Hebrews

Father, we do thank you for the beautiful day you given us. Thank you for your faithfulness to us, your love for us, and especially the love you demonstrated in sending your living word, your son Jesus Christ, but also the written word that testifies to him and to what it means to live in obedience to Jesus Christ and what it means to be your people. So I pray that we’ll take seriously that revelation through our studies, our desire to know your word better and the world that you have created and the different areas of knowledge that you have graciously communicated to us and have given us responsibility to know. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Today we actually move into the final section of the New Testament. Although you could argue that the book of Revelation is, in a sens, it is a different type of book all on its own. Today, we move into a section of the New Testament comprised of Hebrews, James, First, Second and Third John, and First and Second Peter which are usually labeled the General epistles or the Catholic epistles. By Catholic or General, we simply mean that these letters appear to be addressed to a fairly wide audience. You pick that up especially when you read the introduction of James and First Peter. The author is unlike some of Paul's letters, where Paul is addressing specific churches in specific locations. Or in a couple instances, he’s addressing specific persons. With many of these letters, Hebrews all the way through Jude and all the books beside Revelation, you read them and you get a sense that they are addressed to Christians living over a fairly broad geographical area. At least in the case of Hebrews, there is no indication in the letter itself of a specific audience. So again it's usually been labeled one of these general epistles.

We've looked at several books that could be considered as groups, such as Paul’s prison epistles because he wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians while in prison. We look at the section that are often labeled the pastoral epistles, though that's probably not the best label for them. But now we’re looking at a section that is often called
the General or the Catholic epistles because they appear to be addressed to Christians living more broadly and in a larger geographical area rather than one specific place, at least most of them. Except a book like Hebrews, again we can't be entirely sure whether it was addressed to a very specific audience or not. Though I suspect that it was, but the letter itself doesn't tell us.

Now the book of Hebrews. One of the questions that has perplexed people studying Hebrews is to try to figure out who may have written it because by calling Hebrews a letter, we often refer to it as “the letter to the Hebrews.” We'll talk a little bit about that title. By calling it a letter, our expectations in reading this work are frustrated because it doesn't begin like a letter. All the other letters we’ve looked at from Paul and some of the letters we will look at, will have an identification of the author, like “apostle of Jesus Christ,” and then an indication of who he is writing to, to the saints and Colossae or “to Timothy, my beloved son” or something like that. That's lacking in Hebrews and so it becomes problematic to figure out who may have written this. You're confronted with much the same problem as you are in the gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, do not name the author. Which is normal for narrative, you don’t begin a narrative by indicating who's writing it. At least in the first centuries A.D. that's normal. But this work is a little bit more difficult because, although sometimes it sounds like a letter and we often call it a letter, there is no hint at all who wrote it. We don't have any evidence that there ever was an introduction to it, that somehow has gotten lost or left off. Instead, Hebrews simply begins in chapter one and verse one. “Long-ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son whom he appointed heir of all things through whom he created the world.” Then he launches into a rather detailed description of who Christ is and what that means for his readers, but there's no indication of authorship.

The Church throughout history has actually come up with a number of possible proposals. Very early on, it was common to think that Paul was the author of the letter to Hebrews. In fact, very early on, the one of the reasons Hebrews may have gained in
popularity in the early church in the second century was because many people thought that Paul was the author of it. Yet, I think the common consensus today is Paul did not write it. We can't be entirely sure. Some have suggested that Apollos may have written it, or even Barnabas two well-known Christian leaders in the first century that may very well have penned the book of Hebrews. Luke is another possibility. There's actually a monograph, a book, that was produced just very recently that argued that there's a number of similarities, verbally and otherwise, between Luke's Gospel and the letter of Hebrews. Some think Luke wrote it. Others have listed other possibilities; even Mary the mother of Jesus gets a vote as to the author of the book of Hebrews. Probably we can't do much better than the church father Origen. “God only knows who wrote the book of Hebrews.” We can make a pretty good guess about who the author may have been as far as kind of the implied author as he reveals himself in the text, as far as what the author may have thought, perhaps something of his background, and in the sources of his thinking and what he was trying to accomplish etc. But it’s hard to try to pin a precise name on it and the precise identity of the author. If someone thinks that Mary the mother Jesus was a candidate (though that one hasn't really caught on) but we probably have to settle for the Origen’s conclusion. God only knows who wrote the letter to the Hebrews because we just don't have enough information and the author doesn't identify himself or herself in the letter.

Why was Hebrews written? The other difficulty is, because Hebrews does not identify the readership, as far as exactly who they are and where they are, such as Paul identifies his readership. Again, it becomes a little tricky. Interestingly, some early church tradition identifies or locates Hebrews in the city of Rome. Some have suggested that Hebrews may have been addressing persons, and we'll talk about who specifically maybe, but it may be addressing the group who are living in Rome. That's a possibility, but again we’ll have to simply rely on Hebrews to tell us everything we can know about the who the readers are. Back to this first point to the Hebrews, most of your Bibles will have something like, “the letter to the Hebrews” or just “Hebrews” or something like that. Once again, that is not original. When the author, whoever he was, sat down and wrote the book
of Hebrews he did not start by writing “to the Hebrews” on the top line and then start his letter. That is a label that has been added by the later church and some have debated whether it's accurate or not. What it's meant to do is try to capture what appears to be the content and the primary audience from reading the letter of Hebrews itself. We’re solely reliant on the book of Hebrews to try to figure out, to piece together, who might be the readers.

The reason for the title “to the Hebrews” stems from a couple things. Number one is the author of Hebrews, whoever he is, seems to assume that his readers are very familiar with the Old Testament and with the Old Testament sacrificial system. Because of that, you can see why someone would label this book to the Hebrews. They think the primary readers are Jewish and you can kind of see that as you read the book. It's almost as if the author’s whole argument assumes knowledge of the Old Testament, knowledge of the Jewish sacrificial system, and even of the Jewish tabernacle and temple worship. The next assumption is what readers would most likely be familiar with that knowledge. Some would suggest that it must be Old Testament or people steeped in the Old Testament, that is a Jewish readership. Actually I'm going to assume that the most likely the readers of Hebrews are probably Jewish. Now we have to go on and we need to be a little is more specific. Are they non-Christian Jews? Are they some kind of false teachers, it is that the problem? Are they Christian Jews who have been converted to Christianity? Who precisely are these readers?

When thinking of the overall purpose of Hebrews is to note the primary way that Jesus is portrayed. The primary way that Jesus is portrayed in the book of Hebrews is as the high priest in fulfillment of the Old Testament. The author is heavily reliant on Psalm 110. In fact, I would argue that Psalm 110 lies behind much of the entire book of Hebrews. Interestingly, the author of Psalm 110 combines the idea of the Messiah King and also a high priest. We've even seen this text before. Psalm 110 played an important role in Paul's understanding of Jesus as the cosmic Lord of the universe. Listen to the first few verses: “The Lord says to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.’
The Lord sends out from Zion your mighty scepter [the mighty scepter of the King]. Rule in the midst of your foes. Your people will offer themselves willingly on the day you lead your forces on the holy mountains. From the womb of the morning like dew your youth will come to you. The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind. “You [referring to this priest or this king] are a priest forever according to the order Melchizedek. The Lord is at your right hand.”

Interestingly, Psalm 110 anticipates and portrays this picture of one who is both a messianic figure, a royal figure, but who also now is a king, but not in the way one would assume. We’ll go back to that. I want to return to that question. This kingly figure is also a priest, but not quite in the way one would expect. We'll talk more about that. My conclusion, I would suggest that the readers of Hebrews, given all this Old Testament background and the apparent assumption that they would be very familiar with the Old Testament and some of the intricacies of the sacrificial system, I think that the author’s primary audience is Jewish and I want to probe that in a little more detail later. I probably can't do much better than the quotation that is found in your notes. This is a quotation from F.F. Bruce. In his commentary on Hebrews this is how he summarizes the readers, he says: “the addressees of Hebrews appear to have been a group of Jewish Christians who had never seen or heard Jesus in person.” In other words, they’re a kind of second generation Christians. These are not like the apostles and those who had been eyewitnesses of Jesus. They've never seen Jesus in person but they've learned of him from some who had themselves heard Jesus and listened to him. Since their conversion they had been exposed to persecution, but while they had to endure public abuse, imprisonment, and the looting of their property, they had not yet been called upon to die for their faith. They had given practical evidence of their faith by serving other fellow Christians, especially by caring for those of their number who had suffered most in the time of persecution, yet their Christian development had been arrested, stopped or slowed down. Instead of pressing ahead, they were inclined to come to a full stop in their spiritual progress. If not indeed slip back to the stage they had left. Very probably, they were reluctant to severe their ties with the religion
which enjoyed protection under Roman law, that is Judaism, and face the risks of irreversible commitment to the Christian way. The writer has known about them for a considerable time and feels a pastoral concern for their welfare, warns them against falling back, for this may result in falling away from their Christian faith altogether. He encourages them with the assurance that they have everything to lose if they fall back, but they have everything to gain if they press on.”

It’s that last line I think that admirably summarizes the main message of Hebrews. The author is trying to convince his readers they have everything to gain if they will embrace Christ, but they have everything to lose if they turn their backs. It's almost as if they are at a transition stage of either moving forward and embracing Christ fully in faith, or turning back to their ancestral religion, that is turning back to Judaism. We’ll return to that in just a moment when we raise the question of who are the readers more specifically. It seems to me that the author is trying to convince these readers, whoever they are specifically (again probably Jewish and from Jewish background) that they have everything to lose if they turn their backs on Christ, but they have everything to gain. Despite what they might have to suffer and experience in doing so, they have everything to gain if they will move forward and embrace Christ in faith fully.

One of the difficulties with Hebrews is how to classify what kind of literature it is. In some respects when you read it, it reminds you of reading an epistle or a letter because it has theological argumentation like you find in Paul's letters, but then it also has exhortation material and commands. We’ll see that Hebrews is well known for having a series of rather stern warnings that the author issues to his readers, and we’re going to try to put all this together. The closest clue we have to what kind of book Hebrews comes in chapter 13 and in verse 22, the author says that he's writing a word of exhortation. In other words, I think one of the best ways to classify this is: this is a sermon in written form, sent off like a letter. In other words, it has all the earmarks of a sermon or homily, but now in written form. It actually ends like a letter and was probably sent off. It would be like someone writing a sermon and then attaching a letter ending and sending it. That's how we should think of
Hebrews, and probably why it doesn't begin like a letter and doesn't have all the other things you might expect to find in Paul's letters. It's more like a sermon, some something similar to preaching, but committed to writing down in written form and sent off like one would send a letter. We’ll see that this is very fitting for the author's purpose.

Now specifically, who were the readers of Hebrews? I suggested to you that most likely they are from a Jewish background. Let me fill that out a little bit more. I think what's going on in this is most likely the author and the readers of Hebrews had come out of the Jewish background. They worshiped under the Old Testament and belonged to some form of Judaism, such as we looked at back of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes. They had heard the gospel preached and responded to it, but perhaps they had not yet completely broken off ties with the Jewish synagogue, but were beginning to meet with this newly founded church and this newfangled religion that we call Christianity. Now a number of things were happening. Many of these persons who had made the transition from Judaism into Christianity were now experiencing some of the struggles that went along with that. I would guess that one of them was that they were probably being ostracized and treated very poorly by their own family members for leaving Judaism and now apparently converting to this newfound religion--Christianity. The quote from F.F. Bruce read: “the religion did not enjoy the protection most of the time under Roman rule like was true Judaism. So you have this group of those who been raised and live life and enter Judaism, now they have heard of this newfound religion and about this person Jesus Christ. They’ve heard the gospel preached to them and now they’ve responded in some way and began to associate with this church. But now they are facing the persecution and ostracism even from their own friends and family and from the synagogue for leaving. Moreover, another factor may be that they have left a religion that really in some senses appealed to the senses physically. They had left a religion that not only met in the synagogue, but one centered around sacrifices and centered around feasts and festivals and the Passover meal etc. etc. Now they were leaving that to worship a Jesus who they had never seen, who is invisible, and they were to worship in the Temple that is a heavenly Temple. Perhaps Judaism had some
attraction in that it was tangible and physical. Something they could touch and feel and actually see, in exchange for a Christianity that revolved around worshiping a Jesus that was invisible, or at least was not visibly present, who was in heaven and a Temple that was heavenly as well. That may have provided a reason for them wanting to go back to Judaism. To recap, along with some of the persecution and ostracism they may have faced from Jewish family and friends because they had now responded to this new religion, and perhaps because of the longing to go back to a religion that was tangible, visible and physical, many of the readers, these Jewish Christians, were now tempted to turn around and go back to their old religion. The author then, is going to write and do everything he can to persuade them of the danger of doing that.

You may ask: were these readers actually Christians or were they not? In my opinion, the author suspects that most of his readers had not yet fully embraced Christ. They had not yet made the full transition from Judaism into Christianity, and they had not yet embraced Jesus Christ fully. I wonder if he thought that they were at the tipping point where they could have gone either way, and now it appears that they're in danger of tipping back and going back to Judaism. The author then writes to warn them that you have everything to lose if you turn around and turn your back on Jesus Christ, having come this far. Having heard the gospel and now associating with the church, to reject that and go back to your former religion, you have everything to lose if you do that. You have everything to gain instead if you press on and move ahead and embrace Jesus Christ in faith fully. I'm working from the assumption that these are Jews who have made the transition or are in transition into Christianity to embrace Jesus Christ in this gospel by faith and to be part of this church. Yet the reader suspects that they probably have not yet fully done that and they need that extra push so they don't turn back and neglect or reject everything they been exposed to.

There are two ways of looking at Hebrews as far as: how does it breakdown and outline? What's the main plan of Hebrews? There are two ways of dividing it up. One of them is more structural. That is when you read Hebrews, one thing that sticks out to you is
how the author flip-flops back-and-forth between exposition and exhortation. It would almost be similar to Paul's indicative/imperative. Whereas usually Paul devotes almost half of his letter to the indicative, and then he'll get to imperative towards the end; the author of Hebrews keeps switching back and forth. The exposition part is usually a section where the author demonstrates that Jesus Christ is superior to something in the Old Testament. Then the exhortation is for the readers to not fail to understand that and to press on in obedience and faith to Jesus Christ. In all the exposition sections, the author compares Jesus Christ to something in the Old Testament. Jesus is compared to the angels. He's compared to Moses. He's compared to Joshua. He's compared to the rest that the people enjoyed when they entered the land. He’s compared to the tabernacle and the Temple. He's compared to the animal sacrifices. He's compared to the old covenant. All the prominent features of the Old Testament, Jesus is compared to these exposition sections to show that Jesus is superior. Once the author demonstrates that, then he'll shift to an exhortation saying if this is true then here you better not go back. Why would you want to go back to your ancestral religion, to Judaism, when something far superior is right in front of you? Why would you want to go back? You have everything to lose if you go backward and you have everything to gain if you move forward and embrace Christ who is the superior revelation of God. In fact, the verses I just read in chapters 1 and 2, “In the past God spoke in various ways the prophets but in the last days he has spoken through his Son.” It’s as if the writer’s trying to get his readers to hear: don't miss that. Don't turn a deaf ear to God's final revelation in his son, Jesus Christ. He passionately tries to get them, it’s almost on a seesaw, and it could go either way, he wants to tip them so they’ll embrace Christ fully, instead of going the other way--back to their life under Judaism.

Another way of dividing the letter and looking at it is more threefold. You'll see that at the top of page 50 in your notes. The first four chapters portray Jesus as God's true revelation--God’s true messenger. Again, Jesus is the final revelation of God. Jesus is the final speech of God so they better listen to him. The second section is Jesus as our high Priest. Jesus in this large section is portrayed as the superior high priest; so again it is better
listen to him and embrace him in faith. Finally, our partnership with Jesus and what it means then to walk in obedience to this Jesus, who is God's final messenger and who is our high Priest. You'll notice from the outline that I've given you, those sharp eyed students out there, you'll notice that the chapter and verse references don't follow each other in that outline. That’s because Hebrews is really quite difficult to outline because sometimes sections function as a transition. Like a conclusion to what comes before, but at the same time an introduction to what comes next. Hence, if you look closely at the chapter and verses on this threefold division they don't quite match up. It’s because some of these sections are functioning as both a conclusion and an introduction to the next section.

Part of what the author does in Hebrews is to get the readers to understand. If he's going to convince them not to go back to the old covenant and their Jewish religion, he needs to convince them that they have something far more superior to turn to, and that is Jesus Christ and the new covenant salvation that he brings. However, at times when one reads the book of Hebrews it would be easy to see or to think that the author is being rather derogatory about the Old Testament. When he talks about Jesus being superior and we have a superior priest and a superior covenant and he says things like the sacrifices of the Old Testament could never save, they could never bring about perfection, but Jesus and the new covenant do.

The author says things that could almost lead you to think that he was almost anti-Semitic or anti-Old Testament. While saying the New Testament is something superior and the old covenant in the Old Testament as something inferior that his readers could do without and that they no longer needed at all. So the question is what then does the author find wrong with the old covenant? By the old covenant I simply mean the arrangement or covenant that God made with Israel under Moses. Israel's life and their obedience under the law was all regulated by the old covenant, but as we saw the Old Testament anticipates that one day there'll be a new covenant, a new way of God extending blessings to his people, a new way of God relating to his people that doesn't depend on the old covenant and the law. But what’s wrong with the old covenant? Why is the author
convinced that the readers should not turn back to the old covenant? What does he see as wrong with it? Why is the new covenant superior? What does he think is wrong with the old covenant, if there is anything wrong at all? We need to avoid misunderstanding. As I read Hebrews, I take it that the author is not saying that the old covenant itself was defective, or that God messed up when he gave the old covenant. He shouldn’t have and it didn't work so now he had to go to Plan B which is a new covenant. Or that the old covenant means bad, or worse, means evil, and the new covenant means everything that is fine and good. Certainly that's not the case.

Instead I would suggest to you that the primary shortcoming of the old covenant, according to the author of Hebrews, is that it could never completely deal with the problem of sin in a way that allowed the worshiper and allow God's people to enter into God's presence. The problem with the old covenant is, the author’s convinced that it could not or it was unable to ultimately and finally deal with sin, so that the worshiper could enter into the very presence of God. But now the author is convinced that that is what the new covenant, through Jesus Christ, now offers.

Do you see how that fits into his argument? Why would the readers want to go back to Judaism when they have something that will ultimately deal with sin and cleanse them from sin and allow them to enter into the very presence of God, something they could not do under the old covenant? Why would they want to turn their backs on that and go back to the old covenant? The author doesn't have any problem with the old covenant; the only thing is it's been fulfilled in Christ. What the old covenant pointed to and anticipated has now arrived in the person of Christ and the new covenant. So would they want to go backwards, when what the old covenant has pointed to has now arrived? The writer convinces them, again I’ll use this phrase over and over again, they have everything to lose if they turn their backs on Christ, but they have everything to gain if they will embrace him in faith no matter what it costs them. The old covenant again is not inferior, it's not outdated, and it’s not bad. It just could not bring about perfection. “Perfection” is the word the author uses throughout Hebrews to refer to the fact that the new covenant has now
arrived and has dealt with sin finally through Jesus Christ. Now we can enter God's presence and worship. One could not do that under the old covenant system. The author is going to argue as well that the Old Testament tabernacle and temple serve just as much to restrict God's presence as it did to bring God's presence among his people. We’ll look at that just a little bit more.

Any questions as far as how the author understands the old covenant? Again, we’re mainly to understand it not in terms of something bad or a second rate or inferior or useless, now finally replaced by something good, but it is to be seen in terms that the old covenant was meant to point forward to and anticipate something greater. Now that that has arrived why would they want to go back to something else? Why would they want to refuse Jesus Christ and go back and embrace something, which has been fulfilled in a far greater way, in Jesus Christ and the new covenant? That lies behind much of chapters 3 through 12. Much of what the author does with the old covenant. He'll say things that could lead to think that that old covenant was useless. It’s no good. It's bad. It's defective and deeply flawed, but that's not his point. The author’s view of the old covenant in relationship to the new is summarized again in the first two verses I read. “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets [of the Old Testament,] but in these last days [that is in the time of fulfillment] he has spoken to us by his son.” God speaking through his son in this new covenant salvation is the very fulfillment of what the old covenant and Old Testament were pointing to and anticipating. Now that that has arrived they’re in grave danger of missing that and neglecting that by going back to the old covenant, whether it’s out of pressure from family and perhaps because the old covenant was more tangible and visible. For whatever reason, the author doesn't want them to commit the mistake of missing this new covenant. God has finally spoken. Yes, God spoke in the past through the old covenant, but now God is finally spoken in the time of fulfillment the Old Testament was anticipating. Now God has spoken through his son and he’s trying to tell his readers: don't miss that.

One of the ways the author argues his point is what I call the historical argument.
The author argues not just from the fact that Christ is the fulfillment, but the author goes back and argues from the Old Testament itself. His argument looks like this. When you look back to the books of Exodus and Leviticus and you read about the Old Testament priest, and here we'll talk a little bit about the Old Testament priest. Again, Jesus, as high priest, is the dominant way that the author of Hebrews portrays Christ. When you go back and read about the high priest in Exodus and Leviticus, he was to be from a specific family line. In other words, you couldn’t wake up one morning and decide, “I think I'll be a priest today.” In the Old Testament what was a qualification for being a priest? A descendent of Aaron from the tribe of Levi, you had to belong or you were out of luck if you want to be a priest if you were not in the line of Levi. Here's how it works as if this was meant to be the final priest, in other words, if this was to be God's ultimate priest, a priest in the line of Levi. Then why, historically, why years later do you have Psalm 110 anticipating the coming of another priest? Remember that verse I just read from Psalm 110? It said the Lord has sworn forever you are a priest in the order of Melchizedek. Why is that in there? Why is Psalm 110 years later anticipating the coming of another priest, if the priest of the Old Testament was all there was in Exodus and Leviticus?

Another example, the author talks about rest. Israel was led out of Egypt, through the wilderness, brought up to the promised land and Joshua brought them into the promised land. You remember your class with professors Wilson, Hildebrandt, or Phillips talking about the conquest and entering into the land of Canaan. The author refers to that as giving the Israelites rest. Rest from their enemies, settling in the land. Now what the author does is he says in the Old Testament, you don’t even have to go to the New Testament, if Joshua gave the Israelites the ultimate final rest, if that's all there was, why years later do you have Psalm 95 offering a rest? There’s still a rest available. He trying to get them to see if the Israelites going in the land of Canaan, if that's all there was, and yes, that was a fulfillment, but if that's all there was then why do you still have a psalm like Psalm 95 anticipating there is still a rest available?

Finally, the covenant. Historically, if the covenant God made with Israel in the book
of Exodus made through and through Moses with Israel; if that covenant was the ultimate final covenant, why, years later, does Jeremiah 31 anticipate another covenant? Do you see what the author is doing? He’s arguing from the Old Testament itself, that the Old Testament even points to the temporary nature of the old covenant. If the readers read their Old Testament carefully, they would see that the priesthood, and the rest in the land, and the old covenant, and with the tabernacle and temple, and sacrifices, they would be able to see that that was all temporary because the Old Testament itself anticipates something greater, as seen in texts like Psalm 110 and Psalm 95 and Jeremiah 31. To go further, the author then says something greater than the Old Testament itself anticipated has now been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Why do they want to go back to the old covenant? Why would they want to return to this when what the Old Testament itself was pointing to has now arrived in the person of Jesus Christ?

By the way, I want to say a couple things about the first one, the priest. I should have Ted come and talk about the Dead Sea Scrolls and whether there are two messiahs: a priestly Messiah and a King Messiah. Anyway that the issue is this: from the Old Testament we know that the Messiah, the King, is going to come and what line? In the line of David, but we just said the priest comes in what line? The line of Levi. So you have a problem. If you have a Messiah who is also to be a priest, how can that be because they come from completely separate family lines? You can't have someone coming from the line of Judah and Levi apparently at the same time. What the author of Hebrews does then is interestingly: yes, Jesus is from the line of David, but he finds his solution in Psalm 110. Jesus is a priest, but not after the line of Levi. Remember Psalm 110 that we just read? Psalm 110: “the Lord said to my Lord sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool [that's a promise made to David] the Lord has sworn and will not change his mind you is this Messiah you are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” So apparently there's another order of priests and I don't want to go into all the detail on who Melchizedek is, I have questions myself. The author basically says Jesus is a priest, but not in the family line of Levi. He's a priest according to a different order, this order of
Melchizedek. Therefore, Jesus can be both Messiah in the line of David and he can still be a priest. He can still be our high priest without coming from the line of Levi. He comes through a different line; he belongs to a completely different order of priests that Psalm 110 says is the priest Melchizedek.

If you go back to Genesis, that’s where you read the story of Melchizedek and the problem is: it doesn't tell us very much about him or who in the world he was and what he did. It says nothing about his lineage or who his parents were and whether he died. It says nothing about him, but the Psalm picks up on this and understands that there's another priesthood. There's another order of priesthood in the order of Melchizedek and Jesus belongs to that. That’s how Jesus can be both Messiah in the line of David and he can still be priest without coming through the family line of Levi. He belongs to this other order that the author of Hebrews finds in the Old Testament, this order of Melchizedek. A key theme in Hebrews you find that name pop up several times in Hebrews. The author is going to argue Jesus is indeed a high priest. He meets all the qualifications of a high priest. Even though he doesn't come to the line of Levi, he’s in the order of Melchizedek. Therefore, he can be both Messiah and King but he can also be our high priest.

The other thing that you see going on in Hebrews is when the author wants to compare the worship that the Jewish Christians should engage in and be part of, he refers to Jesus in the heavenly Temple. Interestingly, he compares it not to the Temple in Jerusalem, but he compares it to the Old Testament tabernacle. Interestingly, whenever the author talks about the holy of holies and the sacrifices that were offered up and the sanctuary and the table of showbread in the Ark of the Covenant, all those things that belong in the Temple, but when the author of Hebrews describes it, he refers to the tabernacle from the Old Testament not the Temple. Some have suggested that it’s proof that the Temple had been destroyed, so Hebrews must be written quite late in the first entry sometime after 70 A.D. after the Temple was destroyed. I think there's a better explanation though, and that is over and over the author of Hebrews is going to compare his readers to the Israelites who wandered in the wilderness throughout the book of Exodus and Numbers. Remember that
they were the ones who wandered in the wilderness until they got to the promised land that Joshua eventually led them into. When they left Egypt the major trek to the wilderness, they set up a tabernacle. The tabernacle is just a portable Temple. They set up a tabernacle and then when the pillar of fire would move they would move or when the cloud would move they would move as well. Where they ended up they would set up this tabernacle and that’s where God would dwell. Then they would tear it down so it was portable. The author always appeals to that and I think the reason is not because the Temple was destroyed but because the author wants to compare his readers to the Old Testament people when they wandered in the wilderness.

We’ll see why he does that on Wednesday. We’ll talk more about why the author compares his readers to the Israelites as they wander from Egypt through the wilderness to the land of Canaan.

Transcribed by Adam Vogel
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt