Today I’m going to take us into a very different room in The House of Listening. We have already seen in the first message of the series that when God brought the commandments down from the mountain that the people did not *listen*. They did not *hear*. They were not a House of Listening. They chose instead to build an idol, something they could touch and worship; they chose instead a House of Things.

Then last week we saw Jesus enter the Temple and declare that the house had been debased. It was not a House of Prayer, it was not a House of Listening. It had become, once again, a House of Things – commerce, profit, ritual and pointless blood – as the prophets of old had said so many times, and in response, Jesus cleared out the tables of money and livestock. This house shall be a House of Listening!

Now, this week, as we make our way toward Holy Week, we continue on the theme of Jesus’ interaction with Temple Judaism looking at our lectionary text for the day, Hebrews 5:5-10. The theme is the ***New Covenant*** which will replace a flawed covenant of old.

The consideration of the ideas here will show us the way to true listening – and the path is through the mediator of the New Covenant, Jesus Christ.

Let’s hear the Word of God as read by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

So let’s engage in some good old-fashioned exegesis this morning, and then we will look for the “so what?” – the application.

The argument of the Book of Hebrews is unlike anything else in the NT. None of the gospels nor Paul nor any other NT author uses the notion of priesthood to describe Jesus. I doubt very much that the idea ever occurred to Jesus.

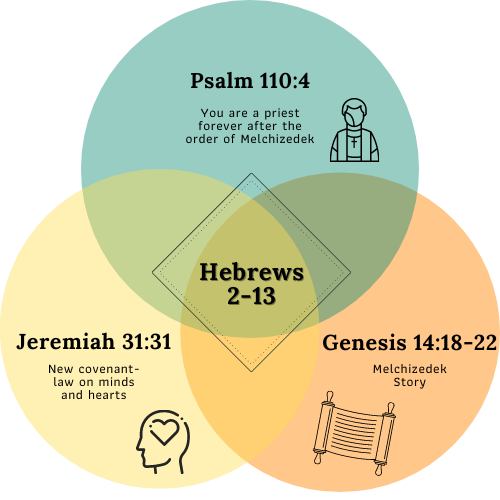
This is why this book is called Hebrews. It is because the author *rereads* the Jesus story in terms of the Jewish cultus (a system of beliefs and rituals based on animal sacrifice), the sacrificial system of the Temple itself.

In order to grasp the argument of Hebrews 5 and its rather tortuous logic, to be honest, this bit of background may help. As the author says About this we have much to say that is hard to explain…you need milk as does an infant…but solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil (Heb 5:11-15).

The author is using what is called in biblical studies, and particular rabbinic Judaism, a midrash method. A midrash is an “early Jewish interpretation of, or commentary on a biblical text, expounding and clarifying a point or illustrating a principle.”

Basically, it is what I do every week in my message.

The Hebrews passage on the priesthood of Jesus is a great case-in-point. This is about a clear an example of intertextuality as you can find in the NT. Look at this graphic and I’ll show you how this works.



Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice, but not as the imperfect sacrifices of the cultus which had to be offered repeatedly (remember the image of the Temple from last week’s message – 100,000+ pascal lambs during one Passover Festival). Since Jesus is the Son of God, we ought to think about his life as a temple sacrifice, a perfect one, hence it was once-for-all. This argument spans Hebrews chapters 2-13. Plus a lot of really wonderful moral exhortation scattered along the way of course. But basically that is what he (or she… as some have suggested) does in this unique theology.

Remember in my message about building and ark when you fail? 1 Peter 3:18, the Ristretto Gospel? For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.

There is a bit of a problem with this argument, the author of Hebrews is getting creative.

Jesus wasn’t a priest. He never seemed to think of himself this way and the Bible never mentions this idea outside of Hebrews. Jesus thought of himself as a prophet, as the Son of Man, as the Son of God. To us he was the speaker of parables, the compassionate healer, the wandering Rabbi, the trouble-maker disrupting the commerce of the debased Temple economy in his righteous indignation.

He was of the house of David, a king, not of Levi, a priest.

Jesus wasn’t a Levite, the tribe from whom all priests come. He was from the tribe of Judah, if you trace his heritage from Joseph, as in Matthew and Luke (Joseph the husband of Mary, Matt 1:16) from the village of Bethlehem. The son of Jesse, the son of David.

Hebrews addresses the issue by rereading Gen 14 Melchizedek story, Psalm 110:4, and Jeremiah 31:31.

If perfection had been attained through the Levitical priesthood…there would be no need to speak of another priest arising from the order of Melchizedek, rather than from the order of Aaron (i.e. Aaron was a Levite; Heb 7:11].

Hebrews 7 is the author’s midrashic exegesis of Gen 14:18-20. It is fascinating!

Jesus’ tribe never served at the altar having descended from Judah, and of that tribe …Moses said nothing about priests (Heb 7:14).

There is priesthood that is superior to the Levitical priesthood of Abraham/Moses and that is found in the mysterious figure of Melchizedek.

In Hebrews 5:6 says, quoting Psalm 110:4:

You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.

Melchizedek is one of the most mysterious figures in the Bible. His importance, as it turns out, is far out of proportion to the amount of space given to him. There are three verses in Gen 14:18-20 and one in Psalm 110.

One of my favourite resources is The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, a book that explores the treasure house of images, symbols, motifs, metaphors of the Bible. It is endlessly helpful and elucidating.

I was reading the article on Melchizedek for some reason a few years ago and the style, the content seemed familiar. And then I realized that I had written this article and others for the dictionary back in the 90s. It was quite good! I was very impressed with me!

And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” (Gen 14:18-20)

So Hebrews argues that Melchizedek, King of Salem points to Jesus in these ways….

* Melchizedek blesses Abraham – pretty heady stuff that the superior one blesses Father Abraham, the patriarch of the faith, the inferior one! Abraham receives the blessing from this priest.
  + Jesus is the Son of God, the Word incarnate, the resurrected Lord of all.
* Melchizedek is the King of Salem, that is Jerusalem, the word for “peace” and Melchizedek is the King of Peace!
  + Jesus is the Prince of Peace
* Melchizedek is a priest of God Most High - a priest is a mediator.
  + As Hebrews puts it Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant (Heb 9:15, 12:24)
* Abraham pays a tithe to Melchizedek (we tithe to the divine, Abraham makes obeyance to Melchizedek.). That is, we pay tithe to the exalted one, to the Lord above us, we give what is due.
  + Give unto Caesar what is Caesar but give to God what is God’s
* Melchizedek says to Abraham that God has delivered your enemies into your hand!
  + This obviously works for us as we consider the confrontation of Jesus with the Jerusalem of his day, and his eventual victory over his foes.
* Melchizedek brings out bread and wine for Abraham
  + This evokes the Christian communion to the Christian mind as we reread Gen 14.
* And all of this is forever… Though art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek indeed![[1]](#endnote-1)
  + In chapter 7 Hebrews says speaking of Melchizedek, he says: Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

Here Hebrews makes explicit that what was declared in Jeremiah 31:31 has now been fulfilled in Christ.

31 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah… this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31:31-33)

Jesus is the mediator of this New Covenant

The titles of our two books of the Bible derive directly from Jeremiah 31:31 and the interpretation of that passage in Hebrews 2-13. Thus, you have an Old Covenant and a New Covenant.[[2]](#endnote-2)

And this language was used by Jesus himself at the last supper, …this is a new covenant in my blood (Luke 22:20, see also Paul 1 Cor 11:25ff; 2 Cor 3:6)

From the Test (So What?)

If we want to be a House of Listening what must we do?

Well, nothing. Because the New Covenant is perfect.

I think listening in this House is different for everyone. What is your place of listening? Where and how do you best “hear?”

You won’t often hear me encourage you to be passive – but listening is a passive thing.

I hear best through the reading of text, not just Bible but through a good novel or article. I hear well standing next to old growth trees. Or in the wee hours on the edge of consciousness as I awake – sometimes at four in the morning!

Maybe for some it is music or meditation or laughter or creation of art being with people. Everyone is different.

Or how are we going to be a House of Listening as we turn to consider refreshing our vision and charting a strategic course for the next years? How shall we listen?

The New Covenant will, as it says in the quotation of Jeremiah in Hebrews 8:10, …put my law in their minds…and write them on their hearts [ now that is listening], and I will be their God and they shall be my people.

You don’t put God’s word to you in your mind. God writes it there. You are a letter of Christ…Written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts! (2 Cor 3:3)

He makes us his people.

What are you striving about here? What are you trying to make happen? Stop striving with God. It’s okay.

This possession of God comes up from within, not pressed onto the soul by our own effort and striving.

Fast from yammering at God, feast on silence. Fast from striving and feast on the perfection of God provision in the New Covenant.

Just Listen. That’s all.

I will be your God and you will be my people.

This is the Covenant. And it is perfect.

Amen

1. (Hebrews 7:3, Without father or mother, without geology, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. At an academic conference for biblical studies you never find “Old Testament” on the agenda, it is Hebrew Bible, or First Testament, so as to be inclusive of Jewish scholarship. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)