

## Jesus Our Heavenly Priest

### Hebrews 7:11-28

#### Introduction

The writer of Hebrews has introduced us to the mysterious figure known as Melchizedek. It is in the context of the superior nature of Jesus Christ as our High Priest in Heaven. We know very little about the King Priest Melchizedek other than what is revealed in the Scriptures. Two short passages in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 and here in the book of Hebrews. Some have suggested that Melchizedek was an Old Testament Christophany—a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. Others a supernatural messenger or perhaps Shem—the son of Noah. What we do know about the man is the meaning of his name; the king of righteous and the king of peace (7:2). We know that Melchizedek’s ancestry is a mystery—mentions of his father or mother or birth or death are omitted by the Scripture. Why does the writer of Hebrews spend so much time on this figure? Because the writer of Hebrews wants to convince his reader of the eternal priesthood of Christ. The writer of Hebrews has already given the historical argument by drawing attention to this figure’s relationship to Abraham (7:1-10). Melchizedek is superior to Aaron and the Levitical priesthood because Abraham paid the priest-king tithes; and the priest-king blessed Abraham—not the other way around. “The lesser is blessed by the better” (v.7). In the earthly ministry of the tabernacle and the temple the priests received tithes—but in Genesis 14 the priests symbolically gave tithes through Abraham to Melchizedek. All of these examples were meant to convince us of the inferiority of the Aaronic priesthood and the superiority of the eternal priesthood of Christ Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews will now move to further arguments for the superiority of Christ. His main text is taken from Psalm 110:4; “Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”. His argument is that the Psalmist anticipated the future setting aside of the priesthood of Aaron and the priests in the Temple. It is impossible for two divine priesthoods to operate side by side. The fact that God allowed—and established a new order proves the old order was weak and ineffective; but wait there is more! If the priesthood established by the Law and Moses was set aside—it also meant that the Law—was also set aside. “The Law made nothing perfect” (v.11). The sacrifices offered by these priests made nothing perfect (see chapter 10:1). Remember the word perfect does not mean *without sin—but rather having a perfect standing before God (see Wiersbe p. 695)*.

Aaron was a made a priest but not forever. This is evidenced by his death. Jesus was a made a priest forever by God. This is evidenced by the power of an endless life (v.16). Did God acknowledge Aaron and his sons in the elaborate ceremonies of Exodus chapters 28-30? Yes. But the Lord never swore an eternal priesthood for them. God knew that one day their work would come to an end. But when God ordained Christ—to be a priest—he confirmed it with an unchanging oath.

What is the writer of Hebrews trying to say? The priesthood of Jesus is infinitely superior to the priesthood of Aaron. Grace is superior to Law. Jesus is better than the types and shadows that prefigured Him. The substance of Jesus is better than the symbols given in the past. The blood of Jesus is infinitely superior to the blood of bulls and goats.

#### **The Priesthood Of Jesus Separate From The Law (vv.11-12)**

*Hebrews 7:11 (NKJV) 11Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron?*

Think about what the writer is saying.

If acceptance by God could be had through the Law and the Priesthood of Aaron could be had—why does the writer of Genesis and the Psalms bring up the person of Melchizedek?

The priesthood of Jesus has set aside the priesthood of Aaron.

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What about the person who is still toying with the idea that God will accept the Jew apart from Christ and the Gospel? What about the person who wants to return to the familiar and comfortable rules and rituals and ceremonies of Judaism?

The writer knows there were people who thought precisely that—God has a plan for the Jews and God has a plan for the Gentiles! But perfection (being right before God) could not come through Aaron's priesthood! Wait a minute—the priests and their offerings did not make perfect those who offered them? No—they only pointed to a perfect priest and a perfect offering!

If Aaron's offering and his son's offering were perfect; why would the writer of Psalms by the Holy Spirit declare a future eternal priest?

The Jewish system of sacrifice never offered a permanent solution to sin; could never provide permanent freedom from guilt in the conscience (see vv.18-19; and again chapter 9:13-14).

Are there two ways to be saved? Ritual performance or the sacrifice of Jesus Christ? The answer is no!

*Hebrews 7:12–28 (NKJV) 12For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.*

Did Aaron's priesthood serve the law? The answer is yes. The Law established Aaron's priesthood, regulated Aaron's priesthood—but the Law made no provision for a priesthood outside the tribe of Levi.

The priesthood of Jesus must be separate from the Law and separate from the tribe of Levi.

### **The Priesthood Of Jesus Is Separate From The Levitical Tribe (vv.13-15)**

*13For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar.*

*14For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.*

The Law of Moses never authorized anyone from the tribe of Judah to be a priest. Yet Jesus is a Priest! How can that be? Because the Law has been changed (fulfilled—see Matthew 5:17-20).

*15And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest*

### **The Priesthood Of Jesus Is Everlasting (vv.16-17)**

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*16who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life.*

What evidence do you have that there has been a change in the Law? Because the Psalmist by the Holy Spirit points to another Priest. A Priest who is like Melchizedek. What makes Jesus qualified? Who gave this authority? It is very different from Aaron's sons. The Levitical priests were given authority by bodily descent by birth in the right family. The family of Aaron, the tribe of Levi. But what qualifies Jesus? He has an endless life—It is not a question of pedigree—but of personal power and authority! Jesus lives forever.

*17For He testifies: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek."*

The writer of Hebrews could be accused of making that up—but no—he says—and he cites the Scripture—Psalm 110:4; where David points forward to the Messiah's Priesthood—The Messiah is a priest forever—and the emphasis is on the word forever! His ministry will never cease because His life never ceases!

*18For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness,*

The Law which authorized and instituted the priests functions and duties—has been *annulled*. *Made void—substituted for a new law—a better law. How was it cancelled? By Christ. By the life and death and resurrection of Jesus.*

In what way was the former commandment “weak” and “unprofitable”? Wasn't this Law given by God Himself—by the finger of God—why would God do such a thing? **The answer must be—God never intended the law to be permanent but temporary—it was never meant to be a permanent priesthood. It was a preparation—for a permanent priesthood—the partial and the temporary would give way to the perfect and the final.**

Was the ritual a way of salvation? What was the true significance of the priesthood? What was the true significance of the sacrifices?

*19for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.*

In what other way—was the Law—weak and unprofitable? It never saved anyone. It never gave anyone a right standing with God! The Law did not make it possible for people to enter into the Presence of God. The Law revealed the problem of Sin and the enforcement of the trespass. The Law was a constant reminder that the sin problem must be dealt with. The sin problem must be answered—once and for all.

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The law made nothing perfect (accepted by God).

Look at the phrase “a better hope” “through which we draw near to God”.

The better hope is a guaranteed hope (vv.20-21). We are saved by the gospel through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian has hope and access to God!

Remember that word *better* (*kreiton*). The writer has told us Jesus has a better name than the angels (1:1-2:18). Jesus is better than the prophets, better than the angels, better than Moses and Joshua. Jesus has a better message; a better rest; His is a better ministry; in a better sanctuary and he provides a better sacrifice. Now wonder we have a better hope!

We do not simply come to Jesus for salvation! We come to Jesus for service. Coming to Jesus makes one a believer—but coming to Jesus in service makes one a disciple! Salvation comes to us when we believe and accept Christ; discipleship only comes by self-surrender, self-sacrifice. Salvation is free—but discipleship costs—it is the cost of paying the price for a separated walk. Salvation—cannot be lost—because it depends on God’s faithfulness. Discipleship can be lost—because it depends on our faithfulness. Preaching results in believers. Teaching encourages saints to be disciples.

### **The Priesthood Of Jesus Is Guaranteed (vv.20-22)**

*20And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath*

*21(for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: “The Lord has sworn And will not relent, ‘You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek’ ” ),*

*22by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.*

Jesus is the guarantee of a better covenant.

We are all familiar with the concept of a guarantee.

We also know that a guarantee is only as good as the person or authority who makes the guarantee.

The Hebrew word for covenant (*berith*) Greek (*diatheke*); the word means a promise or a covenant between God and man. A covenant may be conditional or unconditional. There are at least eight covenants mentioned in the Bible; the covenant with Adam before the fall and after the fall; the covenant with Noah—that the earth would never again be completely destroyed by water; that would seasons would continue; the covenant with Abraham, and Moses, and David. There is a covenant with the Church and a new covenant with Israel (Jer. 31:31; Isa. 42:6); that God would eventually bring back Israel to himself; that he would forgive their iniquity and forget

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their sin. That God would use the Jews to reach and teach the Gentiles and that God would establish the Jews in the land forever.

The priesthood of Jesus is guaranteed by God's oath! This is the first mention of the New Covenant by our writer—and he calls it “a better covenant”. Jesus is the “surety” or down-payment or guarantor. Salvation is not something we look forward to—but something we look back on—in Christ. The Old Covenant looked forward. The New Covenant looks back. The Old Covenant looked forward to a future possession—the New Covenant looks back on a present possession.

In the Baker Bible Commentary the author puts it this way; “One does not require a guarantor for what one already has (6:17-20). The new covenant, the rest of God, the promise, even salvation itself are presented in Hebrews as different aspects of the future consummation and the fulfillment of the world to come” (see p. 1139).

What exactly is this New and Better Covenant? The writer of Hebrews connects the role of Jesus as High Priest with this New Covenant! William MacDonald suggests the New Covenant stands or falls on the ability of Jesus to make good His promises.

“The New Covenant is an unconditional agreement of grace which God will make with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah when the Lord Jesus sets up His kingdom on the earth (Jer. 31:33,34). Believers today enjoy some of the blessings of the New Covenant but its complete fulfillment will not be realized until Israel is restored and redeemed nationally” (p. 2180).

In what way is Jesus our Guarantee? His death, His burial, His resurrection—has provided the righteous basis on which God can fulfill the terms of the Covenant. In His perpetual priesthood He is able to keep His unbreakable promises.

### **The Priesthood of Jesus Is Perpetual (vv.23-28)**

*23 Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing.*

The writer of Hebrews began with an historical argument (vv.1-10); continued with a doctrinal or theological argument (vv.11-25); but now will conclude with a practical argument—as it relates to Christ and the believer (vv.26-28).

*24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.*

The Lord Jesus does not need to be replaced by a new generation of priests.

Jesus has an unchangeable priesthood. His intercession: unchanging. His sacrifice: unchanging. His access to God: unchanging.

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*25Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*

Robert Murray M'Cheyne said, "If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet distance makes no difference. He is praying for me."

And He is praying for you.

Spurgeon would often say; "I have a great need for Christ. I have a great Christ for my need."

*26For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;*

What does the writer mean by "was fitting for us"? That it means it suits us—it meets our needs. No priest of Aaron—no son of Aaron—could fit us—or match Jesus! In the Old Testament were the Sons of Aaron "holy" harmless undefiled separate from sinners? No—Aaron himself build a golden calf and invited the children of Israel to engage in idolatry. The sons of Eli were gluttons, and immoral (1 Sam.2:12). We have a perfect High Priest.

The Lord Jesus' ministry is permanent, perpetual, perfect. Jesus is the eternal Holy Son of God. The Levitical priests—all—without exception—had to offer sacrifices for themselves! Jesus will sacrifice Himself. Jesus is the perfect and obedient man (vv.17-18).

Jesus is a substitute for everything. But nothing can serve as a substitute for Christ!

If Jesus is not your Priest—you have no priest.

*27who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.*

*28For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.*

Why was Aaron's priesthood imperfect? Because Aaron was a sinner. Sinners require sacrifice. The priesthood under the law was temporary and incomplete. The priest's die and can never completely fulfill their work. The work required succession. The true priest must be a true king. The kings of Judah could not be priests and the priests of Levi could not be kings. But in Christ both offices are combined—eternally joined—forever united.

## **Conclusion**

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Why would anyone trade diamonds for clay? Why would anyone give up what is everlasting for what is temporary? Why give up a sure thing—something guaranteed for something not guaranteed? The priesthood of Jesus is independent of the law (vv.11-15); sufficient (vv.18-19; 25,27,) perpetual (v.23); permanent (v.24); holy (v.26)\_ flawless (v.28).

Jesus is the only source of salvation (5:9).

Go to Him. Pray to Him. Believe in Him. Serve Him.

Why in the world would anyone look back with fondness or longing to an old religion when we have something so much better in Christ? Why Christian aren't you satisfied in Christ? Why long for an old life, why cling to an old religion or the Law of Moses?