

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Session 27, Hebrews Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 27, Hebrews, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture on Hebrews provides an overview of the book, exploring its authorship, intended audience, and purpose. The lecture highlights the challenge of identifying the author, noting various historical proposals while ultimately concluding that the author's identity remains unknown. **It suggests the book was written to Jewish Christians** who were wavering in their faith, tempted to revert to Judaism. **The primary aim of Hebrews**, according to Mathewson, is to persuade these readers that embracing Christ offers far more than returning to their old ways. **Mathewson details two methods for dividing the letter**, a structural approach observing alternating exposition and exhortation, and a threefold method that involves focusing on Jesus as the ultimate messenger of God, high priest, and partner with humanity. **The lecture also explores the author's perspective on the Old Covenant**, clarifying that it was not defective but fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

2. 15 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 27 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Daniel).



**Mathewson_NTLit_S
ession27.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 27, Hebrews

Okay, here is a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture on the book of Hebrews:

Briefing Document: Hebrews - NT Literature Lecture 27

Overview:

This lecture provides an introduction to the book of Hebrews within the context of the New Testament's general (or Catholic) epistles. It focuses on the significant challenges in understanding the book, specifically regarding its authorship, intended audience, and purpose. Dr. Mathewson highlights the book's unique literary character as a written sermon and its central argument for the superiority of Christ and the New Covenant over the Old Covenant, urging Jewish Christians not to revert to Judaism.

Key Themes and Ideas:

- **Placement in the New Testament:** Hebrews is categorized as one of the general or Catholic epistles alongside James, 1 & 2 Peter, and 1, 2 & 3 John because these letters seem addressed to a broader, less specifically defined audience compared to Paul's letters. "By Catholic or general, we simply mean that these letters appear to be addressed to a fairly wide audience."
- **Authorship:** The author of Hebrews is unknown. Early tradition attributed it to Paul, but modern scholarship generally disagrees. Other suggested authors include Apollos, Barnabas, Luke, and even Mary, the mother of Jesus. Origen's statement, "God only knows who wrote the book of Hebrews," encapsulates the uncertainty.
- **Intended Audience:** The lecture posits that the audience was most likely Jewish Christians, possibly located in Rome, who were familiar with the Old Testament and the sacrificial system. "The addressees of Hebrews appear then to have been a group of Jewish Christians who had never seen or heard Jesus in person." These Christians faced persecution and were tempted to revert to Judaism.
- **Purpose of Hebrews:** The primary purpose of Hebrews is to persuade Jewish Christians not to abandon their faith in Christ and return to Judaism. The author argues that Christianity offers something far superior to the Old Covenant. "The writer who knows them or has known about them for a considerable time and

feels a pastoral concern for their welfare, warns them against falling back, for this may result in falling away from their Christian faith altogether." The core message is that they "have everything to lose if they fall back, but they have everything to gain if they press on."

- **Literary Genre:** Hebrews is best understood as a written sermon or "word of exhortation," exhibiting characteristics of both theological argumentation and practical application. "In other words, I think one of the best ways to classify this, is this is a sermon in written form sent off like a letter. In other words, it has all the earmarks of a sermon or homily, but now in written form."
- **Central Argument: Superiority of Christ and the New Covenant:** The lecture emphasizes that the author of Hebrews systematically argues for the superiority of Jesus Christ over key elements of the Old Testament, such as angels, Moses, Joshua, the Tabernacle, sacrifices, and the Old Covenant itself. This is achieved through a pattern of exposition (demonstrating Christ's superiority) and exhortation (urging readers to remain faithful). "In all of the exposition sections, the author compares Jesus Christ to something in the Old Testament...to show that Jesus is superior."
- **Jesus as High Priest:** A dominant theme in Hebrews is the portrayal of Jesus as the ultimate High Priest, fulfilling the Old Testament foreshadowing. Psalm 110, which combines the idea of a Messiah-king and a High Priest, is crucial to this argument. "The primary way that Jesus is portrayed in the book of Hebrews is as the high priest in fulfillment of the Old Testament."
- **The Old Covenant and its Limitations:** The author does *not* view the Old Covenant as inherently bad or flawed. Instead, its primary shortcoming was its inability to fully deal with sin and grant access to God's presence. The New Covenant, through Jesus Christ, achieves this. "The primary shortcoming of the Old Covenant, according to the author of Hebrews, is that it could never completely deal with the problem of sin in a way that allowed the worshipper...to enter into God's presence." The Old Covenant is seen as pointing forward to the New.
- **Historical Argument:** The author of Hebrews argues from the Old Testament itself to demonstrate the temporary nature of the Old Covenant. He points to passages like Psalm 110 (anticipating a different kind of priest), Psalm 95 (offering a rest beyond Joshua's), and Jeremiah 31 (foretelling a new covenant) to show that the Old Testament itself implies something greater to come. "He's arguing from the

Old Testament itself that the Old Testament even points to the temporary nature of the Old Covenant."

- **Melchizedek Priesthood:** To reconcile Jesus' lineage from David (Judah) with his role as High Priest (traditionally from Levi), Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus is a priest "according to the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4), a different priestly order. "Jesus is a priest, but not after the line of Levi...He's a priest according to a different order, the order of Melchizedek."
- **Tabernacle vs. Temple:** The author consistently refers to the Tabernacle rather than the Temple when discussing Old Testament worship. This is likely because he wants to draw parallels between his readers' situation and the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, emphasizing a journey of faith. "Over and over, the author of Hebrews is going to compare his readers to the Israelites who wandered in the wilderness throughout the Book of Exodus."

Key Quote:

"The author is trying to convince his readers they have everything to gain if they embrace Christ, but they have everything to lose if they turn their backs on him." This quote effectively summarizes the central message and persuasive purpose of the book of Hebrews.

4. Study Guide: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 27, Hebrews

Hebrews: A Study Guide

I. Key Concepts

- **General/Catholic Epistles:** Letters addressed to a broad, general audience of Christians rather than specific individuals or churches. Hebrews is considered one.
- **Authorship of Hebrews:** The author is unknown; possibilities include Paul, Apollos, Barnabas, or Luke, though Origen suggested only God knows.
- **Audience of Hebrews:** Likely Jewish Christians, possibly in Rome, who are tempted to revert to Judaism.
- **Purpose of Hebrews:** To persuade Jewish Christians not to abandon their Christian faith and return to Judaism by demonstrating the superiority of Christ and the New Covenant.
- **Genre of Hebrews:** Best classified as a written sermon or homily sent as a letter, characterized by alternating exposition and exhortation.
- **Superiority of Christ:** A key theme. Jesus is portrayed as superior to angels, Moses, Joshua, the Old Covenant, and the Old Testament sacrificial system.
- **Psalm 110:** A crucial Old Testament text for Hebrews, portraying Jesus as both Messiah and High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.
- **Old Covenant vs. New Covenant:** The Old Covenant, while not defective, could not completely deal with sin. The New Covenant, through Jesus, offers complete forgiveness and access to God's presence.
- **Historical Argument:** The author uses Old Testament texts (Psalm 110, Psalm 95, Jeremiah 31) to show that the Old Covenant itself anticipated a future, greater covenant.
- **Melchizedek:** Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek, not the Levitical order, allowing him to be both Messiah (from the line of David) and High Priest.
- **Tabernacle vs. Temple:** The author refers to the tabernacle rather than the temple, drawing parallels between the readers' situation and the Israelites' wandering in the wilderness.

- **Exposition/Exhortation:** The structure of Hebrews alternates between explaining the superiority of Christ (exposition) and urging the readers to persevere in faith (exhortation).
- **Warnings:** Hebrews contains strong warnings against apostasy, emphasizing the consequences of turning away from Christ.

II. Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. Why are Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, and 1, 2 & 3 John often called the "General Epistles"?
2. Why has the authorship of Hebrews remained a mystery?
3. What is the likely background of the audience to whom the book of Hebrews was written?
4. What is the primary purpose of the author in writing to the Hebrews?
5. What Old Testament passage plays a central role in the author's argument about Jesus?
6. According to Hebrews, what is the primary shortcoming of the Old Covenant?
7. What does it mean that Jesus is a priest "according to the order of Melchizedek"?
8. Why does the author of Hebrews often refer to the tabernacle rather than the temple?
9. Describe the alternating structure of exposition and exhortation that characterizes the book of Hebrews.
10. What are the readers in danger of losing if they turn back, and what do they have to gain if they press on?

III. Quiz Answer Key

1. The term "General Epistles" refers to these books because, unlike Paul's letters, they are addressed to a wider audience of Christians rather than specific churches or individuals. The intended recipients are not as narrowly defined.
2. The authorship of Hebrews is unknown because the book lacks the typical introductory features of a letter, such as identifying the author and the specific

recipients. This absence of authorial information has led to much speculation but no definitive answer.

3. The audience of Hebrews likely consisted of Jewish Christians who were familiar with the Old Testament and Jewish sacrificial system. They were possibly facing persecution and tempted to revert to Judaism due to the pressures and attractions of their former religion.
4. The primary purpose of the author was to persuade these Jewish Christians not to abandon their newfound faith in Christ and return to Judaism. The author seeks to reinforce their commitment to Christianity by demonstrating the superiority of Jesus and the New Covenant.
5. Psalm 110 plays a central role because it portrays Jesus as both Messiah and High Priest. This passage supports the author's argument that Jesus fulfills and surpasses the Old Testament priesthood and kingship.
6. The primary shortcoming of the Old Covenant, according to Hebrews, is its inability to completely and permanently deal with the problem of sin. The Old Covenant sacrifices could not ultimately cleanse the worshippers and grant them direct access to God's presence.
7. Jesus being a priest "according to the order of Melchizedek" means that his priesthood is not based on the Levitical line but on a different, superior order. This allows Jesus, who is from the tribe of Judah, to be both Messiah (from David's line) and High Priest.
8. The author refers to the tabernacle rather than the temple to draw parallels between his audience and the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. The wilderness wandering was a time of testing and transition, mirroring the situation of the readers contemplating abandoning their Christian faith.
9. Hebrews alternates between sections that explain and demonstrate the superiority of Christ and sections that urge the readers to remain faithful and not to turn back to Judaism. The author uses these cycles of exposition and exhortation to reinforce his argument and appeal to his audience.
10. The readers risk losing the complete and final salvation offered through Christ, including access to God's presence, if they turn back to Judaism. They have everything to gain if they press on, as the author assures them that faithfulness to Christ guarantees a superior and lasting relationship with God.

IV. Essay Questions

1. Discuss the challenges in determining the authorship and intended audience of the book of Hebrews. What evidence, internal and external, has been used to support different theories, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments?
2. Analyze the author's use of the Old Testament in Hebrews. How does the author interpret and apply specific Old Testament passages to argue for the superiority of Christ and the New Covenant?
3. Explain the concept of Jesus as the High Priest in Hebrews. How does the author use the Old Testament sacrificial system and the figure of Melchizedek to illustrate the unique and superior nature of Christ's priesthood?
4. Discuss the "warnings" in Hebrews. What are the specific dangers the author is addressing, and how do these warnings contribute to the overall purpose and message of the book?
5. Compare and contrast the Old Covenant and the New Covenant as presented in Hebrews. How does the author portray the limitations of the Old Covenant and the advantages of the New Covenant mediated by Jesus Christ?

V. Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apostasy:** The abandonment or renunciation of a religious or political belief.
- **Catholic Epistles (General Epistles):** The books of James; 1 and 2 Peter; 1, 2, and 3 John; and Jude. Traditionally understood to be addressed to the church at large rather than a specific individual or congregation.
- **Covenant:** A formal agreement or treaty between two parties. In the Bible, covenants are agreements between God and his people, outlining the terms of their relationship.
- **Exhortation:** An address or communication emphatically urging someone to do something.
- **Exposition:** A comprehensive description and explanation of an idea or theory.
- **Homily:** A sermon, usually short, that gives practical moral advice.
- **High Priest:** The chief religious official in ancient Israel, responsible for leading worship and mediating between God and the people.
- **Levitical Priesthood:** The priestly lineage descended from Levi, one of the twelve sons of Jacob.
- **Melchizedek:** A priest-king mentioned in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110, who is presented as a type of Christ in Hebrews.
- **Messiah:** The promised deliverer of the Jewish people, prophesied in the Old Testament. Christians believe Jesus is the Messiah.
- **New Covenant:** The agreement established by God with humanity through Jesus Christ, based on grace and forgiveness of sins.
- **Old Covenant:** The agreement established by God with the nation of Israel through Moses, based on obedience to the law.
- **Psalm 110:** A messianic psalm that speaks of a king who is also a priest in the order of Melchizedek.
- **Tabernacle:** A portable sanctuary used by the Israelites during their wanderings in the wilderness.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 27, Hebrews, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on the Book of Hebrews

- **Why is Hebrews categorized as one of the "general epistles"?**
- Hebrews, along with James, 1 & 2 Peter, and 1, 2 & 3 John, is considered a general or "Catholic" epistle because it appears to be addressed to a broader, more general audience of Christians rather than to a specific church or individual. Unlike Paul's letters, which often target particular congregations in named cities, Hebrews lacks a specific audience identification within the text itself. This lack of specificity leads to the classification as a general epistle.
- **Who wrote the book of Hebrews, and what evidence do we have to support this claim?**
- The authorship of Hebrews is unknown. The letter itself does not identify the author, and there is no surviving historical introduction that names the writer. Throughout church history, numerous suggestions have been made, including Paul, Apollos, Barnabas, Luke, and even Mary, the mother of Jesus. However, none of these suggestions can be definitively proven. Origen famously stated, "God only knows who wrote the book of Hebrews," a sentiment that remains the most accurate assessment given the lack of concrete evidence. While one can infer aspects of the author's background and theological inclinations from the text, a precise identification remains elusive.
- **To whom was the book of Hebrews likely written, and what were their circumstances?**
- The letter was likely written to Jewish Christians, possibly located in Rome, who were familiar with the Old Testament sacrificial system. These Christians were likely second-generation believers who had not personally seen or heard Jesus. They faced persecution and ostracism for their faith, potentially tempting them to revert to Judaism, which enjoyed protection under Roman law. They were at a crucial point, either embracing Christ fully or returning to their former religion.

- **What is the main purpose of the book of Hebrews?**
- The primary purpose of Hebrews is to persuade its readers, who are primarily Jewish Christians, to persevere in their faith in Jesus Christ and not to turn back to Judaism. The author argues that Christ and the New Covenant offer something far superior to the Old Covenant, including a better high priest, a superior sacrifice, and a more direct access to God's presence. The author wants to convince his readers that they have everything to lose by abandoning Christ and everything to gain by faithfully embracing him, despite the potential for suffering and persecution.
- **How does the author classify the book of Hebrews, and how should we understand it?**
- The author describes Hebrews as a "word of exhortation" (Hebrews 13:22). This suggests that the book is essentially a written sermon or homily, akin to a transcribed and expanded message delivered orally. It has theological arguments (as found in Paul's letters) along with exhortations and warnings, ending in the way that a letter would be finished. This understanding helps explain the absence of a typical letter introduction and the presence of sermon-like qualities.
- **How is Jesus portrayed in the book of Hebrews, and why is this portrayal significant?**
- Jesus is primarily portrayed as the ultimate and superior High Priest, fulfilling the Old Testament sacrificial system. This portrayal is crucial because it addresses the Jewish Christian readers' familiarity with and potential longing for the Old Covenant rituals. By presenting Jesus as the High Priest, the author argues that Jesus offers a better sacrifice and a more effective means of accessing God's presence than the Old Covenant ever could. Psalm 110, which combines the idea of a Messiah king and a high priest, heavily influences this portrayal.

- **How does the author of Hebrews view the Old Covenant, and what is its relationship to the New Covenant?**
- The author does not view the Old Covenant as inherently bad or defective but as incomplete and temporary. According to the author, its primary shortcoming was its inability to fully deal with sin and grant worshippers complete access to God's presence. The Old Covenant served as a pointer toward the New Covenant in Jesus Christ, which fulfills what the Old Covenant anticipated. The author uses a "historical argument," citing Old Testament passages like Psalm 110, Psalm 95, and Jeremiah 31 to demonstrate that the Old Testament itself suggests the coming of something greater. He does not mean that the Old Covenant should be denigrated, but seen as fulfilled.
- **What is the significance of Melchizedek in the book of Hebrews?**
- Melchizedek is significant because he represents a different order of priesthood than the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament. The author uses Psalm 110 to argue that Jesus is a priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," not the line of Levi. This allows Jesus to be both a Messiah from the line of David and a high priest, even though the two lineages are separate. Melchizedek's priesthood, about which little is known, serves as a model for Jesus' unique and superior priesthood, offering a solution to the potential conflict between Jesus' royal lineage and his priestly role.