

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 185

Hebrews 7

November 11, 2017

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Hebrews 7 picks up themes that are familiar already to readers of the book. The writer defends the superiority of Christ's priesthood to the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament on the basis of his connection to Melchizedek. A key part of this strategy is to declare that Levi "paid tithes to Melchizedek, being still in the loins of his ancestor" (Abraham). How are we to understand this idea? This episode tackles this difficult issue, as well as the tradition that Melchizedek was Noah's son Shem.

### Transcript

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 185: Hebrews 7. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing this week?

**MH:** Pretty good, pretty good. Ready for Melchizedek, *again*. [laughs]

**TS:** Our boy! This'll be the shortest podcast ever! [laughter] Since you'll be referencing...

[laughter]

**MH:** Go listen to that other stuff!

**TS:** Yeah.

**MH:** Well, that's all the time we have for now...

[laughter]

**TS:** Before we get started, Mike, I just wanted to remind everybody that we're going to try to do a get-together in Boston, because we'll be at the SBL and ETS, covering the conferences. We're aiming for Friday, Nov. 17<sup>th</sup> in Boston somewhere, so stay tuned to that. We'll try to do a live Q&A like we did last year in San Antonio.

**MH:** Yeah, hopefully like in San Antonio, we'll get a dozen or so, and we'll have a good time.

**TS:** Should we say who we have lined up for some of the interviews?

**MH:** Yeah, we can do that. Let's see, going back into my memory here, I'll just mention a few.

1. Hugh Ross, we're fortunate enough to be able to spend what I'm hoping will be 20 or 30 minutes with Hugh Ross. His schedule is very chaotic. That's because he has to speak a little bit, he has to do some booth time, and then people just want to talk to him. So we'll get to chat with Hugh again. We got to chat with him last year, just one-on-one at a booth, but it'll be nice to interview him and talk about his recent book.
2. John Walton we have on the schedule.
3. John Goldengay, who is an Old Testament professor.
4. Andy Naselli has a book on the "higher life," the "let go and let God" approach to the Christian life. He has a book critiquing that. I think that'll be interesting.
5. We have—I'm trying to remember their names because I haven't met them before—Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson. They have a couple books that thematically are about recovering the model of the scholar pastor. Back in the old days, a couple of centuries ago, scholars were leading intellectuals and theologians. So they're actually trying to restore this model, write a lot about it. So I thought for this audience, that's going to be an important conversation to expose you to their work too. So those are samples of what we'll have.
6. Some familiar ones: David Burnett, Ryan Johnson, Carl Sanders.

It'll be a good time.

**TS:** Looking forward to it!

**MH:** Well here we are in Hebrews 7. No, we're not going to just end it here. [laughs] But I will say again, by way of a retrospect, we have covered Melchizedek quite a bit on the podcast, and not too long ago. This is sort of Part 2 of Christ's high priesthood. We got into the high priesthood of Christ a little earlier episode, in 183, in fact. The priesthood of Christ is going to stretch into Hebrews 10. I made that comment before. Part 1 (if we're calling this a second part, a second installment) is episode 183, so you can go back and listen to that. But even further back than that—not too long, but further back—we had a whole series on Melchizedek. We did four podcasts on Melchizedek, and I think the third one was episode 170, where we did Christ and Melchizedek. We actually got into Hebrews 7 a lot in that episode. Because of that, we're going to focus today on what we didn't do before. I'm going to do a little summarizing and then transition to new material. So we're not going to repeat these prior episodes,

we're just going to hit a few points real quickly by way of summary. So if you want detail, episodes 167, I think, on through 170, 171, are all about Melchizedek. You've got the episode in 183 which was the first installment about the high priesthood. If you want the detail, go there. For today, we're just hitting some highlights, then getting into new stuff, and I think you'll find the new stuff pretty interesting. So let's go to the last few verses of Hebrews 6, which set up Hebrews 7 and jump in there. So Hebrews 6:13-20:

5:00

**<sup>13</sup> For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, <sup>14</sup> saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." <sup>15</sup> And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. <sup>16</sup> For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. <sup>17</sup> So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, <sup>18</sup> so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. <sup>19</sup> We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, <sup>20</sup> where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.**

That introduces the Melchizedek idea specifically. There was an earlier allusion in the high priestly talk I mentioned just a few minutes ago before. Let's just jump right in to Hebrews 7. If you want to listen to the end of Hebrews 6 or the other stuff, please go there. But Hebrews 7 begins this way, right on the heels of that comment that he has been made a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Verse 1 says:

**For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, <sup>2</sup> and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. <sup>3</sup> He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever. <sup>4</sup> See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils!**

That finishes up with verse 4, at least to this point. Now, there's some old material here (mostly from episode 170) about Melchizedek in the New

Testament. There's a significant phrase—significant phrase #1, I guess we can call it: “without father or mother or genealogy, neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he continues a priest forever.” Now as O'Brien comments (and I quoted this in the earlier episode):

These remarkable words have been understood in two significantly different ways. The first approach interprets *without father or mother* as divine predicates which were well known in Hellenistic sources. *Without genealogy* signifies unbegotten or uncreated and therefore 'of divine generation', while the crucial statement *without beginning of days or end of life* means that he was truly God and not merely a divinized mortal. On this view, Melchizedek is a divine figure, a heavenly being who is not part of this world.

That's from O'Brien's commentary, *Letter to the Hebrews*, the Pillar Series. Now the problem, of course, as O'Brien himself points out and as we talked about, is there's no hint of that stuff in the Old Testament. It is a Second Temple period understanding that Melchizedek is a divine being, but in the Old Testament, you don't get that. There's just no hint that he's anything but a guy—but a man.

So we get into the second approach that O'Brien talks about. The second approach takes the author's statements as an example of an argument from silence in a typological setting. In the first clause, “without father or mother, without genealogy,” it's understood in purely human terms within a Greco-Roman context. If that's the case, then this would discredit Melchizedek. “Without father” meant being illegitimate. Someone without a mother was the child of a woman of low social status. “Without genealogy” meant that one was disqualified from becoming a Levitical priest, according to Numbers 3:10 and 15 and 16. So that's another perspective. If you don't take these phrases as the language of divinity, well then you might have other problems on the other side.

10:00 We talked about these things in the earlier episode. We parked on the notion that the key to unraveling this language without showing disrespect to Melchizedek—without saying, “Oh, he's illegitimate, his mom was low status,” and that kind of thing... The way to unravel it and not make him a divine being (whereas the Old Testament never says that and creates those problems), was really two of these words: that is “without genealogy.” The point of this description, therefore, would be a priestly qualification—not that Melchizedek was a supernatural being, but that he was a priest whose priesthood didn't depend on a specific genealogy. That's why we don't have a father or a mother mentioned in the Old Testament, we don't have anything like that mentioned. And so this perspective says that the reason why those things are absent in the description of Melchizedek was so that no one could say, “Well, the only priesthood that's available is the one from the tribe of Levi.” If you take that stuff away and then God calls him a priest (which he does, in Psalm 110, and of course in Genesis 14), then in God's mind, here is a priest of the Most High. Here is a priest that God approves of, that doesn't need

this genealogy. And that's important, because the Messiah, of course, would be the son of David, not the son of Levi. And that's why the description—the linkage back to Melchizedek, who doesn't have any particular lineage attached to him—becomes significant. So O'Brien says in this regard:

Although Melchizedek could not have qualified for the Levitical priesthood, he was a priest of God Most High, and Abraham recognized this. Moreover, since Genesis says nothing about his birth or death, his priesthood [is cast as having] no beginning or end — it was divinely appointed.

In other words, Melchizedek's is not described with any genealogical qualifications—no mom and dad, that's never given—so we're dealing with something outside of the line of Levi that God approves of. There's also no narrative in the Old Testament about Melchizedek's priesthood ever ending. When we get to Psalm 110, it's still there. In God's mind, this is a legitimate line—a legitimate priestly line. And so, by virtue of the absence of this information (no genealogy, it's never said to have ended), that suggests to the reader (and this is what the writer of Hebrews is picking up on) that this is a priestly line that God approves of that doesn't depend on Levi and didn't have an end—it's still ongoing. And when you marry that to the son of David, and some of the messianic characteristics, it makes sense, because as things keep going, you have this relationship between the king and the king as God's son. And then you get to the incarnation later on. It's a sensible part of a whole package.

Now this is me talking, not O'Brien or anybody else. This is the way I summarized it in the earlier episode. I said the implication is that Melchizedek was still a priest of the Most High, regardless of ancestry. There's no need to worry about Jesus not being from the tribe of Levi. You call him a priest. "Well, you can't do that—he wasn't a Levite!" You don't have to worry about that; we don't need to worry about Levi. This is a different priesthood. It's also approved of God... one that is cast that way because it didn't originate with a tribe. It is never described as having an end. As such, physical succession to Jesus of Nazareth isn't an issue because the priesthood his ministry follows wasn't linked to a lineage. It was dictated by God alone. I think that's the importance of this linkage back to Melchizedek. Lastly, one other line from O'Brien. He said (and I used this in the earlier episode, but it's worth repeating here):

Consequently, Melchizedek foreshadows the priesthood of Christ at that point where it is most fundamentally different from the Levitical priesthood'." —i.e., not dependent on tribal lineage.

In other words, it's not dependent on tribal lineage. Now, significant phrase #2, or significant set of ideas #2, is this line in what we read here that Melchizedek resembles the Son of God.

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**...resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.**

The point isn't that Jesus resembles Melchizedek. It's the other way around—Melchizedek is the one who resembles the Son of God. Because Melchizedek resembles Jesus, his priesthood is to be understood as being independent of lineage and one begun by God and never terminated. And so while Second Temple Jewish texts (we spent a whole episode on those texts with Melchizedek) thought about Melchizedek in divine terms, the reason for doing so was misguided. But the notion is still valid if one sees how the messiah was a priest according to Melchizedek's priesthood. And the messiah, not Melchizedek, was divine. In other words, the idea that Melchizedek had something to do with a divine messiah was on target, but not because Melchizedek was more than a man. It's because Jesus, the son of David—the messiah—was more than a man. And Melchizedek resembles him, not the other way around.

Now we had gone over all of that in earlier episodes, so I'm going to leave it there and we're going to move on to new stuff, new points of focus. Really there's just going to be two drill-down places in this episode when it comes to Hebrews 7. And really, they're found in the rest of the chapter, Hebrews 7:11-26. Now I'm going to read all that. It's the rest of the chapter, but I'm only going to focus on Hebrews 7:4-10 in these two drill-down points. Verses 11-26 basically derive from verses 4-10, or reinforce ideas about Christ's priesthood we've already discussed. Frankly, verses 4-10 contain the really interesting material for today because it's new. Now, here's the whole remainder of Hebrews 7. I'm going to read 11-26 here, just so that we get it in our heads, and then we'll go back to 4-10.

15:00

**<sup>11</sup> Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? <sup>12</sup> For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. <sup>13</sup> For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. <sup>14</sup> For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.**

**<sup>15</sup> This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, <sup>16</sup> who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. <sup>17</sup> For it is witnessed of him,**

**“You are a priest forever,  
after the order of Melchizedek.”**

**<sup>18</sup> For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness <sup>19</sup> (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. <sup>20</sup> And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, <sup>21</sup> but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him:**

**“The Lord has sworn  
and will not change his mind,  
‘You are a priest forever.’”**

**<sup>22</sup> This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.**

**<sup>23</sup> The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, <sup>24</sup> but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. <sup>25</sup> Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.**

**<sup>26</sup> For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. <sup>27</sup> He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. <sup>28</sup> For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.**

That’s the whole of chapter 7. Let’s go back to verses 4-10 and hit the first of our drill-down points. Hebrews 7:4-10, I’ll read it once more so we fix it in our minds.

**<sup>4</sup> See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! <sup>5</sup> And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. <sup>6</sup> But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. <sup>7</sup> It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. <sup>8</sup> In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. <sup>9</sup> One might even**

**say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham,<sup>10</sup> for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.**

So we have a couple of items to cover here. The first one isn't really transparent from verses 4-10, but is related to the content. And this question has come up in Q&A episodes before. That is the question, "Was Melchizedek Shem?" Shem, the son of Noah. Now, Lane, in his commentary, writes,

In the Targumic tradition Melchizedek is identified as Shem, Noah's son, and it is specified that he served God "at that time" (*Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 14:18*; see especially Carmona, *Est Bib 37* [1978] 79–102).

20:00 Targums were Aramaic translations of, in this case, the Old Testament. You also have New Testament Targums of the Greek New Testament. Typically, you find this in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, in Genesis 14:18, and some other sources. Targum Neofiti... you find it there too. So there are some fairly significant Targums (Aramaic translations of the Old Testament) that, when you hit Genesis 14:18, they throw in... Translators just throw in this idea that Melchizedek was Shem. But Targums (these specific ones that I mentioned) are dated anywhere from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. So they postdate the Old Testament by centuries. They are pretty loose translations, but they reflect some ideas that were around in the Jewish community—what we might think of as the rabbinic community. So in a couple of Targums, this idea leaks its way into the actual translation, even though in the Hebrew text of Genesis 14:18, there's nothing like this. There's no connection to Shem named in the Hebrew Bible, specifically.

Now, I've already said in Q&A and other contexts, I don't think Melchizedek was Shem. There's no biblical evidence for that, but nevertheless, you have it here in these sources. I want to quote about the date so that we give some weight to this. There's a whole series put out by a liturgical press on the Aramaic Targums. You can get English translations on the Aramaic Targums and then commentaries on those Targums in this multi-volume series of books. This is from Targum Neofiti in this series, *Aramaic Bible, Targum Neofiti 1* (that is, Genesis), translated by Martin McNamara, who's a very well-known Targumic scholar. And the editors are Cathcart, Maher, and McNamara himself. They write this about the Targum Neofiti, and some of this other stuff about Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, their dates. They write:

Neofiti (part of what scholars call the Palestinian Targums) - We have very strong evidence from rabbinic sources that written texts of the Targums of the Pentateuch (therefore Palestinian Targums) existed at least in the late third and early fourth centuries of our era, and there are indications that they were known there earlier still...

Opinions expressed on the date of Pseudo-Jonathan. range from the time of Ezra, or shortly after it, to the time of the Crusades. Although Ps.-J. certainly contains ancient traditions, many recent authors argue that this Targum received its final form after the Arab conquest of the Middle East. D. M. Splansky believes that Ps.-J. dates from the ninth or tenth century. His main arguments may be summarized as follows: The reference to Adisha and Fatima in Ps.-J. Gen 21:21 should not be seen as an insertion. The source of the midrash could not have originated before 633 C.E at the earliest. Ps.-J. makes use of *PRE* and both *Tanhumas*, a fact which points to the ninth or tenth century as the time of Ps.-J.'s compilation. The way in which Ps.-J. presents the midrash about Abraham's refusal to bless Ishmael in Gen 25:11 betrays an anti-Moslem polemic, and the reference to the blemish of Ishmael and the blemish of Esau in Ps.-J. Gen 35:22 can best be explained against the background of a world divided between Arabs and Christians. There are possible indications in other texts in Ps.-J. (e.g., Gen 16:12; 25:13; 49:26; Num 7:87) that they date from a time after the Arab conquest.

He starts talking about calendar and things like this. Basically, the point is that there's stuff in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan that contains the Shem tradition we're talking about that reflect a problem with Islam. [laughs] And if that's the case, then you're talking about 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> century and beyond—history when we've got a divided Middle East. This is why, primarily, when it comes to Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, scholars argue that this is pretty late material. It contains some older ideas that you can find in other texts, but this is late material. The Targums are centuries—at least a few centuries—after the Old Testament period.

Just because I think it's kind of interesting, I'm going to read you Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of Genesis. This is what you'd actually read in this Aramaic translation of Genesis 14:14-18. This is the Melchizedek passage. Now if you were following along in your Old Testament (English translation, and I'm going to quote the English translation of Cathcart, Mayer, and McNamara), you're going to see right away, there's stuff in there that I don't have in my Bible. And yeah, that's true. There is stuff in there you don't have in your Bible, because they frankly feel very free to add details. [laughs] This is not a text-critical issue, where, "oh, some Hebrew manuscripts have this extra stuff about Shem." There's actually no evidence for this stuff about Shem. They make it up, they add it. And we're going to talk about *why* they add it, why it made sense for them to do it. But when they created this translation, they just add materials. So here we go, Targums Pseudo-Jonathan of Genesis 14, beginning in verse 14 of that chapter:

14. When Abram heard that his brother had been captured, he armed his young men whom he had trained for war, (who had been) brought up in his house, but they did not wish to go with him. So he chose from among them Eliezer, son of Nimrod, who was equal in strength to all three hundred and eighteen of them; and he pursued (them) as far as Dan. 15. The night was divided for them on the

25:00

way; one part fought against the kings, and the other part was kept in reserve for the smiting of the first-born in Egypt. He arose, he and his servants, and smote them and pursued those of them that remained until he remembered the sin that was to be (committed) in Dan, which is north of Damascus. **16.** He brought back all the possessions; he also brought back Lot his kinsman and his possessions, as well as the women and (the rest of) the people. **17.** When he returned from defeating Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him at the leveled plain, which is the king's racecourse. **18.** The righteous king—that is Shem, the son of Noah—king of Jerusalem, went out to meet Abram, and brought him bread and wine; at that time he was ministering before God Most High.

Some of the details are impossible because they're far in the future. They're just making stuff up. The Targum doesn't even use the term Melchizedek. It uses "righteous king." Melchizedek can be translated, "My king is righteous." It says "the righteous king," and then it says point blank, "that is, Shem, the son of Noah, the king of Jerusalem, went out to meet Abraham." So it's a clear identification of Shem with Melchizedek in the Targums. You also have this in early patristic sources, early church fathers, a couple of them will have this kind of stuff in it, Ephrem is one of them where you'll find this.

Now, I'm going to post a couple of links on the episode page for this episode. There are two articles. If you're interested in the Shem subject, you can get these. These are publicly accessible articles. One is by Andrei Orlov, who interestingly enough is now David Burnett's advisor at Marquette. But he has an article—a long essay—on 2<sup>nd</sup> Enoch, which is also known as Slavonic Enoch. It's an Enochian book that was written in ancient Slavonic—that's the language it survives in. And that references this idea that Shem and Melchizedek were the same person. There's also an article from the *Biblica* journal about this, and I'm going to read a brief selection from it. The title is, "Melchizedek: Genesis 14:17-20 in the Targums in Rabbinic and Early Christian Literature." So you're going to have links to both of those. If you're interested in the subject, there you go. You'll have some good stuff to read. I think you'll be sufficiently entertained if you're in this Shem idea, which doesn't have biblical roots, but you see it in these sources.

Now, I'm going to go to that second article, which is by McNamara, and I'll read a few things. You say, "Why in the world did they make this connection?" And back in the Q&A's that we've had before, it's basically about chronology—how their lives overlapped. McNamara says on the 13<sup>th</sup> page of the pdf that you could get (page 13 of the article as well):

The biblical evidence is as follows: Abraham was a 100 years old at the birth of Isaac (Gen 21,5). Isaac was thus 75 years old when Abraham died. Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah (Gen 19,2) and was 60 years old at the birth of Esau and Jacob (Gen 25,25). Jacob was thus born fifteen years before the death

of Abraham, and consequently 50 years (15 + 35) before the death of Shem. Isaac died at the age of 180 years (Gen 35,28). Shem thus lived during 100 years of Isaac's 180, and during fifty years of Jacob's lifetime.

30:00

If lived during the lifetime of Isaac and Jacob, he also lived during the lifetime of Abraham, and so the argument is that he was alive and surely he must have been Melchizedek. That's basically how the argument goes. So people take the chronology and they assume an identification. It's actually that simple. Well, Shem's life overlapped with Abraham, and Abraham meets this Melchizedek guy, and whoa—Shem and Melchizedek must have been the same. And you say, "Well, that doesn't make any sense." I agree with you, I don't think it makes any sense at all, but that's what's behind it. So that idea, which was a tradition in some community somewhere within Judaism, leaks its way into Aramaic translations—Targums of Genesis 14. And then early Christian writers who are familiar with Jewish tradition, Jewish thinking, had interacted with Jews, they refer to the idea in their own writings as well. So you actually get these references in early Christian sources and in Targums about Melchizedek and Shem being the same guy.

Now, you say, "Well, that's kind of interesting. What's the harm? Is there anything here to really care about?" Well, yeah, there may be. McNamara on page 15 has a section on the origin of the identification of Melchizedek with Shem. He writes:

M. Simon [a scholar] thinks that it was due to the embarrassment felt by Jews in view of Abraham's paying homage to Melchizedek. If Melchizedek is identified with Shem, then Abraham was merely showing deference to an ancestor.

So some scholars just think, "Well, they came up with this idea because it's kind of embarrassing to Abraham. He's *Abraham*, good grief. He's awesome. He's our primary ancestor. It's embarrassing to have this guy bowing to, essentially, a Canaanite. So let's identify Melchizedek with Shem, and therefore Abraham is really only bowing to an ancestor. It's not so bad."

It is doubtful if there was any polemical tendentious intention, anti-Christian or otherwise, in the identification. The identification of Melchizedek with Shem, in any event, may well pre-date Christianity. Rabbi Ishmael takes the identification for granted, and the texts as found in Jewish or Christian sources do not indicate any embarrassment with it. The rabbinic, targumic and patristic texts (especially Jerome) would seem to indicate that the identification arose from chronological considerations on the biblical age attributed to Shem...

That's what we just mentioned. McNamara continues, and he observes (and I think this is kind of interesting) that when you get to rabbinical writings, there are certain rabbis that make a point of denigrating Melchizedek's priesthood, or demoting it, devaluing it. And that becomes really interesting because the rabbinic period as we think of it is in line with the events of the New Testament, and of course postdates—continues on after—the New Testament. So the suspicion among certain scholars is that the rabbinic writings (certain rabbis who wrote about Melchizedek, and even may or may not have accepted this Shem idea) make a point to take Melchizedek's priesthood down a few pegs. Scholars suspect that when they do that, they are shooting at Jesus because Jesus, to Christians, was identified with this priesthood. Let me just read a section from McNamara's article. He writes:

It has been noted above that in accepting the identification of Melchizedek with Shem R. Ishmael did not have any polemical point to make. The same cannot be said of his statement which follows immediately on this regarding Melchizedek's priesthood. This, he says, was taken away by God from Shem (=Melchizedek) and given to Abram. Shem (=Melchizedek) was a priest but his descendants were not. God transfers the priesthood of Shem (=Melchizedek) to Abraham and addresses Ps 110,1 to him:

**So the rabbis interpret Psalm 110 as being spoken to Abraham.**

God transfers the priesthood of Shem (=Melchizedek) to Abraham and addresses Ps 110,1 to him: "Sit on my right hand...", as he also does Ps 110,4: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek", which is interpreted as meaning "on account of what Melchizedek said."

**Again, the rabbis imagine that the speaker in this Psalm is speaking to Abraham, and this is why "you're a priest forever on account of what this Melchizedek guy did." That's how they read the passage. Now back to McNamara.**

The reason for the demotion of Melchizedek's priesthood is seen in Melchizedek having blessed Abram before he uttered his blessing to God Most High. As Petuchowski observes: there can be no doubt that R. Ishmael's reference to Melchizedek is polemical. But against whom is R. Ishmael's polemic directed?

**So the idea is that the rabbis based this demotion idea on the fact that Melchizedek blesses Abraham before the comment about blessing the Most High, and so God grows mad, and says, "OK, because you did that, I'm going to take your priesthood and give it to Abram. Shem/Melchizedek, you're not going to have any more priests after you. I'm going to transfer it to Abraham and then Psalm 110 preserves this transfer and so the priesthood goes over to Abraham."**

35:00

Well you see what that does. It's going to be a slam to Christians who are identifying Jesus with the priesthood of Melchizedek. Back to McNamara.

One possibility is that his target is the Christian understanding of Melchizedek's priesthood, particularly as presented in the Epistle to the Hebrews (especially Heb 7, with the use of Gen 14,17-20 and Ps 110,4). L. Ginzberg believed that it was very likely directed against the Christians, such as the author of Hebrews 7,1-3 and especially Justin [Martyr] (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 33 and 96) who took Melchizedek to be a type of Jesus.

So some scholars say we might have a Christian polemic going on here. "We want to distance the priesthood of Melchizedek from Jesus." This is very, very possible. There are other scholars who will go off in a different direction. I'm mentioning this again out of fairness, and also for those of you who might find this interesting.

Others do not consider such a conclusion necessary or warranted. The polemic may have originally been directed against a Jewish (or Samaritan) misuse of Ps 110,4, possibly Hasmoneans, such as Simon. In 1 Macc 14,35.41 we read: "The people saw Simon's faithfulness and the glory that he had resolved to win for his nation, and they made him their leader and high priest... The Jews and their high priests resolved that Simon should be their leader and *high priest forever*, until a trustworthy prophet should arise". Ps 110, in particular Ps 110,4, would present legitimization for the Hasmonean union of royalty and kingship in the one person of Simon and his successors.

If you know a little bit about intertestamental history, that was offensive to a lot of Jews (what the Hasmoneans did there), and so some scholars would say that some of the rabbinic talk later on (New Testament era, 1<sup>st</sup> century and forward) might have been aimed at the Hasmoneans. This is why they knocked Melchizedek's priesthood down a few notches, and they said these polemic things about it. So it's either the Christians or the Hasmonean dynasty. It could be one or the other. You probably had Jews that thought one thing or the other, and then scholars, of course, would think one thing or the other. But the important point is that, if you want to say that Shem and Melchizedek are the same, a) you don't have any specific biblical evidence to say that, and b) you ought to know what you're getting yourself into. [laughs] Because that whole idea was used by the rabbis to denigrate Jesus—his high priestly identification in the book of Hebrews. So know what you're getting into.

Now our second drill-down point is, I think, the more obvious of this. As we read Hebrews 7:4-10, you get to verses 9 and 10, I'll read them again:

**<sup>9</sup> One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham,<sup>10</sup> for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.**

There are *all* sorts of problems here. Basically, the question is, “How in the world was Levi, ‘in the loins of his ancestor, that is Abraham?’” Lots and lots of problems. Let’s start with the mainstream view of this passage. I’m going to telegraph it this way: the mainstream view tries really hard to avoid the most difficult question. It just does. The mainstream view argues that Levi wasn’t really in the loins of his ancestor. It says, “That language is meant to convey the idea of corporate solidarity between Abraham and his descendants.” Put another way, it wants to claim the superiority of Levi’s priesthood has a “basis in history” while denying that the tithe payment of Levi ever actually occurred in real time, because Levi, of course, hadn’t been born yet.

Now if you think I’m overstating this, here’s a sample from Lane’s commentary, Word Biblical Commentary. He writes this on page 170:

...the writer clearly recognized his statement that Levi had paid a tithe to Melchizedek was not literally true, because at the moment in primal history when Abraham met Melchizedek Levi was as yet unborn. Nevertheless, the statement that Levi had himself paid the tithe was true in an important sense, indicated by the expression δι’ Ἀβραάμ, “through Abraham,” which immediately follows. The corporate solidarity that bound Israel to the patriarch implied that Levi was fully represented in Abraham’s action. Therefore, Levi’s status relative to Melchizedek was affected by Abraham’s relationship to that personage. Consequently, the superiority of Melchizedek over the Levitical priesthood is not merely theoretical but has a basis in history.

40:00

“Basis in history.” In other words, Abraham’s existence (that would have to be the basis in history) makes Melchizedek’s priesthood superior to Levi’s because Levi was *imagined* to be in Abraham, when he wasn’t *really* there. But that’s ok, since Abraham existed. It doesn’t matter that the payment never occurred, because Levi wasn’t there. It was just presumed to work that way.

It might sound easy to poke fun at that, but let’s think about it a little bit. Does anything in the text actually support it? Some commentators suggest that one of the verb forms in Hebrews 7:9 makes the view that Levi wasn’t really there the correct view. Hebrews 7:9 says:

**<sup>9</sup> One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham...**

The verb translated “paid” is a Greek perfect passive. It’s δεδεκάτωται; *dedekatōtai* (perfect passive in negative third singular, for you Greek geeks out there). It’s a Greek perfect passive, and so the verse could be translated this way, “Levi himself, who received tithes, had tithes paid for him by Abraham.” Now that sounds like it nails down the representative idea. Hey, Levi doesn’t have to be there; Abraham paid tithes on his behalf, and so he doesn’t really have to have existed yet.

So the mainstream view is really based on this notion, and the notion in turn is based upon this Greek perfect passive verb form, that Levi had tithes paid for him. Perfect passive tense in Greek is an action in the past that has continuing and ensuing results. And passive means there’s an outside actor. So this is the basis for the mainstream view. Now, that sounds pretty good, but there’s a problem. It ignores the next verse. It ignores verse 10, which says:

<sup>10</sup> **for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.**

[laughs] So it sounds wonderful in verse 9, “Hey, there’s a grammatical argument to be made here for the mainstream view!” Yeah, well, let’s not look too closely at verse 10, because, that has Levi in the loins of his ancestor. That’s the problem. Now B.F. Westcott, who really deftly handles the passage in Hebrews 7:9, when he gets to verse 10, he basically says a lot of blather. He basically obfuscates. I’m going to use him as an example, because he does a really neat job of pointing out the perfect passive, but then he gets to verse, he writes this:

The repetition of the phrase, which occurs again in the N. T. only in Acts 2:30 [MSH: “set one from his loins on the throne”] emphasizes the idea of the real unity of Abraham’s race in the conditions of their earthly existence. By this teaching a mystery is indicated to us into which we can see but a little way, a final antithesis in our being; we feel at every turn that we are dependent on the past, and that the future will depend in a large degree upon ourselves. This is one aspect of life, and it is not overlooked in Scripture. At the same time it does not give a complete view of our position. On the one side our outward life is conditioned by our ancestry: on the other side we stand in virtue of our ‘spirit’ in immediate, personal connection with God (c. 12:9). Each man is at once an individual of a race and a new power in the evolution of the race.

That’s the quote. That’s the commentary on verse 10. It basically just says a lot of stuff elegantly, but it really doesn’t say anything. It doesn’t address the problem. So basically, the commentators who argue from the representational view (to use Guthrie’s words, that Abraham’s payment of tithes could be transferred to his descendant Levi) do so on the basis of verse 9, because of the perfect passive, and then they never deal with the quote, “still in the loins of his ancestor,” verse 10. That is the fundamental problem. Verse 10 is the fundamental problem.

So here's essentially the mainstream verdict: you presume that the language of verse 10 about still being in the loins of his ancestor doesn't deserve a whole lot of attention. It's just part of expressing the idea of verse 9, that Abraham represented his ancestor, or that Abraham's ancestor would have done the same thing that Abraham did if he had been there. That's where you have to go.

45:00

The question before us, therefore, is how to take Hebrews 7:10 seriously. If you don't go with the representational view, then it's just another way of saying what's in verse 9. If you don't do that (more or less deflect the attention away from verse 10), what do we do with it? And we get all sorts of problems here. Let's just start with a question. Did the writer of Hebrews and other original New Testament writers and readers—people living at this time—did they believe that Levi, the son of Jacob, existed as a pre-born person in the loins of his great-grandfather Abraham? Did they believe that? In other words, was Levi really there in Abraham's loins? That's the question. And that's the question that commentators nearly universally don't even think about, they don't even raise it. Because it's an edgy question, but it's a quite understandable question. Do they believe it or not? Instead, we get, "Ah, don't worry about verse 10—it's just part of expressing verse 9, that Abraham and Levi were identified."

I'm sorry, but for me, anyway, that's just really not satisfactory. Today we would say, with pretty secure scientific justification, that personal existence requires embodiment. We can't really perceive it any other way, if we're trying to think scientifically. That requires materiality, which materiality naturally comes from two genetic contributors—a man and a woman. You can't have human embodiment without that—normally, anyway. Now there are other ways, given cloning and synthetic biology. But just normally, you can't have a full human being with embodiment and with materiality any other way than by two genetic contributors, a man and a woman. Consequently, Hebrews 7:9-10 can quite easily be read as a quaint, completely unscientific idea, if the writers really believed Levi was there, and if we're evaluating on scientific terms.

So now we have another question that needs answering, one that some listeners might think is easily answerable, but it comes at something of a theological cost. Here's the question. If this passage suggests that the writer believed you could have an actual human person existing prior to birth... Think about that. If Levi really was there—if he really was in the loins of Abraham—that means he existed prior to birth, or prior to embodiment. Then how do we avoid the conclusion that, on one hand, this is patently unscientific... How do we avoid that conclusion without requiring the doctrine of pre-existence of the soul or contradicting other points of biblical theology? In other words, can we argue that the bible has a concept of person that doesn't involve embodiment? The short answer is, well, maybe, or "yeah, you can do that." But if you affirm that, it produces pre-mortal (that is pre-embodied) existence, what we typically think of today as pre-existence. We could also call it non-terrestrial embodied existence or some form

of that. This is what you're getting at. If you assent to this idea that Levi was actually physically there, then we've got a real problem, because then we've got a scientific error—we've got a scientific thing that just can't be. But if you say, well, maybe Levi was there without a body—maybe the Bible lets us have persons without bodies—then we can say Levi was there. But we don't have to get into this, "oh, you've got to have two genetic contributors, because that's biology." We're not dealing with biology here, we're just saying Levi was there in the soul—the immaterial essence of Levi was there, in Abraham. We have Levi as a person there without a body. Does scripture allow us to speak of persons without bodies? And if it does (if we answer that question "yes"), how do we avoid pre-existence of the soul? Because that has problems too, or at least that's the way that doctrine has been perceived.

Listeners might know that in the history of Christian theology, that position—pre-existence of the soul—has been declared a heresy for about, oh, I don't know, it's not 2,000, let's call it 1,500 years. [laughs] So again, there are reasons why Christian theologians don't want to go to pre-existence of the soul. They have problems with it, and we're going to talk about what those are, but that's sort of the rock and the hard place that we're at here.

50:00

Now, how might we argue this idea biblically and sort of get Hebrews 7:8-10 off the hook for being unscientific? We don't have to worry about biology. But it also needs to be workable some way that allows the writer to believe that Levi was really there. How do we do that? We're going to try to noodle the problem. Let's start by asking, "What's an actual human person in biblical thought?" I've blogged a lot about this—biblical anthropology. You can go to my website and look that up and you're going to get a whole series on what's personhood in the Bible. The Old Testament is pretty clear that in biblical theology, personhood is the combination of material body—whatever the form—and animate spirit. Material plus immaterial, that makes a whole person. So Adam—*adam*, humankind, if you want to take it that way—became a living being when animated by God's breath. Genesis 2:7:

**<sup>7</sup> then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.**

That description is euphemistic for the act of God in making humans animate beings. The language describes soul or immaterial part of the person, because each successive human doesn't need to have God breathe into him. So we can't say that this is how every soul—every person—comes into being. We don't have God somewhere breathing. God doesn't have lungs, for one thing, but you get the idea. We don't have each person born because God [exhales] breathes into them. We don't have that described in the Old Testament. We have it described with Adam, and then thereafter, humans reproduce. They're made to reproduce. The language is euphemistic for the fact that God made humans animate life. So

that's really what it means. The description isn't about each successive person needing to have God breathe into him like he did Adam.

The description also isn't about consciousness per se, because people who are asleep or in a coma can rightly still be said to be alive. The contents of the womb are alive before evidence of cognition is revealed or possible. It's still a living thing. A living entity whose DNA says "human" is by definition a living human, no matter how hard our culture wants to deny the obvious logic in that. I would also say that the language of Genesis 2:7 is not describing a special, immaterial part of humans, because the phrases "breath of life" and "living soul" are both used to describe animate animal life. "Breath of life" is used to describe animals in Genesis 1:30, Genesis 6:17, Genesis 7:15, 22—that was just a sampling. "Living soul" is a phrase, the *nephesh hayyah*, to describe animals. It's used to describe animals in Genesis 1:21, 2:19, 8:21, 9:10, so on and so forth. It's actually pretty common. Genesis 2:7 and other parts of Genesis are simply saying that human life is here because God made it. He made the flesh, and then he animated it. He made it in such a way that life would be able to reproduce, too. That's how we get humanity.

But the point is that you need two parts in Old Testament thinking—material and immaterial—to have a full human person. You certainly can't maintain that a corpse is a person. Although, the word for "person" or "self" (*nephesh*, which is often translated "soul") is actually used to describe a corpse or a body: Leviticus 21:1, 21:11, 22:4. The reason that happens is... it ought to be familiar to us. Anybody who's been at a funeral knows that we still think of the body in the coffin as the person we knew. The body takes on the person's identity in those kinds of contexts. But the body *only*—having only the flesh, only the corpse there—really isn't the person, and we know that. So you can't really say you have a person when you just have a corpse.

But can we say that we have a person without embodiment? That might help argue that Levi was inside the loins of his father, having nothing to do with biology, because it has nothing to do with embodiment. Example: I Samuel 28:13, where you have the disembodied Samuel appear and have a conversation with Saul. You have Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration. Now here's the question: do they have bodies? Well, they're visible as men, but does that mean that we have embodiment here? Or is that just a phantom visualization that is nevertheless really them? Is it just visual, or is it actual embodiment? Not quite the same thing.

Now, it seems to be the case (because we don't have any other way to argue it in context) that what we have in I Samuel 28:13, the Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah... We have just a visual representation that was truly those individuals, but we don't actually have embodiment. We just don't have that in the context. But that's muddled by the fact that the Bible has spirit beings who can assume actual corporeal embodiment, like angels. But perhaps that's an attribute or ability that

doesn't really apply to post-death human persons, like Samuel and Moses and Elijah. Maybe it's better to speak of personhood continuing on after death without a body. You see where I'm going here. Maybe—and this will sound odd to us because we must have embodiment for identity, at least in our human experience—maybe scriptural portrayals, like that of Moses and Elijah and the Transfiguration just tell us they're still persons and they're with the Lord. But Peter, James, and John were essentially shown a form that wasn't really embodied, but it was still them—it was still Moses and Elijah. But they were visualized.

That seems workable, from the scriptural data. You still have a person, you have a person without a body, but can we have the same idea—a human person without embodiment—before birth instead of after death? Because all these examples are after death. Can we have human personhood without embodiment before birth, before mortal life on Earth? If that can be established, then we have a workable solution for Hebrews 7:10. At least in theory, Levi could've really been there, if we divorce the language from biology and from any embodiment at all.

What would be better is the notion of pre-existence apart from any embodiment. That's what we're angling for here. Now I'm sure many listeners know that the idea of pre-existence like this is very controversial. I think the idea is on the table (you see why), but as noted before, 98-99% of Christian theologians (evangelical or otherwise) would call the whole idea aberrant or even label it heretical, as though they're supposing everybody in the Early Church agreed on the matter, which they didn't. I've mentioned the book by Gibbons, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-mortal existence in Western Thought*. It's quite good. If we have time, I'm going to read you a little bit from it about Augustine, because the point needs to be made that, yeah, just about everybody you talk to would say that's heresy. But guess what? Augustine didn't reject the idea. It's commonly thought that he did, but he only rejected a certain form of it. There were lots of people in the Early Church that took this seriously, like this was on the table and it was a possibility as an explanation for the origin of the soul—pre-existence, pre-mortal existence. Real persons without bodies.

Now, just because people fear the idea, presuming it's heresy, they might say, "Oh, Mike, this is just a silly rabbit trail. The language is just about corporate solidarity or ancestral solidarity. It makes no actual claim to personal existence before birth. Don't worry about Hebrews 7:10." Well, none of that's news to me, but that isn't the question that needs attention. There's certainly solidarity being struck in Hebrews 7:9-10, but the real question is, what's the basis for it? The basis is Levi paying tithes "while still being in the loins of his ancestor." It's something we need to think about.

Take another little sidestep here and think about another angle. If the writer wasn't saying Levi was really there in the loins of Abraham and so Levi didn't really pay tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham, because he didn't actually

exist yet (that's Lane's view, we read it)... If the writer's saying, "Levi wasn't really there. He didn't really pay tithes, because he didn't exist yet," is Levi's priesthood really inferior to Melchizedek's? If Levi was never actually there in any way, how does the claim stand?

Now I can't help thinking that commentators ought not to presume that people in the first century or earlier would have thought the way we do as moderns. Would ancient people really have rejected the idea that Levi was actually there in the loins of Abraham in some way that didn't require embodiment of any kind? Personally, I'd like some evidence that the writer of Hebrews would never have had that thought. I'd like some evidence for that, rather than just us assuming it, rather than just commentators assuming it. I think that's especially needed because we actually have evidence to the contrary. From both the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism, you can actually find things written about this notion of non-terrestrial, pre-mortal, pre-existence. I'll cite one biblical example. This isn't the only one, but I'll give you this one. Just think about the passage. It's not going to nail anything down, because you can look at it a different way—I'll get to that—but think about this passage. This is the call of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:4-5. It should be familiar to a lot of listeners.

**<sup>4</sup> Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying,  
<sup>5</sup> "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
and before you were born I consecrated you;  
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."**

Now reading this passage as pointing to pre-existence is possible. It is possible to read that and think that what we're reading there is that Jeremiah existed before he got in the womb. "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you." How can God know a person who's not a person, who doesn't exist? You can look at it that way and ask those questions, and say, "Jeremiah 1:4-5... I can see how that would teach pre-existence, without embodiment." But the language can also be read as indicating just a generic statement about God's omniscience. Well, God knows everything. God knows everything ahead of time. That's all it means. And I have to be fair. Yeah, you can read it that way, too. But there are some who read this passage and other passages as pointing to pre-existence that didn't require a body.

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Let me ask this question: Why is it not read as pre-existence? What are we afraid of? Do we not read it as pre-existence because some Early Church thinkers just didn't like it? Honestly, for a lot of people, yeah, that's why we don't read it as pre-existence. Because we just don't want to go there. Honestly, that's not an acceptable answer in and of itself. Most of scholarship on pre-existence sidesteps this question. It talks about Christ's pre-existence—that's a good topic—it's important. But a lot of sources really sidestep this. There are some exceptions. If you are a subscriber to my newsletter... Just go to [drms.com](http://drms.com),

right hand column, click on the link to the newsletter and subscribe. At the bottom of every newsletter issue, there is a link to an archive of podcast articles that you can get to for free. I'm going to put a 1966 dissertation in that folder. The title of the dissertation by Robert Gerald Hamerton-Kelly is "The Idea of Pre-existence in Early Judaism: A Study of the Background of New Testament Theology." Now a lot of it is going to be talking about Jesus and pre-existence, but there are parts of that dissertation that get into the notion in Judaism and draw on some Old Testament passages about persons pre-existing—about objects pre-existing, like the Torah. There was this pre-existence category for things in Judaism.

Now why don't Christian theologians take pre-existence seriously today? They can read this stuff. This isn't like secret knowledge here. You can go get this stuff and find it. Why don't we do that? I've already answered the question. Basically, because of Church tradition. Why didn't some Early Church thinkers and theologians not embrace pre-existence? Why did they reject it? The real answer to this is because of the flawed thinking about Romans 5:12. I'm not going to drift into Romans 5:12 here. If you go up to my website ([www.drms.com](http://www.drms.com)) and put in Romans 5:12, you're going to get lots of material. Most Christian traditions teach that Romans 5:12... I'll read the verse to you in the ESV:

**<sup>12</sup>Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...**

Other translations will say "so that all sinned." Most Christian traditions say that that verse teaches inherited guilt. *Inherited guilt*. Adam sinned, and the rest of humanity... Either he represented them all (in other words, God makes us all guilty for what somebody else did) or we were "in Adam." We were put there, we were created there to be... We were there pre-existing in Adam, or "somehow existing" is probably a better way for me to say it because people don't want to go to pre-existence. And we inherit his guilt, because we somehow sinned with him. Because of that—because this idea is drawn from Romans 5:12... And I hope you notice that the verse never actually says that. It says what is inherited by Adam, because of Adam's sin, is *death*. It doesn't say "sin." It doesn't say "guilt." Romans 5:12 really drives this bus. And because people thought this in the Early Church about Romans 5:12 (that we have inherited guilt), they had to balance things like our relationship to Adam and where the soul comes from (because it's the soul that's sinful), and how sinfulness is passed on or transmitted. And what about predestination; what about free will? They had to struggle with all of these topics. If guilt is part of the way this gets discussed, it gets kind of freaky to have pre-existence. Why? Well, if souls pre-exist their birth (their entrance into mortal life), how do they become sinful? Do they get plopped in there? Does God say, "Hey you, Soul #14, that's the body I'm assigning you. You go in there and then somehow, through flesh, you're going to absorb or inherit guilt, because now you're in flesh." Like how does flesh produce a bad quality, a bad attribute of the soul, when the soul that pre-existed didn't have it?

“Well, that was nice of you, God. You sent me to the body and now I’m condemned.” How is God good? What did that soul do at all? He wasn’t even in Adam from the beginning in that reconstruction. There’s lots of different ways to parse this.

1:05:00

Just to give you an illustration of one reason it can be problematic... In the Early Church, you have the same idea for the origin of the soul called creationism, where traducianism said that the soul was created by the human parents. Then, of course, the conundrum there is, how can biology create an immaterial thing? How can the material create something that’s immaterial? That’s kind of weird. Creationism had the problem of, okay, God just creates the soul on the spot. We don’t have pre-existence, so he creates each soul on the spot—puts them in there. But then God has to create them guilty, because you can’t really inherit guilt from biology... You had all these problems floating around, and the discussion was steered by a certain understanding of Romans 5:12. This book—*When Souls Had Wings*—I’m not going to take the time to read from it. I’ll have to think about it. I could probably photocopy a couple pages and put them up. But I want people who are listening to this podcast to realize that... I use Augustine in the pages I was going to read, but we’re getting pretty long here. Augustine was such an important figure, a central figure. I want people to see that even in the course of his writings, he puts all of the views of the origin of the soul on the table and says, “You know what? We just can’t really know, and they’re all worth discussing.”

Now, he objected to Origen’s particular take, or he didn’t want to sound too much like Origen, because Origen had other doctrinal problems and he eventually gets anathematized. So Augustine’s problem is that he has to steer clear of Origen, but he sees the weaknesses of the other views. And so what he eventually actually decides (and we have to throw Pelagianism in here—the whole controversy over free will)... Augustine wanted guilt to be inherited. He wanted predestination. He didn’t like the whole free will take—too much free will. So where Augustine actually lands is, he lands with a traducian view, despite its problems, because that view allows him the most latitude to argue for predestination and human transference of guilt. He never actually comes out (and I’ll put the pages on the website) and says pre-existence is an unworkable, terrible, heretical idea. He doesn’t do it. But yet his opinion veering away from that (and the opinion of others) has been construed as taking pre-existence completely off the table. As I’ve said before on the podcast, I think it should be on the table.

I’m not going to pretend that we have all the answers here. But by way of wrapping this up, I want people who listen to the podcast to learn this. The issue should always be, what can the text sustain? The issue shouldn’t be, what did Augustine say? What did Calvin say? What did Luther say? And those guys say lots of good things. Sometimes I think they say lots of kind of bad things, or truly

bad things. But that isn't the question. The question should be, *what does the text sustain?*

So to wrap up here, what about Levi being really there in the loins of his father? I think that is a possibility. I don't see any evidence, and haven't been shown any evidence, that biblical writers would have dismissed the idea out of hand. And I think that's because you have these instances where (if I can say it this way) embodiment, well we don't quite need it to still be talking about persons. The clear examples are post-death, and we have to ask ourselves, can we use the post-death examples to talk about pre-birth? And that's when you get into passages like Jeremiah 1. You get into pre-existence passages. The text could be read that way, and if we want to go that direction, that might help us deal with Hebrews 7:10.

That's my point today. The text *could* allow this. We should not dismiss it because we just don't think that way. I'm not dismissing the idea of corporate solidarity between Abraham and Levi. That's certainly true. That's not the question. The question is, what is the basis for it? And what do we do with the language of verse 10? I'm suggesting we shouldn't just fold the language of verse 10 into verse 9 and just say, "Let's not worry about the details of verse 10." I just don't think that's an honest way to proceed, and I don't think it can be demonstrated that the biblical writers would not have thought that Levi was actually there somehow.

1:10:00

So for me, I don't take Romans 5:12 the way most people do. I don't have a problem with pre-existence per se. I can't say that scripture *teaches* the idea with certainty. It might teach it. If it did, that could account for the language of Hebrews 7:10. We could argue Hebrews 7:10 is sort of like Jeremiah 1. It reveals something God knew. It revealed about someone existing but not yet born. That reflects a verdict that has its basis in that knowledge: that Levi's priesthood is inferior to Christ's and Melchizedek's, and in the real existence of Levi prior to birth. In other words, it takes Hebrews 7:10 seriously. The solidarity between Abraham and Levi is based on a metaphysical truth that could be attached to events on Earth. That's what I'm saying.

Now if we don't take that view, we're either left with the consensus view that God more or less transferred Abraham's payment to Levi, and Hebrews 7:10 doesn't have a real-time meaning in any historical sense. It's just figurative language, or something like that. It's not historically or metaphysically true. The language is just meant only to convey the principle of solidarity. So you either take that view or you take the one I just articulated a minute or so ago instead of it. But the question should always be, what can the text sustain? How do we think about the text in its own context, and what can it sustain in terms of interpretation?

**TS:** Alright, Mike, that was a little bit more than referring back to our old podcast, so, better than expected. [laughter]

Over the next week or two, we'll be releasing our conference podcasts. I'll try to get those out as we do them. But the next week and the week after that will be filled with conference interviews, and hopefully our live Q&A, so be looking for that and then we'll pick up Hebrews after that. And with that, Mike, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.