

Introduction to the New Testament History and Literature

Lecture 21: Interpreting Scripture: Hebrews Transcript

<https://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/rlst-152/lecture-21>

Overview

There are many ways of interpreting the text, and ancient methods of interpretation may seem bizarre to our modern sensibilities. The New Testament offers us many examples of how an early Christian might interpret the text of the Hebrew Bible, which was their scripture. The Letter to the Hebrews, which is not really a letter but a speech of encouragement, structures its argument around the thesis that Jesus' liturgy and priesthood is superior to that in the Hebrew Bible. The author of Hebrews proves this through several interesting interpretations of passages from the Hebrew Bible.

Chapter 1. What Does a Text Mean? Methods of Interpretation

[1] *Professor Dale Martin:* We last week talked about the issue of women and early Christianity, and I obviously didn't address all the different texts in early Christianity that are relevant for your discussion last week on women. We concentrated on the Pastoral Epistles, I and II Timothy and Titus, as representing one kind of early Christian way of handling women in their early communities. Then we talked about the Acts of Paul and Thecla as a very different kind of way to do that. We're going to shift gears for this week. This week will also have something of a theme about it, and the theme this week is the interpretation of scripture. How do you interpret texts? I'm going to change gears from what could be the basic method I've been using in the class all along, which is the historical critical method, which I've talked about sometimes and explained what that is. We're going to talk about, is that the only way for Christians to interpret scripture?

[2] Today I get into that by talking about the letter to the Hebrews as one very good example, from the first period of Christianity, of the interpretation of scripture themselves. This is how Christians themselves interpreted their scripture in the ancient world. This will be a lecture on Hebrews to kind of talk about the content of the letter of the Hebrews, but the

main—it's also used to shift our gears away from a purely historical critical analysis of scripture and show how ancient people did it themselves. Then next class period, on Wednesday, we'll talk about medieval exegesis, late ancient and medieval exegesis—interpretations of the Bible. Now I got the feeling last week, when I was lecturing about the Acts of Paul and Thecla, that there were quite a few of you in attendance who perhaps had not printed out and actually read the Acts of Paul and Thecla. I had a few blank faces and blank eyes when I was bringing up things from that text. I know it's going to take work for you actually to download the reading for Wednesday, because it's not in your Bible. Download it—I would actually prefer if you don't carry your computer around and can read the text because I want you to look at the text as we're talking about it on Wednesday, just like I want you to look at Hebrews today.

[3] Print it out if you need to and bring it to class because I will be talking about that, and your reading for Wednesday is not part of the Bible. It's from a very, very, very important book, one chapter, which you probably should all rush right out and buy. It's so brilliant and so wonderfully written. I published the book last summer, it's called, *Pedagogy of the Bible*, and I'll set that in a little bit of context. What that is, is I actually went around and studied ten different seminaries and divinity schools around the country, all Protestant seminaries,

but very different. Some of them were very conservative, with conservative denominations in churches; some were very liberal and progressive. What I did was I interviewed both professors and students, about fifty professors and about fifty students, most of whom were planning to be ordained into the ministry of some sort. Most of these students are people who are studying theology and scripture precisely because they will end up preaching about this and working in churches for most of their cases. I asked them, how are you taught to study the Bible? I reported that material back in the first chapter of that book, *Pedagogy of the Bible*. I basically have said, here is what I've found, and the main thing I found was that, almost all these people, although they were really being taught—they were supposed to be taught how to read this text as a theological document for modern Christians. They actually are pretty much only being taught historical criticism, what the text meant in the ancient world, just like I am teaching you in this class.

[4] Now I think that this makes perfect for me to use the historical critical method to teach you because this is a secular environment. I don't assume that you're Christian, I don't assume that you're religious at all, I don't assume that you're coming into this class with the interest of studying the New Testament as a document for your faith. For some of you that's clearly the case, but that's not the structure of this course, as I explained from the very beginning of the semester. I use the historical method as the way to introduce you to this material simply because it's an easy way to introduce modern students to a historical document as we approach it that way. I've also said several times in the class, that's not the only way to read these texts. What we're going to talk about this week is, what are other ways to read these texts? That's what I did in that book. Then in the second chapter of that book was introducing theories of interpretation, some of which I'll do today, textual theory and interpretation theory. The third chapter of the book was pre-modern interpretation of scripture, which is the chapter that I'm asking you to read. That's where I take certain key figures among the church fathers, such as Origen, Augustine, the Venerable Bede in England, Bernard of Clairvaux in the Middle Ages, and Thomas Aquinas. I show how those

people read the Bible before the invention of the modern method of historical criticism. I don't just do that because I think it's interesting. I'm putting it in that book because I'm trying to advocate in that book how schools should change their curriculum, how Christian theological schools should change their curriculum so that it will better teach people who are going to be ministers how to interpret scripture theologically and not just historically. The third chapter is pre-modern stuff.

[5] The fourth chapter of that book, which you won't read, unless you rush right out and order it from Amazon.com and read it on your own time, is on theological interpretation. What does it mean to talk about a theological interpretation of text that's not the same as a historical interpretation? I explained that, I give examples of it, and then in the last chapter of the book, the fifth chapter, I lay out what I would propose as a new curriculum for theological education and what the role of scripture should be in that. I talk about that precisely because I want you to know that when you're reading that chapter for Wednesday, and I do want you to read it ahead of time, I'm not going to cover everything of that chapter, so please read it ahead of time before you come to class on Wednesday. I'll use examples from it. You'll realize that that's part of a bigger project that I had, which was to address the difference between historical interpretation and theological interpretation. That's one of the things that I'm going to talk about today is some of the stuff also that you would have gotten in chapter 2 of that book had I assigned it.

[6] What does the text mean? How do you ascertain what a text means? We talked about this a bit already in the course but we're going to concentrate on it today. When there are different and even contradictory interpretations of a text, whether it's the Bible, the Constitution of the United States, state laws, a contract in business, when we have disputes about the interpretation of the text, how do you settle those disputes? Two honest people, both of good will, both basically intelligent, read the same text, and think it means something different. How do you adjudicate disputes about a text's meaning? Where does a text's meaning lie? Is it with what the author intended the text to mean? Is it

in somehow the literal words, how they would be read by an educated, intelligent, native speaker? Are texts allowed to have multiple meanings? What kinds of text are interpreted in what manners? All of these things fall under the philosophical field of hermeneutics or hermeneutical theory, which is just a fancy word meaning “interpretation theory,” and especially the term “hermeneutics” in theological education means the interpretation of the Bible and how that should be done.

[7] I talked about, one time previously, adoptionist Christology. Remember this? I said there were obviously some early Christians who believed not that Jesus had always been divine but that at some point in his life he was adopted by God, either at his birth, or at his baptism, or his resurrection. In fact I cited Luke 3:22, where, according to Luke’s version of the baptism of Jesus, a voice comes from heaven, and at least in some of the manuscript says, “Today I have begotten you.” Remember that? Of course that is a quotation from Psalm 22. But the person quoting it is implying that Jesus was adopted by God, or begotten by God at his baptism, not at his birth or before. Now if you disagreed with that interpretation, and if you’re a good orthodox Christian you should disagree with that interpretation because that’s not now Christian orthodoxy. Orthodoxy in the way we think of it now, it didn’t exist of course in the first century in a fully defined way. It took a few centuries to develop. At that this time if you’re an orthodox Christian you’re not supposed to believe that Jesus was simply adopted by God at his baptism. If someone came to you with that reading of that text in the Gospel of Luke arguing for an adoptionist Christology, how would you argue against that interpretation? You might have argued, for example, by saying, let’s look at how this story is told in say the Gospel of Mark or in other places, where that “today I have begotten you” is not found. You say, well we’re supposed to use Mark in order to interpret Luke, but the other interpreter could just come back and say, well Mark didn’t include it but that’s not a denial of it. Luke obviously included it for some other reason.

[8] You could also say, well that’s probably not what Luke meant, what the author of Luke meant to say, because Luke seems to have other passages in Luke and Acts where it seems he’s accepting that Jesus was divine in

some sense before his baptism, maybe even at his birth, because the angels announce it, and there’s the worship of Jesus that happens then. You might say, well we have to look at other parts of Luke in order to interpret this verse and not just take this verse. They could just come right back and say, well, who says? I mean this is the clearest key in Luke of when precisely Jesus actually becomes the Son of God. It’s not contradicted by anything else in Luke, so you should take this verse much more heavily than what you’re willing to take it.

[9] One of the ways, I don’t know if I mentioned this before is—did I talk about how some ancient Christians pointed out that the dove descends upon Jesus at his baptism in these texts, right? The Greek word for “dove” is peristera; did I talk about this already? I can’t remember what I talked about in my different lectures on this and what I don’t. The Greek word for “dove,” and that’s in the text when the dove comes down on Jesus’ baptism. Some of these Christian exegetes said, well if you took all the Greek letters here—you know how Greek letters are just like Hebrew letters have numerical value—if you give each of these letters its numerical value and you add them all up, it equals 801, that’s proof. It’s right there in the text, 801. You don’t know what 801 is? You don’t know your numerology very well? What if I told you that 801 also is the addition of alpha, because it’s obviously one, and what do you think 800 would be? You want to make a guess? Omega. Alpha plus omega is 801. And what do we know about alpha plus omega? That’s the nature of God, that’s the numerical value of God and Christ at the end of the book of Revelation. They went to Revelation, the last part of Revelation, where God at one point says it and Jesus says it, “I am the alpha and the omega,” alpha/omega equals 801. Peristera added together equals 801, that proves that the fullness of God, the alpha and the omega, came upon Jesus in the form of this dove at his baptism; numerical, textual proof of their Christology. It’s right there in the text. You could say, but that’s not what the text says, but they could just say, of course it says it, it’s right there, add up the numbers, you idiot.

[10] You see how we would not accept that interpretation of this text, right? Because we don’t practice that kind of textual interpretation most of the time. That just

sounds too foreign to us. We just say that's not what the text means; you're just playing with the text. You're getting these numbers and you could make numbers mean all kinds of things. Do you know there are actually a good many people in the modern world, Christians in the modern world, who still do this sort of thing? You can buy a book called *Theomatics* that adds up all the letters of the Bible in different ways and shows you how different things in the Bible numerically refer to other kinds of prophecy events and all this sort of thing. There are actually religious people now who still practice this form of interpretation. How would you argue against that form of interpretation, if you just want to say that's not what the text says? There's nothing you could do that would basically prove to a person who believes that, that that's not what the text says. You can't just go to Mark and say, but look let me read it to you, that's not what it says, and they could just say, no you read it of course that's what it says. You just read it; the numbers were there when you read them. There's no way just appealing to a text itself can settle disputes about the meaning of a text unless you and the other person doing the arguing share the basic presuppositions about what counts as a good interpretation and what doesn't count as a good interpretation. You have to share assumptions about method of interpretation before you can even come to an agreement about the meaning of the text. What that proves is that the text can't control its own meaning. The meaning of the text is not contained there in the text simply to be passively seen by someone. You have to interpret it, and you have to learn the methods of interpretation that are appropriate in your society for a particular text. So the fact, though, is the way ancient people interpret a text, as this example shows, is not the way I have been teaching you in this class to interpret texts.

Chapter 2. The Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament

[11] What we want to do is put our imaginations back, what counted for early Christians as a good interpretation of the text, and see what methods they used, and stretch our imaginations a bit more. It's not hard to do because the New Testament writers themselves are repeatedly interpreting

scripture for themselves. Now remember, the New Testament writers aren't interpreting the New Testament as scripture because they are writing the New Testament. The New Testament didn't exist yet as scripture. When we read a Gospel writer who has Jesus interpreting scripture, the scripture he's interpreting is what Christians would call the Old Testament, or what Jews would call the Hebrew Bible. For them it was just scripture, Jewish scripture, that was all the scripture that existed for the earliest Christians was Jewish scripture. When they're interpreting what we today might call the Old Testament, they're not interpreting the New Testament, but this is great because we have New Testament writers who now occupy the scripture for Christians interpreting other scripture that was scripture for them, so we can see how they did it.

[12] Look, for example, at Psalm—well, I've already done that I'm not going to do that. Psalm 22, if you want to look at that at some point, is the Psalm that talks about Jesus—see I did it myself. It's not talking about Jesus; Psalm 22 in its historical context is talking about King David or some heroic figure who's suffering, a righteous man who suffers. It talks about someone's hands and feet being pierced, it talks about them dividing his garments and casting lots for his clothes, it talks about drinking vinegar and gall mixed together, or wine, and it sounds like someone being crucified. And sure enough early Christians interpreted that Psalm as a prophetic Psalm about the crucifixion of Jesus. In fact, when you see the crucifixion of Jesus, the different things that happen in the Gospel accounts for the crucifixion of Jesus are echoing the things in that Psalm because the later writers said, well Psalm 22 must be talking about Jesus' crucifixion, so we'll add details to the account to make it fit Psalm 22. In that case what you already got is Christian writers, followers of Jesus, very quickly interpreting the text, their holy text, to be not about the historical Jewish king that the text originally referred to, or that we as historical critics would say. Historical critics would say, no Psalm 22 was not about Jesus; it's about some king in the ancient near eastern situation, centuries before Jesus. That's not the way the early Christians did it. They said, no, it's got to be about Jesus, so they're already doing something that modern historical critics would then reject. It my

lecture next time on medieval exegesis, I'm actually going to walk you through some of the basic presuppositions of modern historical critical method that you've been learning in this class, and I'm going to make it explicit what you've already been learning so you'll have the method clear in your head. I'm also going to talk about how did this method arise in the modern world and why did it arise in the modern world, so we'll talk about that a little bit later.

[13] Let's just look at how New Testament writers then interpret text. Look at Mark 10, this is when some Pharisees come and they question Jesus about divorce. Is it okay, in his teaching, for a man to divorce his wife? Now of course, notice it's already put in a patriarchal context because it's not about how a wife can divorce her husband, or how both of them can divorce one another. We're already in a patriarchal context because the question is phrased as, is it alright for a man to divorce his wife? Look at 10:3, "He answered them, " 'What did Moses command you?' " Ah, that's a good thing. Let's just look at scripture. Scripture will probably tell us whether divorce is allowed by God. "They said, 'Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.'" Jesus says, well there's your answer. No that's not what Jesus says, right? "Jesus said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you, but from the beginning of creation God made them male and female.'" Well that sounds like a quotation, where is that a quotation from? I can't hear you.

[14] *Students:* Genesis.

[15] *Professor Dale Martin:* Thank you. I'm not asking these questions to hear myself talk. I know they're rhetorical questions but just answer them anyway, okay? That's one quotation from Genesis, but then the next one—"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother be joined to his wife." That's also from—say it.

[16] *Students:* Genesis.

[17] *Professor Dale Martin:* Genesis, but are these two quotations from the same part of Genesis? No, they're from two separate chapters. Notice what's going on here, Jesus first says, what did Moses write?, which seems to show he's

saying, okay we'll just go to scripture and scripture will tell us and that'll give us—read scripture like a rulebook and it'll tell us whether divorce is allowed. Then they quote back what is exactly the proper scripture. They're quoting Deuteronomy 24, the twenty-fourth chapter of Deuteronomy, in the law of Moses, it says, if a man wants to divorce his wife that's fine, but what it says, he has to give her a written certificate of divorce, send her away, she's free to remarry somebody else. But if she's divorced from the second husband she can't go back and be joined again to the first husband. In other words, the law is, you can divorce your wife, but once you've divorced her, and she ends up with another guy, you can't take her back again. That was the ruling in the Law of Moses. They cite a text that's actually about divorce. Jesus doesn't accept that text, and his interpretation sets aside that law—that rule by saying, oh well that was a concession that Moses did for your hardness of heart, that really wasn't God's will. God's will on this is seen in a different text, and I'll quote you that text.

[18] But where in Genesis 1 and 2 is divorce ever mentioned? Nowhere. The Genesis passage that Jesus quotes here is not about divorce, it's about marriage. Genesis doesn't forbid divorce explicitly, it just says, men and women will get together and get married. God made them male and female, man will leave his parents and come to his wife. There's nothing in Genesis—Jesus is basically breaking one of the major rules of textual interpretation of hermeneutical theory that's not only around in the modern world, but also was around even the ancient world, which is: interpret the obscure by reference to the clear. In other words, if you have a text that you're not clear about the interpretation of it, it's okay in ancient interpretation theory to go to another text that might shed light on that cloudy text. If you've got a text that's clear, don't go looking for a more obscure text and try to illuminate the clear text with the obscure text. That of course is against common sense, right? But that's exactly what Jesus is doing here. He feels that he has the liberty to basically set aside a clear teaching that permits divorce, and he goes and looks for two other texts that don't say anything about divorce, and he uses them to express God's will. Of course what he has to do is add to the text. He basically has to add to

the Genesis text that not only is this a teaching about marriage, but therefore, it is implicitly therefore a teaching against divorce, whereas, you and I might read that Genesis text and not see anything about divorce in it at all. What this shows is Jesus himself is presented as interpreting scripture in ways that would be completely unacceptable in a modern context to most scholars of the Bible who are going to say, no, you're breaking several rules about interpretation.

- [19] There's all kinds of things on this. Remember when we talked about Galatians? I read you Paul's interpretation of the Hagar and Sarah story from Genesis. Remember how the story goes? Abraham's married to Sarah, but she's not having any children, she's barren. At least that's—in the ancient world it was always the women—woman's fault, it was the woman who was barren, never the man in common ways of thinking. Of course we know differently than that now, but they always present it as, Sarah was barren. Abraham has a child with Hagar, Sarah's slave. Then Paul, instead of taking Sarah as representing Judaism, the Torah, Moses, the law, and Jerusalem, he makes Hagar represent the law, the current Jewish people, and Jerusalem, Jerusalem of the Jews. Paul also seems perfectly free to turn this text of Genesis, which seems like simply a historical talk about how did Abraham start having his descendants, one through his wife and one through his slave, and he flips that around into being an allegory about Gentiles and Jews and how non-Jews would be taken into Israel and at least some of Israel would be rejected by God and the law would be put aside. Paul also interprets scripture in ways that seem to us not only very free but actually rather bizarre in some ways, if you're not used to seeing this in the ancient world.

Chapter 3. The Letter to the Hebrews: A Speech of Encouragement

- [20] Let's look at Hebrews now because what Hebrews is, is one long extended sermon that is also an interpretation of Jewish scripture. What's really odd is that Hebrews is a text that uses interpretation of Jewish scripture to argue against the superiority of Jewish worship and tradition. First thing, what is Hebrews and what is it not? I said from the very beginning of the semester, it was called the Epistle to the

Hebrews, the Epistle to the Jews, and I said it's not really either. It's not a letter. In fact, it even tells you in chapter 13 that it's a sermon of admonition; it says a speech of encouragement, he says in 13:22. It's not a letter really, it has a letter closing added to it a bit, but it's not really a letter, it's a sermon, and it even looks like it quite possibly could have been written to be spoken out loud as a sermon.

- [21] It's also not by Paul. Now it doesn't claim to be by Paul, but some Christians throughout the centuries have assumed that it was by Paul, and that's why it's included in the Canon after Paul's letters. Notice how Hebrews is a long document and we've noticed that the order of canonicity in Paul's letters in the New Testament is by length of book. They didn't follow a chronological order; they put Romans first because it's the longest and then the letters of Paul come in the Canon, more or less with some exceptions, by length. You get to Philemon as the last of the thirteen letters of Paul, and it's of course very short, one little page. Then you have Hebrews, which is a big book, so what's clearly going on is that it sort of got connected up to the letters of Paul in antiquity even though it doesn't claim to be by Paul, and some people in antiquity thought it was Paul. In fact some people believed that's how it got into the Canon because it was kind of a controversial letter in the ancient world so some people didn't want it in the Canon. Some people think it got into the Canon precisely because some people claimed, oh well it's really by Paul after all. Who is—who wrote it though if Paul didn't? There have been guesses all over the place. Some people say Luke wrote it because it looks like a very—it looks very good Greek. For example, there's some books in the New Testament that are really lousy Greek. The book of Revelation is lousy Greek. Yes sir.

- [22] *Student:* Do you mean the author of the [inaudible]?

- [23] *Professor Dale Martin:* Well, sometimes people say it was Luke, the physician, who also was the author of Luke and Acts, and then also of Hebrews. Some people say it was whoever wrote Luke, although we don't know who that was, so the people have proposed different theories. Since the Epistle to the Hebrews does look like it has some influence from Pauline type theology, which has led

some people to say, since Luke was a traveling companion of Paul, even if the Gospel of Luke was not by Luke maybe Luke who was more educated, he's called a physician in Acts, maybe he was the one who wrote it. So there have been lots of theories. Some people have said Apollos, because remember Apollos is called in Acts someone who really has a good gift of speech. He's a great rhetorician. Apollos is depicted in Acts as a great rhetorician. Well this is good rhetoric, so somebody could say maybe this is by Apollos and just doesn't have his name. Some people said maybe it's by Barnabas. Remember it says it calls itself a speech of encouragement, and we're told in Acts that Barnabas' name was given to him because it means a "son of encouragement," so some people say maybe Barnabas wrote this. And then some people, it was asked last week whether a woman may have written the Acts of Paul and Thecla and I said, probably not since there is a second century author who says he knows who wrote it. That's disputed. Some people have said Prisca may be the author of this letter, so maybe a woman was actually written—maybe a woman has actually written one piece of our New Testament after all. The problem with all these suggestions is that they're absolute guesses. We have no evidence at all neither from the letter itself, nor from the ancient world. In fact, the smartest exegete in the ancient world was a church father named Origen and he gave some different guesses about who may have written it and then at the end he said, God knows, God knows who the author of Hebrews is, and God's the only one apparently who knows who wrote Hebrews.

also this Jewish exegetical kind of technique, which is what he uses.

[25] I should also say this exegetical technique I'm talking about was not special to the Jews. Greeks could read texts like this also. So there were all kinds of attempts to read Homer, for example, the Iliad or the Odyssey as allegories for physical science. The different gods represented air, or fire, or other elements of the universe. By the first century, when this speech was composed, this way of interpreting texts was already well known to educated people more broadly, not just Jews. But Jews used it also in reading scripture. In fact, the most famous was Philo of Alexandria, who lived a bit before the time of Paul. Well, he was around the same time but he probably died before Paul died. Philo has—we have lots and lots of text in which he interprets the Jewish scripture through these allegorical kinds of methods among other methods.

Chapter 4. *The Outline of the Epistle*

[24] It is a word of encouragement though, it's a sermon, it uses Hellenistic Jewish style—speech styles and rhetoric and Hellenistic Jewish exegetical techniques. In fact, it's an example of a certain kind of Jewish Platonism or popular Platonism because it contrasts the real and the apparent, the eternal versus the temporal, the spiritual is superior for example to the physical and the shadow, so you've got the spiritual is contrasted with the shadow of things. All these are dualisms that come up in sort of popular Platonizing rhetoric of the time. Now so it's clearly—that doesn't mean it's written by a Jew. It could have been written by a Gentile who just happens to be very well educated in Jewish scripture and has picked up

[26] I've given you an outline to the letter of Hebrews [*attached to this transcript document*]. So look at that. And I want to walk you through it real quick because one of the things you can tell immediately about this text is that it's very carefully constructed. If you're just reading through in one sitting you might not catch all this, so I've made the outline and I'll talk you through it. First, there's the introduction and the thesis, the first two verses, let me get there first. I wish I knew a New Testament song so I would know exactly where to find Hebrews. "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets." We know this is going to be about the message of God given through the Jewish prophets. "But in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son whom he appointed heir of all things through whom he also created the world." He's going to contrast what was said long ago through the prophets with what we followers of Jesus have learned through him. Already this contrast of things is—the thesis of the whole speech is the old and the new, and the superiority of the new over the old.

[27] The next section, section two on your handout, the introduction to the superiority of Jesus. The first part is 1:3 through 2:18; he shows that Jesus is superior to the angels. "To what angel did God ever say you are my son?" He takes

quotations from the Psalms that God is addressing to the Davidic King in the Psalms, he takes those as being references to Jesus and then he shows God never made these kinds of promises to angels, therefore Jesus is superior to angels. B, from 3:1 to 4:13, Jesus is superior to Moses, so he shows, through quoting scripture again, Jewish scripture, that God says things to Jesus that he doesn't say to Moses and to Joshua. Of course Joshua is just the one who inherited Moses' position so he's including it in this superiority of Jesus to both Moses and Joshua. And C, from 4:15 to 5:10, Jesus is superior to the old high priesthood, the Israelite high priesthood.

[28] Then you've got, I put them in bold, a digression, a kind of excursus in the main outline, and these are very important because these are very skillful digressions that will foreshadow something that's going to come up later in the same sermon. This one he talks a bit about Melchizedek. And so this little section, after 5:10, is foreshadowing what we'll see in V down further in your handout; so the foreshadowing of Melchizedek. Then you have III which a digression of—that goes from 5:11 to 6:12, and there you get a longer digression, which is an invitation to higher doctrine. He says you need to stop being babies, you've been drinking milk, I'm going to give you some meat, so we're going to go onto higher things; so that's a digression which is an invitation. Then there's another foreshadowing, the mention of examples of faith at 6:12 foreshadows what will be in section VII below when he gives a long list of examples of faith in the Jewish scripture. Then IV, the introduction to the second half of the sermon, which is our assurances, "We can be assured as followers of Jesus that we have..." So 6:13 to 6:20 is the introduction to the second half of the sermon.

[29] Then in section V, Jesus is compared to Melchizedek, I'll talk about that in a little bit more detail in a minute. First, (a) Melchizedek is superior to Abraham and the Levitical priesthood in 7:1-14, then in (b) Jesus is himself the new Melchizedek, 7:15-28. VI, the reality compared to the shadow. Now this is where you get this thing of the reality is always superior to the shadow and he makes Jesus and the liturgy, the service, the worship that Jesus introduces superior to the shadow that is the previous Jewish high priesthood and

tabernacle liturgy. You have a comparison here between earthly and heavenly liturgies. Then section VII, this is called is paranesis, the Greek word just means "ethical instruction." I've introduced this word before when I was talking about James, so this is the parnetical section of the sermon, "Therefore," he says in chapter 10:19, "you should do this." You have (a) an introduction to these things, (b) do this in spite of sufferings, (c) several examples of faith in chapter 11. Chapter 11 is basically a list of examples of faith in the Jewish scripture; (d) encouragement chapter, chapter 12, then practical detailed paranesis in chapter 13. Then finally a call to leave the camp, chapter 13:8-16, which I'll come back to in a minute, and then in closing admonition and benediction.

Chapter 5. Hebrews As Synkrisis: A Comparison between the Superior and the Inferior

[30] Now notice what you've got. This is a very well structured, well outlined speech, and it even has hints of what's going to come later, so you have foreshadows of things and you have reminders of things that are have come about. The basic point of the letter then is this superiority of Jesus' leitourgia, this is from the Greek word—this is where we get the English word "liturgy." In modern English it refers to worship services, so the liturgy of a worship service is what you do. Do you cross yourself? Do you bow? Do you kneel? What prayers do you say? What does your prayer book say and that sort of thing? Those are all liturgy in English, but it comes from the Greek work which had a much broader reference. It meant any kind of service. For example, when a rich man gave a bunch of money to a town and they had a big sacrifice, and a parade, and a festival, that was called a liturgy, a leitourgia. It was a service to the gods, but it was also a service to the town. So this comes to mean a broader sense of service and worship and all that sort of thing, and that's the Greek word that's here translated as service. In fact, the word leitourgos, the same word but with o-s on the end of it, means "a servant" and that's what he calls angels in Hebrews 1:7 and 1:14. So angels are called servants; they're using the same word.

[31] In most of Hebrews, therefore, I said, is a comparison between two liturgies, two leitourgiai. One is between that of Moses and

the Tabernacle, as we see in the Hebrew Bible and the other is that of Jesus introduced by his priesthood. In fact what we have—we have another Greek word. So you get all this good Greek you can use at cocktail parties and impress your friends and get new jobs. You know that the Wall Street banks will be really impressed that you know some Greek words, right? The Greek word for comparison is *synkrisis*—do we have an English word? We don't have an English word that comes from that, do we? *Synchretic* is not—is different than *synkrisis*. So it comes from the Greek word for “judgment,” *krisis*, and we get “crisis” from it, which means a “judgment” or some critical thing happening, and the Greek word for “with.” When you judge something with something else that's a comparison, so *synkrisis* is a rhetorical term used by ancient education to describe precisely this kind of speech: a comparison of one thing to another. If you were a high school boy, you would have learned rhetorical styles, you would have practiced at how to give a *synkrisis* speech, a speech of comparison. Sort of like in high school you were taught to do a compare and contrast essay, right? You're taught a form, that's what Hebrews is, is a speech in the *synkrisis* form and these two things.

[32] Now notice though what the means of demonstration is. Look at Hebrews 8:7, he's going to prove to you, the hearers—of course you're not going to need a whole lot of proof because you're already in this Christian community. You wouldn't be listening to this sermon if you weren't already a believer. He's trying to convince you, though, that what you've got in Jesus is superior to anything that the Jews could give you when it comes to this liturgy, *leitourgia*. Hebrews 8:7, he says, how do you know it's superior? “For if that first covenant had been flawless there would have been no need to look for a second one.” That's very interesting. Basically he's saying, because Christianity exists, that proves it's superior to Judaism, because otherwise, God wouldn't have brought it about. So the very existence of the second liturgy, he says, the second service, that is the service—the priesthood initiated by Christ, the very existence is used to prove, for this writer, that it's superior to what it supplanted.

[33] The main way he proves this point is proofs from scripture, and so we're going to look at a

few more of that. All the way through here he's quoting texts that are from the Hebrew Bible. He's actually is quoting them from the Greek Bible, he probably doesn't read Hebrew; he's quoting them from Greek translations of Hebrew scripture. Most of them don't talk about the Temple. You might be reading like when he talks about the high priesthood and the way these structures were—he even talks about the building. He's not talking about the Temple in Jerusalem. He's talking about the tabernacle, the big tent that is described in Exodus, because that's what the people of Israel are using when they're going through the desert before they enter the promised land. They've constructed it according to Mosaic instructions, given to Moses by God, exactly how this big tent will look, what materials it will have, what decorations it will have, its structure in different compartments. And that's where they believed God, Yahweh, was living in the camp with them as they wandered through the desert. This writer reads the descriptions of the tabernacle given in Exodus, and he reads the descriptions of the priesthood, what they're supposed to wear, what they're supposed to do; sacrifices. He says, the real meaning of all that stuff is not at all the ancient Israelites wandering around in the desert; it's talking about us as the new house of God, as the new tabernacle of God. It's talking about Christ's priesthood as the new priesthood. So everything in Exodus he just reads through the lens of Christ himself. Christ becomes this lens that all of ancient scripture then can be read through.

[34] What God says to somebody—now notice the author of scripture is not, in Hebrews, Moses necessarily, although he would believe Moses did write it. He takes the main author of scripture to be God or the Holy Spirit. Well it can even refer to Christ in 11:26, Christ can be the speaker in scripture. God, or the Holy Spirit, or Christ, are the actual authors of this text, even though it had human authors. This is one way where he's already showing a very different world from our modern world. He's not too concerned about what the human author thought or what the human author intended. He believes that God is the author of this text, and so you can figure out God's mind from reading the text itself. God is the author of the text, the centrality of Christ as key for scriptural interpretation. And it's from the very

beginning. He said it in the beginning—remember in the thesis, we’ve learned this now through the Son, not through the prophets—not just through the prophets.

[35] Let’s look at one particular passage, and we’ll talk about this briefly and then I’m going to stop, and if I need to come back to this at the beginning of next lecture I will because there’s a few other things I want to cover. Look at chapter seven; this is where he talks about this Melchizedek figure.

[36] This King Melchizedek of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham as he was returning from defeating the kings and blessed him. And to him Abraham apportioned one-tenth of everything.

[37] The basic story is referring back to a Genesis account. Abraham has gone off to liberate some of his kinsmen who have been kidnapped for ransom. Abraham raises a little army of his own. He goes off, he defeats these united kings, and he gets his kinsmen, he gets his slaves, he liberates everybody, gets the booty, the plunder of the war, and he’s traveling back home. And he comes to this place called Salem, which just happens to be Jerusalem. Of course Salem means “peace,” shalom, but this writer is taking it that Melchizedek is the King of Salem and connecting it to Jerusalem. The story is, Abraham then gives a tithe, a tenth of the spoils of war to Melchizedek as an offering. In other words, Abraham is recognizing Melchizedek as being a priest of Yahweh. And so he gives a tithe for the war.

[38] To him Abraham apportioned one-tenth of everything. His name, in the first place, means “king of righteousness.”

[39] Melech means King in Hebrew, zedek means righteousness. Now as I said he’s using Greek but he must have some kind of word key. He knows enough Hebrew that he knows how to interpret this Hebrew word “Melchizedek” to mean “king of righteousness.” He’s taking the name as having a hidden meaning. Next he’s called the King of Salem. Well shalom means peace, so that means he’s also the king of peace. He takes this, again, “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life,” why does he say that? Well Melchizedek comes up in the text of Genesis without us knowing

anything else about him. You know how in Genesis and the other parts of the Hebrew Bible it’ll say, so and so begat so and so begat so and so, it tells you everybody’s lineage. It tells you who is everybody’s father, even their names, son of so and so is a reference their father and their ancestors. He noticed Melchizedek just comes out of the text out of nowhere, and so he takes that as a sign that Melchizedek actually had no father or mother. He sprang out autochthonous, just all on his own. He has no descendants because they’re mentioned in the text. Well who else is the king of righteousness, who else is the king of peace, who else does not have a human father and a human father in any normal way? Who else has no genealogy? Who else has no end of days or end of life? Well Jesus! So Melchizedek is simply a foreshadowing, he’s a sign of Jesus.

[40] See how great he is! Even Abraham the patriarch gave him a tenth of the spoils. And those descendants of Levi who received the priestly office had a commandment in the law to collect tithes from the people, that is from their kindred, though these descended from Abraham. But this man who does not belong to their ancestry [Melchizedek wasn’t a Jew, he’s saying; he was not part of that lineage of Abraham obviously] collected tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had received the promise. It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. In the one case tithes are received by those who are mortal, in the other, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. One might even say that Levi himself [that is the father of the Jewish priests who received tithes] paid tithes through Abraham for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

[41] Now let me explain what’s going on here. This one ties in a little bit of ancient genetic theory, a little biology. According to ancient ideas, inside the body of every man are not just little sperm swimming around, but each of those little things is a homunculus, a little person, a little, teeny, tiny person. In the body of Abraham were millions of little, teeny, tiny people. The ancient gynecological theory was, inside of every man, at least, was actually every one of his descendants that he would ever have. His sons, his daughters, his grandchildren, his great grandchildren, any of their descendants, they all exist inside the

body. Abraham carried, within his own body, all these tiny, tiny, tiny, tiny little Jews, they would all come out eventually. Now Levi, who's the head high priest, who then—the first priest all Levi's descendants out of Levi's body, they were in Levi's body even when Levi's body was inside Abraham's body, so even the Levite priests of the Jews were all sacrificing to Melchizedek when Abraham was sacrificing to Melchizedek, because they're all in Abraham's body when Abraham sacrifices to Melchizedek, or gives his tithes to Melchizedek.

[42] Notice what this is, the entire Jewish people, all the Israelites, whoever existed then and whoever exists were all inside Abraham's body so they all tithed to Melchizedek. Melchizedek wasn't a Jew. This proves—then he says notice how—Melchizedek also blesses Abraham. Well if you're blessed by one,

you're not blessed by someone who is inferior to you; you're blessed by the bishop. What proves the bishop's superiority is his blessing you in the first place, so that proves that Melchizedek was superior to Abraham. Then when Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek, and Levi in Abraham's body was therefore tithing to Melchizedek, this proves that the Jewish priesthood itself recognizes the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood; wonderful little proof from scripture. Next time I'll start my lecture by finishing up how the letter of Hebrews ends, and then we'll set that aside as an example of ancient scriptural exegesis by Christians. And then I want you to read the chapter online because that will talk about then later Christian exegesis scripture up until the Medieval period.

[end of transcript]

Outline of Hebrews
(A Sermon of Synkrisis: Comparison)

RLST 152 Introduction to New Testament History and Literature
Dale B. Martin

- I. Introduction and Thesis: the old and new (1:1-2)

- II. Introduction to the superiority of Jesus (1:3-5:10)
 - A. Superior to angels (1:3-2:18)
 - B. Superior to Moses (and Joshua) (3:1-4:13)
 - C. Superior to the old high priesthood (4:15-5:10)

[Mention of Melchizedek here foreshadows section V below]

- III. Digression: Invitation to a Higher Doctrine (5:11-6:12)
[Mention of examples of faith here (6:12) foreshadows section VII.C below]

- IV. Introduction to Second Half of Sermon: our assurances (6:13-20)

- V. Jesus compared to Melchizedek (7:1-28)
 - A. Melchizedek as superior to Abraham and Levitical priesthood (7:1-14)
 - B. Jesus as new Melchizedek (7:15-28)

- VI. "Reality" compared to "Shadow" (8:1-10:18)

A comparison of the earthly to the heavenly "liturgy"

VII. Parenesis ("Therefore...") 10:19-13:21

- A. Introduction 10:19-25 (since all these things are true, let us "hold fast" to the new covenant)...
- B. In spite of sufferings (10:26-39)
- C. Examples of faith (11:1-40)
- D. Encouragement (12:1-29)
- E. Practical, detailed parenesis (13:1-7)
- F. Call to "leave the camp" (13:8-16)

VIII. Closing admonitions and benediction (13:17-25)