianic Jews for the approaching destruction of Jerusalem. After accepting **Yeshua** as their Messiah, the Messianic Jews continued to be zealous for the Temple rites and sacrifices, thinking that their beloved city was about to become the capital of the world under their Messiah's reign. Instead, they were to receive the shock of their lives. By one stroke of the Roman army, the Holy City would be wiped out, and the Temple rites would cease.

This letter was written to explain to the Messianic Jews that animal sacrifices, to which they were so attached, were no longer of any use, that the killing of a bull or a lamb could never take away sin. Those sacrifices had never been intended to be forever; they had been planned to be a sort of picture of the coming sacrifice of the **Messiah**, and now that **Yeshua** had come, they had served their purpose. God's people must look only to **Yeshua** for redemption and salvation.

In my next post, we'll begin to examine Messianic Jews 1:1-4 ~ **The Deity of Yeshua.**

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<sup>3</sup> Halley's Bible Handbook.