



## The Book of Hebrews: Part 4 of 4

### Lecture Video Transcription

By Dr. D.A. Carson  
Research Professor of New Testament,  
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Now, last day we got as far as the Old Testament texts with Melchizedek, namely Genesis 14 and Psalm 110. Now we turn to Hebrews 7, and although we don't have time to go through the passage in enormous detail, I want you to see what the author does with it. First, at the beginning of verse 7, "This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High." Well, that's simply repeating what the text says in Genesis 14, there's nothing innovative there. "He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything..." still nothing but a summary. Then you start getting the interpretation. "First, the name Melchizedek means 'king of righteousness.'" Well, we saw that already, that's what Melchizedek means. "Then also, 'king of Salem' means 'king of peace.'" That is, the *slm* radicals, "shalom," that's what the name of Salem means. "Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever." Now here what the author is doing is commenting on the fact that was already obvious to a reader of Genesis. That is, so far as the records go in Genesis, there's no mention of a daddy or a mommy or a genealogy. Now, you could understand this to mean that he is absolutely without genealogical pedigree—that is to say that he is supernatural, that he really is the Son of God. But if that is what the text were saying, you'd think that what the writer would have written would have been something like, "Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, obviously he is the Son of God." But he says he's *like* the Son of God, he *resembles* the Son of God. In other words, the author sees that he is some kind of anticipation of, prefigurement of, standing in for. Which is why the view that is common in the history of the Church, that this is really a pre-incarnate visitation of the Eternal Son, really doesn't fit that well. He is *like* the Son of God, or as the NIV 2011 puts it, He *resembles* the Son of God. And then everything else follows. "Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder!" So that is significant in that Abraham is the first patriarch of all of the Israelites, and yet this man is considered greater than Abraham.

And then it jumps to the Levitical Law regarding tithing, "The descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, from their fellow Israelites—even though they also are descended from Abraham. But this man did trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises." In other words, all of this establishes that in some sense he must not only be greater than Levi, but greater than Abraham, greater than the entire Israelite heritage and history. And without doubt the lesser is blessed by the

greater. “In the one case, the tenth is collected by people who die—that is, the Levites—but in the other case by him who is declared to be living.” That is, he is declared to be living in the sense that there’s no mention in a book that’s full of genealogies of births and deaths—he lives so many years and then he dies, he lives so many years and then he dies—there’s no mention of his death. And almost as if the author realizes he’s pushing the steps pretty hard, he adds one more, “One might even say that Levi, who collects a tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek made Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his Ancestor”—that is to say, there is a view of a certain solidarity in the race. Now, all of that’s a pretty straight-forward reading of the Old Testament text once you accept the fact that there is no genealogy mentioned—no birth, no death, no genealogy—is itself a symbol-laden thing. Now it’s an argument from silence. You’re basing something on something that’s not there; it’s an argument from silence. But arguments from silence can be powerful if you expect noise. An argument from silence when there’s no expectation of noise is not a powerful argument. But if you expect noise, and the noise you expect in this case, judging by the entire book of Genesis, is that genealogies are mentioned, beginning of life and end of days are mentioned for all of the important figures. You expect the noise. But when there’s no noise, it’s important, it’s significant, it’s symbol laden.

But then the really important point in the argument comes, it seems to me, in verses 11 and following. Now verse 11 is tricky, I’m going to leave out the parenthetical bit first so that you can see what the flow of the argument is, and then we’ll put the parenthetical back in. “If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood”—that is, if the fullness of all of God’s purposes for his people could have been attained through Levitical priesthood, through sacrifices, through their mediation, (the sacrifices and mediations that are going to be talked about especially in chapters 9 and 10) if that was the sum substance of all of God’s purpose, then, “Why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?” Now this is referring to Psalm 110. That is, David announces in Psalm 110 that there is another priest coming in the order of Melchizedek. And that takes place after the Levitical priesthood has already been established. So, in sequence, you get Melchizedek—Genesis 14—centuries later, you get the Mosaic code and the establishment of the Levitical priesthood. Then, centuries after that, there’s mention of somebody coming in the Melchizedekian order, which the author therefore says, demonstrates that the Levitical priesthood can’t possibly have been final. Now the sequence is absolutely everything here. It’s a salvation-historical-based argument. Do you see? Then the argument will go even further, that he’s referring to Psalm 110 becomes clear in a couple of verses, but then the author goes one step further, “For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also.” Now, that needs unpacking.

When you and I think of “the Law,” we probably think, first of all, of what we would call today, “moral law.” And because we’ve all been brought up under the tripartite breakdown that we talked about earlier when discussing Paul—moral, civil, ceremonial law—civil and ceremonial law both get relegated to sort of second tier;

moral law is most fundamentally important. But there is another way of assessing these things. How much of *Torah* is, in fact, bound up with the priestly system? After all, you come to Exodus, the first nineteen chapters are largely narrative, then you come to the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue, in chapter 20. What happens in chapter 21? Well apart from a little bits of narrative, 21 and following all have to do with what we would primarily call “ceremonially law.” Then you come to Leviticus, and apart from tiny little snippets, it’s civil and ceremonial law. Then you come to Numbers and a lot more narrative, a lot more numbering of the tribes, and so on and so on, and bits of narrative, as I said, but more ceremonial and civil law, with bits of moral law thrown in here and there. Then you come to Deuteronomy and repeat the whole thing. In other words, what we have traditionally called “ceremonial law,” namely the laws that are bound up with the priesthood, the Tabernacle, the sacrificial system, and all the laws of holiness and purity, and so on, and so on, they take up a hugely disproportional part of “the Law.” And, at one level, that shouldn’t surprise us, because all of those so-called ceremonial laws have to do with how someone is acceptable before God, they have to do with righteousness and holiness and acceptability before God. Now the writer to the Hebrews says, if, then, you change the priesthood, because don’t forget that entire ceremonially structure depended on the Tabernacle which turned on the priest, the whole sacrificial system turned on the priesthood. “So, if you change the priesthood,” the author now says, “you change that whole law covenant.” It’s not a little minor point off to the side. So, do you see the argument? The argument is, verse 11, “If perfection could have been attained through Levitical priesthood,”—skip the parenthesis—“why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?” appealing to Psalm 110. “For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also.” In other words, from Psalm 110, from the fact that Psalm 110 is there in the text, from that simple fact, the author infers there is something in the Old Testament itself a thousand years before Christ that is announcing the principal obsolescence of the law covenant. That’s huge. Let me repeat that: It’s very important, from the fact that Psalm 110 is there at the time of Moses, in sequence: first Melchizedek, then the giving of the Law which gives the Levitical priesthood, then Psalm 110 which announces in effect that there’s a priest coming in the order of Melchizedek which shows that the Levitical priesthood is not adequate, it’s announcing, in other words, that something must come along to outstrip the Levitical priesthood. And then, he points out that if the Levitical priesthood is bypassed or outstripped or done away with, then you’re really changing the whole law. Then what you really are finding in his argument is this kernel of truth, Psalm 110, a thousand years before Christ establishes the principal obsolescence of the law covenant.

Now fill in the other little bits that we’ve left out just so that you can see that this really is where the argument is going. Go back to verse 11, put the parenthesis back in, “If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood—and indeed the law given to the people established that priesthood”—that is the priesthood and the law are tied together so tightly—then “why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of

Aaron?" What's Psalm 110 doing there? "For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also. He of whom these things are said"—that is, talk about a Levitical priest, or one in the order of Melchizedekian priesthood rather—"belonged to a different tribe," not Levi, "and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar." He's from the tribe of Judah. "For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry,"—that's what was done for Levi—"but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life, for it is declared," and now the actual quotation for Psalm 110, "You are priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." So Jesus gets established in the order of Melchizedek, not on the basis of ancestry, not on the basis of a Levitical code, not on the basis of *Torah*, but on the basis of Psalm 110 where the Messianic figure, the one who is to rule in a Davidic line, who sits at God's right hand until God has made the enemies his footstool. That Messianic kingly figure is also declared by God on oath to be a priest. Not in the order of Levi, that would be illegal, but in the order of Melchizedek, patterned like him.

And all the rest of this chapter is filling out the details of this. It points out, for example, that Psalm 110 pictures God taking an oath in this regard. Others became priests without an oath, but he became a priest with an oath when God said, "The LORD has sworn, will not change his mind;" that's how important it is. Verse 22, "Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant." So once again you're talking about the law covenant, do you see? The implications are huge. In other words, the text is saying that to understand the Old Testament aright, one of the things you have to see is that built into the Old Testament is the announcement of the principal obsolescence of the law covenant. Now that was done already, if you recall, on the "rest" theme in chapter 4, where you move from the rest of God in Creation, and the Sabbath rest, and the rest of entering into the Promised Land—some didn't make it but under Joshua they did—but after they get in to the rest of the Promised Land, that can't be the final rest because Psalm 95 much later finds God still inviting people into that rest. Do you see? In other words, the author is looking for traces in the salvation-historical development of the Old Testament; that announced the principal obsolescence of the old covenant. He's reading the Old Testament, in other words, in a salvation-historical way. Now we saw Paul doing something similar in Galatians 3, if you recall. That is, reading the narrative of the Old Testament in a salvation-historical way. And here is Hebrews doing something rather similar. What that does, then, is set us up for the ensuing discussion, especially in chapter 9, there's something brief in chapter 8 first I'll mention, but in chapters 9 and 10 about with a new priest we've got a new sacrifice, we've got a new approach, we've got a new Tabernacle, and so on and so on and so on. And all of the old things, then, are pointing forward to the ultimate thing. So here is a way of reading the Old Testament that means that you've got a much more integrated Bible. Do you see? You are really saying, in effect, this was God's design from the beginning. And that's what gives so much weight, then, to the author's insistence that to go back then to the rights of Judaism—to go back to the rights

established by the Old Testament—even though they were God-established in the Old Testament is, in fact, doing something really bad because you're going back to that which pointed forward. You are really going back to the types—that is, to the patterns, to the anticipations—rather than to the reality to which they pointed. How can you possibly do that? Do you see? This is the culmination; this is the fulfillment that the author is saying. Now let me take one more step before we open it up again for Q&A and then we'll press on a little further.

In chapter 8, there is a very extensive quotation from Jeremiah 31. I wish we had time to park on Jeremiah 31 a little while; that is an important text for Christians to understand, but what the author of the epistle of the Hebrews does with it is pretty obvious. He argues that there is something about the old covenant—that is the covenant with Moses, the Mosaic Covenant—that establishes once again that it cannot possibly be final. [Hebrews 8], Verse 7, "If there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: 'The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant' " Now notice, it's pretty important to recognize that he's not saying that the old covenant was intrinsically evil or something like that. He is saying that it was inadequate, but the real fault lay with the people under the old covenant rather than with the old covenant by itself. That's why he says, "God found fault with the people," verse 8. But the old covenant was simply not up to transforming the people, changing the people, making them acceptable before God. That's why God, then, announces the dawning of a new covenant. Verse 9, "It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors," and so on. Now, it would be wonderful to tease that all out, but the lesson to be inferred from the presence of Jeremiah 31, six centuries before Christ, is drawn out by the author of the epistle of the Hebrews in verse 13: "By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear." So once again, the author is taking this same step on a slightly different ground, that he has take before. He has pointed out with respect to rest that there is an anticipation of rest beyond getting into the Promised Land already established in the Old Testament. And he's pointed out that with respect to priesthood, there is anticipation of a priest in the order of Melchizedek after the Levitical priesthood has been established. Which means that not only the priesthood changes, but the entire law covenant changes. And now he's brought attention to Jeremiah and now said, "well Jeremiah himself announced a new covenant." Do you see? So David, Psalm 110, 1000 BC; Jeremiah 31, about 600 BC; he is pointing out that if you read the Old Testament text appropriately, the Old Testament text itself is constantly pointing forward. It announces in a variety of ways that the old covenant structure was not final; the old covenant was anticipatory. And there were elements in that developing storyline that announce its own principial obsolescence, as various authors look forward to the dawning of a new covenant and all that Christ brings in and through it. And then, you see, if you think through the numerous parallels in the New Testament, you can see deeper significance than you might otherwise have done. "When on the night that he was betrayed, Jesus takes the cup and he says, 'this cup is the new covenant in my blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins.' " All right; questions?

*Student 1: "Why do you think he quotes the Jeremiah passage at length when some of the others are just small snippets?"*

A good question, "Why does the author quote the Jeremiah passage at length when he just takes snippets from the others?" I think that the primary reason is that he is about to head into chapters 9 and 10 where he is trying to show the advantages of the new covenant in terms of what is actually achieved for the forgiveness of sin. Now we're going to be looking at some of those verses in a few moments. But, Jeremiah 31 he takes to be announcing that in principle even if he doesn't give the details, it will not be like the covenant, but, "I will forgive their sins and their iniquities, I will remember them no more, I will write my law on their heart," and so on. So some of the language is just Old Testament language that is ratcheted up in intensity, but this going all the way to the forgiveness of sins and so on, it anticipates where the argument is going regarding the cross and the new Tabernacle and so on, I think that's why. At the end of the day, this is a hugely cross-centered, atonement-centered discussion and Jeremiah's anticipating that.

*Student 2: "Could you comment on maybe some of the motivations behind calling this a 'renewed' covenant rather than a 'new,' maybe some of the goods and some of the bad to that?"*

Yeah, that's a biggie that I was not going to bring up, but since you've brought it up, I should say something about it. The question is, "Why do many scholars talk about Jeremiah 31 as if it's announcing a *renewed* covenant rather than a *new* covenant?" I have to say flat out that Jeremiah is understood, probably by a majority of scholars from various theological camps today, as promising a renewed covenant, the renewal of the old covenant, rather than a new covenant. But that is certainly not the language of Hebrews—it's not the way Hebrews reads it—which makes me want to go back and reread Jeremiah again and say, "Why do so many see it as simply a renewed covenant?" I think that there are two or three reasons why some prefer renewed covenant categories there. Number one, there are various covenant renewal texts in the Old Testament and it's easy to fit Jeremiah 31 into that grid and say, this is just another renewal of the covenant thing, calling the covenant people of God back to repentance and renew what's going on in their mind. Number two, some of the language of the new covenant is, in fact, old covenant language, you know, like writing the law on their hearts and so on. That's not invented brand new in the time of Jeremiah. Those are probably the biggest elements, but on the first, I would say, yes there are covenant renewal texts, but that does not mean that all texts are covenant renewal. The text does seem to speak antithetically. "It will not be like the old covenant, but rather it will be a new covenant. This is what it'll be like." In other words, the text says that it actually stands in Jeremiah, is pretty antithetical. Moreover, I'll come to that point again in a moment. Moreover, I think that one of the things that happens in Scripture with texts that describe the relationship with God, is that the same language is used, but the meaning gets ratcheted up. So, in Leviticus already God says, "I will be their God; they will be my people. I will dwell in

the midst of them.” But what that means in the context of Leviticus is, ‘I will dwell in the midst of them by being present in glory in the Tabernacle which is built in the midst of the people with three tribes in the North, three in the South, three in the East, three in the West.’” On the other hand, in terms of the new covenant—“I will be their God; they will be my people. I will dwell in the midst of them”—that’s bound up without a tabernacle; it’s bound up with everything that’s based on the cross work of Christ, a whole structure that outstrips the Tabernacle in all kinds of ways although the same language is being used. And then the same language is picked up again in the final vision of the Bible, in Revelation 21 and 22, where once again you have, “I will be their God; they will be my people. I will dwell in the midst of them”—that sort of language picked up again. But there it’s in the context of the new heaven and the new earth where God being in the midst of us, God’s blessing upon us, is so spectacularly transformative, so culminating that there’s no more death, no more sorrow, no more decay, no more... but rather there is holiness, there is perfection. Even in the language you get in chapter 21, “I will be his father and he will be my son.” Well, some language is used with respect to believers, individually, or the Israelites in the Old Testament as early as Exodus chapter 4, “Israel is my firstborn son.” But now, the son language, though it’s still son language, is so ratcheted up in the context that “I will be his father, he will be my son,” is contrasted against everything that is evil and unbelieving and cowardly, and so on and so on and so on. The Sonship is now perfect—that is, human beings are perfected and are as much like God as human beings can be. But it’s the same language, so you see that there is a ratcheting up with time, so the question that arises then in Jeremiah 31 is, “Is it adequate to see here *only* a renewal of the old covenant or should one see something of a ratcheting up?” And clearly Hebrews sees so much of a ratcheting up that the language of newness is taken seriously.

But there is another element that I could mention. Go back, for a moment, to Jeremiah 31. Usually when we study this passage in a New Testament context, we just begin at verse 31, “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant,’ ” and so on and so on and so on. But ideally one should read the larger context. I wish I had time to outline the whole passage, but let me draw attention just to the previous two or three verses. Verse 29, “‘In those days people will no longer say, “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” Instead, everyone will die for their own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—their own teeth will be set on edge. “The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant.” ’ ” Now you see in both of those texts, there is an antithesis. How does the one antithesis shed light on the other? They’re clearly parallel in some respects, what’s going on? Now the proverb, “The ancestors have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge,” is found twice in the Old Testament. The other place is in Ezekiel and I think the context of Ezekiel makes it just a bit different in meaning. But the context here means something like this: In the context of the Old Testament, then, what happens is, because the old covenant represents a tribal-representative system, when the kings and the priests and so on, eat sour grapes—when they do that which is evil, when

they are corrupt, when they are perverse, when they are idolatrous—judgment falls on the entire nation. “The ancestors eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” When the ancestors do it, when the leaders do it, it’s a tribal representative organic system. That’s the way the pattern of judgment works. Do you see? But the day is coming when it won’t be like that. If a man eats sour grapes, his own teeth will be set on edge. Now, this is not denying that there is some huge emphasis on individual responsibility in the old covenant, that’s true. But the very structure of that old covenant was that it was a tribal representative system. That’s the nature of the old covenant. And now God comes along and says, “Yeah, but I’m gonna make a new covenant. It will not be like the old covenant.” What will it be like? “ ‘It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord. ‘This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.’ ” Now that part is standard covenant language that you find in Leviticus and so on as well. And then this, “No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.” Now the very nature of the old covenant was there were certain people who had mediating roles. The priests were not only to collect tithes, they were supposed to teach the people, that’s why they were scattered around the entire nation. And they were supposed to be the teachers of the law to the people of God. The king was not only to rule, he was supposed to, by his rule, teach the covenant, to teach the law of God to the people. What were the prophets supposed to do? Well, apart from specific revelations that came along from time to time, they were supposed to teach the whole counsel of God as well. Do you see? They were saying to the people, “Thus says the Lord.” They were mediators. The very structure of the old covenant was a mediated covenant, it was a tribal representative system. The ancestors, the authorities, and so on, they ate sour grapes, and their children’s teeth were set on edge. And yet now the time is coming when God says, “It won’t be like that; the very structure’s going to be different. They will all know me, from the least to the greatest.”

Now there is a sense, of course, in which in degree that is already taking place in the Old Testament, but this is structurally different. Which is why in the New Testament, very strongly in various strands—not just in Hebrews—but in Paul and elsewhere, ministers of the Church of God are not priests; those are mediators. We’re all priests or none of us is a priest. We’re all priests in the sense that we mediate the grace of God with the outside world, but we’re not priests—we’re not mediators in that sense—because we only have one High Priest—one mediator—namely Jesus himself. Or alternatively, we’re all priests in the sense that all Christians mediate the grace of God, but the structure of the new covenant is not that we have a special class of people called “priests” who mediate things to the rest of us. So instead, the metaphors run differently, and Paul, for example, they’re different body parts: one’s an ear, one’s a mouth, one’s a nose, one’s a whatever. So, I’m a teacher, that makes me sort of like a stomach. I take a lot of stuff in and distribute the nourishment to



the rest of the body, but I'm not a priest. Yeah, I've just ruined my reputation now, once and for all. You think of me as an inglorious stomach and now you've got it about right, but that's why there is nothing that I have that intrinsically other people cannot have; I'm not designated by birth or tribe as a special character called a priest. So the very structure of the whole thing is fundamentally different. Do you see? I suspect too that this is one of the reasons why another passage in the New Testament, that we won't have time to look at, 1 John chapter 2, says this: 1 John 2:26, "I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him." Now what does that mean? John writing to Christians says you don't need anyone to teach you, so there are some commentators who point to that text and say: "John is a big hypocrite, cause what he really means is you don't need anybody, it's not you don't need anybody to teach you, because after all what does John think he's doing? He's teaching them. What he means is that you don't need anybody else to teach you, just believe me and don't believe all them." John is saying something more profound than that. I think John is reflecting precisely on texts like Jeremiah 31. In other words, under the terms of the new covenant, you don't need mediating people with an inside track. That was the very claim of the Proto-Gnostics. The Proto-Gnostics claimed that they had special *gnosis*, they had special knowledge, they had special inside-track information. And they were there for the ones who had to mediate it to other people. Do you see? And if you agreed with them, it proved you were on the inside track, a Gnostic too. And if you didn't accept it, clearly you are on the outside, you're on the outside looking in. But John says, "No that's not the way it works. Under the terms of the new covenant, you all have knowledge, you all have the Spirit, you all have the anointing. Do you see? So these teachers mustn't come along and claim that they've got an inside track that you can't possibly have." And all of that is predicated, then, on the fundamental structural difference when you get to a new covenant. Do you see? So I think there are profound reasons from within Jeremiah 31 and then the way it works out in the New Testament to see that this is not just a *renewed* covenant, it is a *new* covenant. And certainly the argument of chapter 8 of Hebrews, verse 13, just doesn't make sense if it's only a renewed covenant. By calling a new one "renewed," he's made the old one obsolete? It doesn't work. In other words, if you think the writer to the Hebrews has got his reading of the Old Testament right, then this has to be a new covenant rather than merely a renewed covenant. Does that make sense? Other questions?

*Student 3: "What would you say to the contemporary interpreters who claim to be doing the same thing as the author of Hebrews with Christocentric readings of the Old Testament? I'm thinking particularly of people who reread the so-called Old Testament 'texts of terror' in light of Jesus' non-aggression."*

Yeah, the question is: "What do we do with people who claim to be doing Christocentric readings of the Old Testament? In particular those who read the so-called 'texts of terror' and read it in terms of Jesus' apparent non-aggression and

therefore the texts get domesticated in some way or fulfilled or whatever the language is that is being used.” It’s a much bigger issue. The language a Christocentric reading of Scripture covers a multitude of truths and falsehoods, of glories and of sin. By a Christocentric reading of the Old Testament may simply mean, I don’t believe anything in the Old Testament unless Jesus says it’s okay. But it’s difficult to find any New Testament writer that takes exactly that stance. Brian Chapels’s Christocentric reading of the Old Testament tends to be operating out of the grid of systematic theology, as opposed to, let’s say, biblical theology. But it’s a lot more sensitive to the Bible as a whole. Moreover, this kind of Christocentric reading, if you want to call it that, this reading of Jeremiah 31 is not undermining what the Old Testament says. Whereas that kind of so-called Christocentric reading that says, “We don’t have to pay any attention to the texts of terror because Christ has gone another way,” actually is saying that there is something intrinsically bad about those Old Testament texts—something intrinsically wicked or evil or unholy. But even when this author is saying that the Old Testament, old covenant, is obsolete, what he points out is not that the old covenant is wicked, but that the people were wicked and the old covenant was not up then to transforming the people. That’s very different stance. Moreover, the whole “texts of terror” thing is often based on another grid. We’ve mentioned it earlier in class when we were doing Romans. Another grid that is being imposed on the text wittingly or unwittingly; in the Old Testament, God is the God of wrath, he’s the God of terror, he’s the God of judgment. Then you come to the New Testament. There, he’s the God of “turn the other cheek,” the God of “love your neighbor,” “love your enemy,” and so on. And so there is an antithesis that is set up that then becomes the controlling grid under which all of these other bits are fit, into which all of these other bits are fit. But I think that that’s a pretty false reading. I argued earlier, if you recall, that the figure in the New Testament who says most about Hell is, at the end of the day, Jesus. And it’s hard to say that the God of the New Testament is sort of a softer pacifist sort of deity when you include biblical texts like Revelation 14, the closing verses, and many other texts of similar sort. So that instead of saying that as you move from the old covenant to the new, or the Old Testament to the New, you’re moving from a stern God to a soft God, I think it’s truer to say that as you move from the Old to the New, you ratchet up the depictions of God’s love until they reach their apex, their culminating point in Christ Jesus. But you also ratchet up the pictures of God’s judgment until you reach their culminating point in the eternal judgment of God. So there are quite a few texts in the New Testament in one fashion or another that view Old Testament judgment texts not as something bad, but as something merely preliminary, they’re merely temporal judgments. Read the closing verses of Romans 3:21–26; it sounds as if God had left unpunished certain of those sins from the past. We don’t think of people in the Old Testament being unpunished, but Paul does. And thus the cross becomes the focal point of both God’s love and God’s wrath. It seems to me that once you’ve seen that grid, it is so powerful that to have some other grid in order to domesticate the Old Testament has much more overtones of Marcion than it does of Christocentric reading of the Old Testament. Does that make sense?

*Student 4: "Just trying to understand, how do we understand the principal obsolescence of the law with the very nature of the new covenant promise that Jeremiah makes when he says 'I will write my laws upon their heart...'? And they seem very contextually, Mosaicly-informed laws. And furthermore, how much the New Testament writers are using Mosaic law to inform how we ought to live as Christians, and just how Paul instructs Timothy, 'Preach the law.' So how do we say it's obsolete when yet it still seems to be so relevant in terms of how we are supposed to live?"*

Yeah. And that's worth probing at great length. I hinted at some of it when we were dealing with 1 Corinthians 9, if you recall, but let me revisit a couple of those things. Part of the problem is the term "law" is used in a variety of ways. It's used in a variety of ways, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, both in terms of meaning and referent. So, that's part of the difficulty sometimes. We are using the term sometimes today in one way and applying it to all passages and then we find ourselves in some difficulty. What is meant here, judging by the applicability of chapter 8 to chapter 7, is the law covenant. Don't forget that Paul likewise says—when we read 1 Corinthians 9 together we discovered it—Paul could say that to the Jew he has to make himself like a Jew, he has to act like a Jew. To those under the law, he makes himself as one under the law, "Though I am not myself under the law." That's exactly the same notion as here. He's not under the law, even though elsewhere he can quote various things under the law and point out that they have some bearing on Christian morality. But then he goes on to say immediately, "To those without the law—that is Gentiles—I make myself as someone without the law, though I am not myself lawless, but I am *ἐννομος Χριστοῦ* (*ennomos khristou*), I am under law to Christ; I am under Christ's law." So that immediately raises the question in terms of actual content, what continues as binding from being under the Mosaic Law to being under Christ's law? Even if Paul can still word himself in such a way as to say that he is not under the law covenant; he's not under the law in the sense that he's not under the law covenant, he's under the new covenant. But that still leaves open all kinds of complicated questions about what are the points of continuity and discontinuity. And so likewise here, Paul...the writer of the Hebrews—not Paul—the writer to the Hebrews is, I don't think he's trying to say, I'm trying to justify antinomianism—complete lawlessness. He's talking about whether or not the law covenant is still in force as a law covenant for the people. And if it is, then it's the whole law covenant—sacrificial system, which is so central to the whole thing. But that's been changed, transparently it's been changed, the law covenant is principally obsolescent. But that doesn't mean there are no points of continuity between the law covenant and the new covenant, those have to be worked out in a variety of ways, it's not the point of the author to the Hebrews here to work those points out, but they have to be worked out because they're thrust in your face in the writings of Paul and the writings of Matthew and the writings of Hebrews and so on. You have to work them out, but nevertheless none of these writers hesitates to speak of the obsolescence of the law covenant or not being under the law covenant or being superseded by the new covenant or whatever. Do you see? It's more than simply the old covenant renewing the vows; it's more than that. It's a new one that makes the old one obsolescent.

Moreover, even in terms of ethical motivation under the terms of the new covenant, I would argue that there is much more ethical motivation in the New Testament grounded in the Gospel and the Cross than in the Law, though there is some in the Law. There is a new book that's about to come out by Brian Rosner on Paul and the Law. I think it's one of the best ones that's been produced in quite a while, because what he—it's coming out in the NSBT series so it sounds as if I'm hawking, you know, my own stuff—but I think it's pretty good precisely because he works through all of the different uses of law in Paul and shows how the language is, the terminology might be the same, but the context shows that the meaning is really quite different. You have to pay attention to get the individual nuance before you start putting things together, do you see? I think that book will probably help some. I think it's just, I can't remember what it's called, *Paul and the Law*, something fairly unimaginative, but it's coming out in the NSBT series shortly. Does that help at all?

*Student 4: "Yeah, I guess the big question then is how do you define the Law of Christ and it seems like it's most, he's using Israel, like Israel becomes a paradigmatic of how Mosaic Law informing what is the the Law of Christ, but there's a transformed meaning there in how it's applied. So it's not something totally disconnected from the Mosaic Law in terms of what is the Law of Christ applied to Christians today."*

So if you're asking the question, "What is the law of Christ?" The actual expression *ἐννομος Χριστοῦ* (*ennomos khristou*) is found only in one place. But if you ask in a broader sort of theological fashion, "What is meant by that?" It is true to say that there are points of continuity and discontinuity, but when you think of the thing in covenantal terms, there is some sense in which text after text says we're not under that covenant, we're under this covenant. And you've got to preserve—those who keep arguing for continuity have got to preserve—that language or they're betraying a lot of themes in the New Testament including Hebrews. On the other hand, those who want to have nothing but discontinuity become almost Marcionite, and often they have a short-sighted reading of continuities that are actual there in discrete points. The thing is, I think, that part of the problem is we're so often thinking of law primarily in terms of "do this, don't do that." We're thinking of it primarily in moral categories. Don't forget *torah* primarily means "instruction;" it's teaching, which certainly has a whole lot of *lex* in it—law—but it's instruction. And the author is seeing, the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, is seeing that there's a lot of instruction in all of what we now call "types," of tabernacles, sacrificial systems, so on and so on and so on. There's a huge amount of instruction there, but the whole package of it, the law covenant is gone, because that to which it pointed is fulfilled. Now, because it's that to which it pointed, then obviously there are points of continuity. And he's not even talking now in what we mean by moral categories, he's talking about sacrificial system; we're about to get to that in chapter 9. But unless you see that there is some kind of obsolescence intrinsic in whatever it means to be under the law to Christ, then we ought to be back in the Tabernacle, and the temple, and so on. Do you see? It's a whole package.

Any other question? This one's a biggie, but it's part of putting your Bible together.

All right. Now, this seems like a horrible place to go quickly, because chapters 9 and 10 say huge amounts about sacrifices and the atonement, and so on. But let me run through the argument quickly. What happens in chapter 9 is this. The author, having insisted that there is a new covenant, outlines what took place under the old covenant. And then shows what Christ does under the new covenant to supersede it. So under the old covenant, there's a place, verses 1–5, a sanctuary where the services are enacted. Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary, and then it's described. There are various challenges in that brief text that I don't have time to unpack. Verse 4, which had the golden altar of incense, which here seems to be in the Most Holy Place, but in fact in the Old Testament is in the Holy Place, not the Most Holy Place. Has the author got this wrong? But the Greek word, *θυμιατήριον* (*thymiaterion*) can be used both for the altar and for the cens3r, and the cens3r was carried into the Most Holy Place. Any of the larger technical commentaries will talk you through that one, I don't have time to unpack it here. But then at the end, in verse 5, you see there is this *ἱλαστήριον* (*hilasterion*), the mercy seat, the place where the blood was spilt on the top of the covenant. So this was the place. Then, verses 6 and 7, there's an offering; "When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed..." the NIV has "in ignorance." The Hebrew in the Old Testament is "sins committed without a high hand" over against, "sins with a high hand." I don't think that ignorance cuts it. That is, there are many sins that we commit, he's not just talking about sins that we commit ignorantly, but sins that we commit because we fall, we're weak, as opposed to those who stand up on your hind legs and defy God and say, in effect, "I defy you, I will go my own way," it's some sort of act of principial rebellion. That, it seems to me, there's no sacrifice for under the terms of the Old Testament. And so you have what happens to Abijah and Korah and people like that. Do you see? There is no sacrifice for them.

So, in any case, that's the way it worked. There's an offering, verses 6 and 7, then an approach, verses 8 to 10. So, "The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place," that is, the approach into the very presence of God, "had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning." It's "an illustration" the text says. The Greek is *parabolh*. So here is a non-verbal parable—that is, it's a way of saying things in a parallel way. For the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to cleanse, to clear the conscience of the worshiper, they had to be offered again and again, year after year, year after year. "But now," verse 11, and what you get is the same sequence; a place. "When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation." I think what it's saying, it gets teased out a little further on, he enters into the very presence of God to present his sacrifice. In other words, the tabernacle was a type, a structure that localized the

presence of God in visual-ritualistic ways, but Christ enters, as it were, heaven itself. Then he has an offering, verse 12. "He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and of calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place," that is the very presence of God, "once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption." And this, then, provides the approach, verses 13 and 14. "The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of the heifers sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant."

Now, there are so many things that are then teased out here and in the following verses about the blood of bull and goat. What is it that is sacrificially of value in the blood of a bull or a goat? Does the bull say, "Here's my neck, cut it, take my blood, I'll pay for your sin"? In other words, there is no voluntary sacrifice on the part of the bull or the goat. In fact, at one level, you could say that it's the owner of the bull or the goat that is actually sacrificing some income. Moreover, it has to be done year after year after year after year. So, the priest goes in and offers his sacrifice, Day of Atonement, God is ordained and this is the means by which sins are set aside. Wonderful. And then there's no more Day of Atonement until next year. So the day after the Day of Atonement you go and commit a whole bunch of sins. Who pays for those? When? Next year? What happens to your conscience in the mean time? So after a while, the repetition of the sacrifice becomes a reminder of your sinfulness, but not really an answer to it. So although the whole system was God-ordained, yet the author is saying, experientially, it can't really answer the problems of conscience, it can't intrinsically. The repetition shows its futility, the nature of blood sacrifice shows the seriousness of sin demands death, but a goat does for me? And it's not even a voluntary sacrifice. Do you see? So he's arguing that these things, then, once you see them within the matrix that he's already established of a better priest, with a better approach, a better sacrifice, the promise of a new covenant. You put all those things into one package and you see they must be pointing forward, do you see, to something that outstrips Yom Kippur, or *Yom Kippurin* as it really is in Hebrew.

Now, a lot of these points that I've just summarized are actually teased out specifically in the text. The once-for-all-ness of it, "Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the High Priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own, otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world, but he's only appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." Do you see? Which became a huge plank in Reformation debates over the nature of the Eucharist. If you start thinking of the Eucharist as a further sacrifice, a sacrifice that has the same meritorial value as the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, then what are you doing with this once-for-all, for all time, putting away sin. Do you see? From the point of view of Protestants this side of the Reformation, that was viewed as a

virtually blasphemous theology of Holy Communion, because somehow it was undermining the once-for-all-ness of the historic sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Or again, when you see its proleptic nature, the proleptic nature of the sacrifices of the Old Testament, verse 23, “It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but for the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.” And now you see there’s a massive cosmic vision here. It’s not merely that there is a proleptic anticipation of the ultimate sacrifice of Christ in the Old Testament sacrifices, but there’s a sort of up-down massive cosmic vision. Down here you’re cleaning things at a sort of ceremonial level, but if you are really getting rid of sin at a God-level, then it has to be a heavenly sanctuary into the very presence of God with one sacrifice, the sacrifice of the one who’s been introduced already as the God man in chapters 1 and 2, who sacrifices his own blood. It’s a voluntary act, do you see? Born along by the eternal Spirit who offers so that Christ offers himself unblemished to God, verse 14.

I can’t come to the end of this chapter, verses 27, 28, without telling you a story. “Just as people are destined to die once and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many and he will appear a second time not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” I went up to Cambridge to start doctoral studies in 1972, and because I had been in pastoral ministry for a number of years, I had a backlog of a lot material that I had used elsewhere. And so, it wasn’t very long before I was involved in Bible studies in the university and preaching in the surrounding areas, and so on. Cambridge is a collegiate university, there are 27 colleges and all of them had their own group with their own Bible studies, and so on, so I was getting thoroughly involved in things. And I think it was that Spring, Spring of ’73, it could have been the Fall of ’74, I think it was the Spring of ’73, I went to Emmanuel College, that was my college; “Emma,” everyone referred to it as, Emma college; Emmanuel College. And the Dean of Chapel was a chap called Don Cupitt. Now the Dean of Chapel is an academic post there as well as being in charge of the chapel and he was, some of you have studied a bit of historical theology, 20<sup>th</sup> Century historical theology will know the name Don Cupitt. He was an ordained Anglican minister, but as close to being a plain flat out Atheist as any ordained minister can be and still be under orders. He was a remarkable man. He was interesting, challenging, he wrote books like *The Sea of Faith*, and he was constantly on demand by the BBC—British Broadcasting Corporation—he was articulate. I want to say right up front that he was very fair to me, put my name forward for studentship monies, for example, that enabled me to get through my third year. So he was eminently fair, he was very likeable, and so on. But his theology really was far left. You couldn’t even describe it as liberal; it would make liberals look like flaming fundamentalists. It was really out there. But the biggest group in the college—the college had about 450 students—and about 40 of them, that’s close to 1 in 10, were Evangelical Christians and belonged to the Christian Union, which was their version of Intervarsity, so it was one of the stronger Christian Unions in the university. And certainly the biggest college organization, but somewhere along the line, Don Cupitt got in his head that he would like to have

all the different religious groups in the college join together for, what he called, a mission, an Emmanuel College mission. Now what is this guy gonna do in a mission? Do you see? And he wanted it to run from Sunday night. So, all of these colleges—not all of them, all but two—have chapels, and the Emmanuel College Chapel was designed by Sir Christopher Wren during the time of Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans and so on. Cromwell replaced most of the masters of other colleges, both at Oxford and Cambridge; he replaced them by Emma Men because this was considered one of the Puritan colleges. It's why the library there is still the second best Puritan library in the world. And so, in this college there is this chapel by Sir Christopher Wren, you have morning service and evensong and then so on, it was with all the bells and smells and for designated events then the Dons, the academic people, were supposed to show up wearing their full regalia and so on; at least robes if not all the full regalia except for very occasions. And so if this was a duly appointed college thing, you'd have a lot of people showing up. So, he decided that the mission would run from Sunday night with noon hour talks Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Sunday night again. And what's the CU, what's the Christian Union supposed to do? I mean it doesn't want to be obstructionists, but it doesn't want to participate in something that is so far out it's... you're not even sure it's theistic. And so, there was negotiation back and forth, and because he wanted not only the CU, but also the halal group and the Catholic Newman Society group, each of whom had a handful—two, three, four, five students. And he wanted them all together for the Emma mission. He chose the theme, a famous phrase from Bonhoeffer, *A Celebration of Death*. Well that'll really turn you on, won't it? Anyway, that was the theme, *A Celebration of Death*. And so each night and each noon was a celebration of death: Death and something or other, death and this, death and that. But negotiations were held and eventually the CU was given the right to choose its speaker for all of the five noonday talks, but Don Cupitt himself would control the two big chapel events on the two Sunday nights. Fine, five out of seven's not bad. And so they asked a friend of mine, Jonathan Fletcher, who nowadays is a minister in London at Wimbledon—yes, that Wimbledon—and he was at the time a curate of a church called, The Round. And we had already formed something of a friendship and they asked him to do these noon hour talks and so he did. Four weeks before this thing came off, the guy who was supposed to be there in the first Sunday night had to cancel, so Jonathan Fletcher got that one as well. So Jonathan Fletcher now had six of the seven; not bad. And the last one was supposed to be under the theme death and judgment, *A Celebration of Death: Judgment*. And we were going to be treated to an American Atheist psychiatrist who was going to be speaking to us on death and judgment. Ten days before the event, she phoned Don Cupitt and said, "You know, I made a mistake, I'm double-booked, I'm supposed be at the Sorbonne that night, sorry." So he threw up his hands, gave it back to the CU and said, "Get whomever you want." Fletcher couldn't do it, so in their desperation they turned to me. So the first time I ever spoke in a university college at Oxbridge, I was supposed to speak on death and judgment. At an official "do," so that all the head honchos were going to be there. Do you see? And you have twenty minutes; it's nicely packaged. I'm a first-year PhD student, somewhat terrified, and by this time I'd done enough stuff in the university that the word rabbited around the university, you



know: "Carson's gonna speak in Cupitt's chapel on death and judgment, you gotta go!" So that brought in people by the... those old chapels all the seats are down the side, they had the floor full of people squatting on the floor, the place was jam-packed, and I was terrified. So what are you supposed to do, you're speaking on death and judgment, you know? What you do is you come to a certain text that says, "Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment," there's your theme, "so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many." So I got there and it was an Anglican service and in those days I wasn't familiar enough with the prayer book either so I was fumbling around not knowing what I was doing, generally lost. And eventually got through my twenty minutes. I'm sure it wasn't much of a sermon, but what was the really terrifying part was that afterwards there was a tradition of inviting everybody to a big common area where the speaker sat down and everybody grouped all around him and fired questions at him for 45 minutes. So I sat down there and there was a chaplain in addition to the Dean, the chaplain's name was a chap called Raymond Hockley, and he was sort of almost a stereotype of an Anglican chap, he sort of rung his hands and said very meekly, "I do think that there may be questions arising." And then you look around and you're waiting for what will happen, and the choir was there, the worst audience in any Oxbridge chapel is the choir, because they're all music students. They're all very, very good, but they're cynical about everything, they're singing because they have to do it as part of their fulfillment, their requirements, not because they're singing to the glory of God. If looks could kill, I was already sliced and diced, I mean they were just... And then you look around and there were a lot of students there from the CUs and they were beaming from ear to ear, you know, "What's gonna happen?" And I there was waiting for the first question. And the first question came from a mathematics don I hadn't even met yet, seated up on the corner at the back. And he simply said, "I do believe if we heard more things like that, England would not be in her mess." And the whole atmosphere changed just like that. If the first question had been a zinger, there would have been a lot of blood on the carpet. What can I say, I couldn't control it at all, but the first question was that tone, that seriousness, and nobody dared be irreverent. It was a mathematics don. And I spent the next 45 minutes answering serious questions and rearticulating the Gospel. So I can't read this text without remembering that sometimes what happens at the end of a meeting like that when you're in an interesting situation. I've been in many universities since then, you can't control it, you give those things to the grace of God. It could've happened in another way, I would've been pummeled into the ground, it could have easily happened that way. But in the grace of God, speaking about death and judgment, and of Christ's sacrifice in Cupitt's chapel, God turned into amazing good.

Now, that really has little to do with Hebrews except that it does show that he is more interested in the ultimate things; that is death and judgment and an approach to God, than he is in mere disputes regarding how you organize your canon.

Now, last thing before we wrap this up. Chapter 11 is often called the faith chapter or the hallway of faith, but what I would like to point out is that what this writer

means by “faith,” though it overlaps with what Paul commonly means, it nevertheless has a slightly different emphasis. The emphasis is shaped by what the whole epistle is about. Almost all the figures who are introduced and the way their stories are introduced, almost all of these figures are commended for their faith because they persevere. You see, Paul, for example in Romans 4, can talk about faith over against works. And that sets up a certain type of antithesis that shapes your understanding of faith. Then you can talk about whether this faith has components of ongoing trust and so on, you’re into all kinds of Reformation debates. And Paul can use faith along those lines. Once in a while, “the faith” in the New Testament refers to the corpus of Christian truth. But here, faith, although it’s faith, the faith ultimately for this writer is faith in Christ and his finished cross work and all of that. Nevertheless, the faith that he’s underlining from the Old Testament is persevering faith; real faith sticks. So Moses perseveres as seeing him who is invisible. Abraham perseveres; the promise is given to him, but he does not inherit the land in his own time, but he perseveres in seeing him who is invisible. Do you see? And some persevere and act in great victory like Gideon and Baruch and people like that. And some persevere in great suffering and are the martyrs of whom “the world is not worthy,” the text says. But in every case, the emphasis is on real faith sticks. It’s persevering faith. And so you’ve come back to reinforce the themes introduced right at the beginning of the book, articulated in chapter 3, verse 14, it gives renewed shape to your understanding of what apostasy looks like and what genuine Christianity is. Do you see?

Any final question?

*Student 5: “The definition of faith, and I know it’s not a technical definition, 11:1, but I’ve defined faith as a commitment made based on probability and I’ve felt irreverent next to this verse, so I don’t know if I’m free to define faith like that or if that would be a technical definition?”*

Well, I don’t think it’s a helpful definition. I can see why you want it, in an age where over against and claims of omniscience, all human knowledge is shy of omniscience and therefore you can speak of probability, but those are simply not the categories that the New Testament authors are thinking about. Rather, faith here is not just the confidence, but the reality of what we hope for. It’s a God-given gift to grasp that reality and it itself is even the assurance of what we do not yet see. So it is related to reality, it is part of that reality, it gives us confidence in what we cannot yet see which enables us, therefore, to persevere. But I don’t think that it is dealing primarily at an epistemological level, which is what your definition is trying to do. I think it’s dealing much more at an eschatological level. We don’t have this stuff yet, but we already perceive it and grasp it by faith.

God bless you. See you next Tuesday.