

Hebrews 7
April 17, 2016

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Suppose, hypothetically, our pastor stepped down, and all of us in this class have been invited to serve on the pastor search committee to replace him. What would you guess would be one of the main things you would process as a committee? [What qualities are we looking for?]

Q: So what qualities would we look for in a pastor? [Record on DEB: Strong knowledge of the Word of God; engaging communicator; someone who has vision and can lead us accordingly; an equipper of the saints; people-person; loves the Lord; etc.]

Transition: Now let's go back in time and pretend we are Jews who were led by priests instead of pastors. We have been asked to serve on the Priest Search Committee.

Q: What qualities would we seek in a priest? [Record on DEB: Someone who could cleanse me of my sin; compassionate; one who wants to help me restore my relationship to God; trustworthy; a man who has a heart after God; one who listens to what God tells him]

Q: After looking at our two lists of qualities we're looking for in a pastor or priest, what jumps out at you as a key difference between a pastor vs a priest? [a pastor can't cleanse of our sin, only a priest]

I, like many of you, have no exposure to being under the leadership of a priest. I didn't grow up Catholic, and what I know about priests is only what I hear from others who have had this experience, which is very little. Having been raised in a Christian home, I learned that because what Christ did for me on the cross, I now have "direct access" to God. ***I don't need a priest*** as we think of one today. In other words, I don't need to find a man with the title of priest, confess my sins to him, in order to gain access to God.

But something happened when I was putting this lesson together. It was an "aha" moment for me. The idea of "not needing a priest" is misguided. ***We all need a priest!*** We all need a priest who can cleanse us of our sin, be our advocate before the Father, be our mediator as we pray and seek Him, be compassionate and understanding of our shortcomings, etc.

Transition: In the next four chapters of Hebrews, the writer introduces us to the superior priesthood of Christ. As we study Chapter 7, remember that the Jewish nation was accustomed to the priesthood of the tribe of Levi. This tribe was chosen by God to serve in the tabernacle (Ex. 29; Num. 18). Aaron was the first high priest of many to follow, who were all appointed by God. In spite of their many failures, the priests had served God for centuries; but now the writer has affirmed that their priesthood has ended – because there's a better one through the order of Melchizedek! "Who?" you might ask?! Stay tuned. In the meantime, here's what I hope you'll get out of today's lesson:

I believe all of us CAN strengthen our understanding of why Christ's priesthood is superior *in its order* BY understanding the REASONS why Melchizedek's order is superior to *the order of Levi*.

Background: Melchizedek's name appears twice in the OT. First in Genesis 14:17–24; and then he was referred to once more in Psalm 110:4. Because we have limited information on Melchizedek, the most important things we need to know about him can be found in those two passages, or what the author has summarized for us in the chapter we're getting ready to read.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Heb 7:1-10]

V.1:

- This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him,

V.2:

- and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.”

V.3:

- Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.

V.4:

- Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder!

V.5:

- Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, their brothers—even though their brothers are descended from Abraham.

V.6:

- This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.

V.7:

- And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater.

V.8:

- In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living.

V.9:

- One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham,

V.10:

- because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.1: What are two roles that Melchizedek held? [*He was both king and priest*] This is unique because in the OT, the throne and the altar were separated. Melchizedek held *both* offices.

Q: Did Aaron ever get to be both a king and priest? [No – so we already see that Melchizedek is in a priestly order that was more superior than Aaron/Levites]

Observation v.2: Unless you have some good footnotes, you can't appreciate what Melchizedek's name means. Does anyone have a study note? [Melchizedek means "King of Righteousness"]

Q v.2: What does the word Salem mean? [Peace – so Melchizedek being the king of Salem meant that he was "the king of peace" as well as the "king of righteousness"]

Some of you may think that these names are "interesting," but names and their meanings are important.

Q: When your children were born, how many of you spent much time giving consideration as to what your child's name meant or represented or honored? [I bet all of you!]

So the meaning of Melchizedek and Salem was a big deal because "righteousness" and "peace" are often found together in Scripture:

- "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever" (Isa. 32:17)
- "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps. 85:10).
- "In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth" (Ps. 72:7).
- "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable ... And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (James 3:17–18).

Note: Peace can be experienced only on the basis of righteousness. If we want to enjoy "peace with God" we must be "justified [declared righteous] by faith" (Rom. 5:1).

Q v.3: What qualities does Melchizedek have? [Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.]

Explain v.3: Melchizedek was a man (see Heb. 7:4), so he had to have had a mother and a father. But there is no *record* of his genealogy ("descent") in the Old Testament; and this is significant because most great persons in the Old Testament have their ancestry identified. ***It was especially important that the priests be able to prove their ancestry*** (see Ezra 2:61–63; Neh. 7:63–65).

He was a real man, a real king, and a real priest in a real city. But *as far as the record is concerned*, he was not born, nor did he die. No one knew his DOB or date of death. In this way, he is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. Though Jesus Christ did die, Calvary was not the end; for He arose from the dead and today lives in "the power of an endless life" (Heb. 7:16). Since there is no account of Melchizedek's death, as far as the record is concerned, it seems that Melchizedek is still serving as a priest and king. This is another way in which he is like the eternal Son of God.

The application is clear: neither Aaron nor any of his descendants could claim to be "without genealogy" (Heb. 7:3, NASB). They could not claim to have an endless ministry. Nor could they claim to be both kings and priests, like Jesus Christ.

Q 4-10: After Abraham defeated some kings in his region, he gave Melchizedek a tithe. Does anyone know why that is significant? [Jews were commanded to give God one tenth of their crops, herds, and flocks (Lev. 27:30–32). These tithes were brought to the Levites (Num. 18:21ff) at the tabernacle and later at the temple]

Conclusion: The greatness of Melchizedek is seen in the fact that Abraham gave him tithes from the loot of a few mini-wars. Abraham acknowledged the authority of Melchizedek. Furthermore, Melchizedek blessed Abraham in a special way; and “the less is blessed of the better” (Heb. 7:7). In giving Melchizedek tithes and in receiving his blessing, Abraham affirmed the greatness of this king-priest.]

Transition: Now that we have the historical background on Melchizedek, let’s look at the REASONS as to why Christ’s priesthood from the order of Melchizedek is superior to the order of Levi.

[Read Heb 7:11-25]

V.11:

- If perfection (“completed or fulfilled”) could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come—one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?

V.12:

- For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law.

V.13:

- He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar.

V.14:

- For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

V.15:

- And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears,

V.16:

- one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life.

V.17:

- For it is declared: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

V.18:

- The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless

V.19:

- (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

V.20:

- And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath,

V.21:

- but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever.’ ”

V.22:

- Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

V.23:

- Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office;

V.24:

- but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.

V.25:

- Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.11: The author raises a great question that highlights the shortcoming of the order of the Levites. What was it? [Perfection couldn't be attained through the Levitical order]

Q v.11: The reason that *the Levitical priesthood and the Law was “imperfect”* was because the OT priests could not by their ministry complete the work of God in the heart of a worshiper. That's why v.19 says, “For the Law made nothing perfect.”

Q v.12-14: What in the world does it mean “For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law?” [The Law of Moses made no provision for a priesthood from the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14). Since our High Priest, Jesus, *is* from the tribe of Judah, according to His human ancestry, then there must have been a change in Moses' Law. There has been! The entire system of Old Testament Law has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and has been taken out of the way (Col. 2:13–14). The believer has been set free from the Law (Gal. 5:1–6) and is dead to the Law (Rom. 7:1–4).]

Q v.15-19: Who came along who was like Melchizedek? [Jesus]

Q v.16: On what “basis” did the Lord become a “priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek?” [The power of His indestructible life! He is our priest for eternity and will never be replaced!]

Q: So let's not lose sight of these Hebrew Christians who are tempted to back to the old temple system. Why is this writer working so hard to present Jesus as their priest compared to others they've known in their past? [He wants to remind them that Christ has accomplished what the Law could NEVER accomplish: He brought in a better hope, and He enables us to draw near to God. To go back to Judaism would mean losing the enjoyment of their fellowship with God through Christ. The only hope Judaism had was the coming of Christ, and these believers already had blessing!]

Q v.20-22: The writer highlights yet another difference between Jesus becoming a priest forever and the Levitical priests. What was it? [Jesus came with God's personal oath!]

Q v.22: How did God's personal oath enhance Jesus's priesthood? [Jesus became the guarantee of a better covenant. Our risen, eternal Savior guarantees that the terms of God's covenant will be fulfilled completely. God will not abandon His people.]

Reinforce Proposition: I suggested that all of us CAN strengthen our understanding of why Christ's priesthood is superior *in its order* BY understanding the REASONS why Melchizedek's order is superior to *the order of Levi*.

So far, the writer has given three reasons why God changed the order of the priesthood from that of Aaron to that of Melchizedek: (1) the priesthood and the Law were imperfect; (2) being imperfect, they could not continue forever; (3) God had sworn by His oath that the new order would be established. Now the author will close this section with a fourth reason.

Q v.23-25: What is one more reason that Christ's priesthood is superior to the priests of the Levi tribe? [Christ's priesthood is permanent because He lives forever, while the Levite priests were just men who eventually died.]

Q v.25: What does having a permanent priesthood allow Jesus to accomplish in our lives? [He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them]

Q v.25: What does He "always live for" on our behalf? [He always lives to intercede for us! The basis for this completed salvation is the heavenly intercession of the Saviour. The word translated "make intercession" simply means "to meet, to approach, to appeal, to make petition." Intercession involves our Lord's representation of His people at the throne of God. Through Christ, believers are able to draw near to God in prayer and also to offer spiritual sacrifices to God (Heb. 4:14-16; 1 Peter 2:5)]

[Read Heb 7:26-28]

V.26:

- Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

V.27:

- Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

V.28:

- For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

Process Observations/Questions:

Begin application below by going to the DEB and record the qualities Christ has to be our Priest.

LOOK:

[DEB] Let's reconvene as the Priest Search Committee. What qualities are found in Jesus that makes him superior over any other candidate we could consider?

- In the order of Melchizedek
- Have a dual role of both king and priest
- One who has the power of an indestructible life
- Will live eternally
- Permanent Priest
- Oath confirmed by God
- One who is able to save completely
- One who always lives to intercede for us
- One who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, and exalted above the heavens
- Sacrificed sins once for all so that daily sacrifices were unnecessary
- Made perfect forever

There is one and *only one* candidate who fits these criteria, and His name is Jesus. He has accepted the call to be our priest forever!! We all need a priest, and thank God He is Jesus.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 299–303). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

If you were asked to name the most important people in the Old Testament, I doubt that Melchizedek's name would be on your list. He appeared once, in Genesis 14:17–24; and he was referred to once more, in Psalm 110:4. You could hardly call this “top billing.” But the Holy Spirit reached back into the Old Testament and used those two passages to present a most important truth: the priesthood of Jesus Christ is superior to that of Aaron because “the order of Melchizedek” is superior to “the order of Levi.”

Chapter 7 of Hebrews introduces the second main section, as we have outlined it: *A superior Priesthood* (Heb. 7–10). In Hebrews 7, the writer argued that Christ's priesthood, like Melchizedek's, is superior in its *order*. In Hebrews 8, the emphasis is on Christ's better *covenant*; in Hebrews 9, it is His better *sanctuary*; and Hebrews 10 concludes the section by arguing for Christ's better *sacrifice*.

The Jewish nation was accustomed to the priesthood of the tribe of Levi. This tribe was chosen by God to serve in the tabernacle (Ex. 29; Num. 18). Aaron was the first high priest, appointed by God. In spite of their many failures, the priests had served God for centuries; but now the writer has affirmed that their priesthood has ended! To defend this statement, and to prove that the order of Melchizedek is superior to that of Aaron, he presents three arguments.

The Historical Argument: Melchizedek and Abraham (Heb. 7:1–10)

The record of the event discussed is in Genesis 14:17–24, so take time to read it. The writer of our epistle wanted us to note several facts about this mysterious man, Melchizedek.

He was both king and priest (v. 1). We have noted already that, in the Old Testament economy, the throne and the altar were separated. Those persons who attempted to invade the priests' office were judged by God. But here is a man who had *both* offices—king and priest! Aaron never had that privilege. And it is important to note that Melchizedek was not a “counterfeit” priest: he was the “priest of the Most High God” (see Gen. 14:18, 22). His ministry was legitimate.

His name is significant (v. 2b). In the Bible, names and their meanings are often important. We name our children today without much consideration for what their names mean, but this was not the case in Bible days. Sometimes a great spiritual crisis was the occasion for changing a person's name (see Gen. 32:24–32; John 1:35–42). The name *MELCHIZEDEK* means “king of righteousness” in the Hebrew language. The word *Salem* means “peace” (the Hebrew word *shalom*), so that Melchizedek is “king of peace” as well as “king of righteousness.”

“Righteousness” and “peace” are often found together in Scripture. “And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever” (Isa. 32:17), “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Ps. 85:10). “In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth” (Ps. 72:7). “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable . . . And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace” (James 3:17–18). Of course, God's purpose for His people is that they bear “the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:10–11).

True peace can be experienced only on the basis of righteousness. If we want to enjoy “peace with God” we must be “justified [declared righteous] by faith” (Rom. 5:1). Man cannot produce righteousness by keeping the Old Testament Law (Gal. 2:21). It is only through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross that righteousness and peace could have “kissed each other.”

He received tithes from Abraham (v. 2a). This important fact is explained in Hebrews 7:4–10. The word “tithes” means “one tenth.” Under the Jewish Law, the Jews were commanded to give God one tenth of their crops, herds, and flocks (Lev. 27:30–32). These tithes were brought to the Levites (Num. 18:21ff) at the tabernacle and later at the temple (Deut. 12:5ff). If the trip was too long for transporting grain, fruit, or animals, the tithe could be converted into money (Deut. 14:22–27).

Tithing, however, did not originate with Moses. Abraham practiced tithing long before the Law was given. In fact, archeologists have discovered that other nations also tithed in that day; so the practice is an ancient one.

His family history is different (v. 3). Melchizedek was a man (see Heb. 7:4), so he had to have had a mother and a father. But there is no *record* of his genealogy (“descent”) in the Old Testament; and this is significant because most great persons in the Old Testament have their ancestry identified. It was especially important that the priests be able to prove their ancestry (see Ezra 2:61–63; Neh. 7:63–65). Here the writer of Hebrews uses an argument from silence, but it is a valid one.

Melchizedek was not an angel or some superhuman creature; nor was he an Old Testament appearance of Jesus Christ. He was a real man, a real king, and a real priest in a real city. But *as far as the record is concerned*, he was not born, nor did he die. In this way, he is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. Though Jesus Christ did die, Calvary was not the end; for He arose from the dead and today lives in “the power of an endless life” (Heb. 7:16). Since there is no account of Melchizedek’s death, as far as the record is concerned, it seems that Melchizedek is still serving as a priest and king. This is another way in which he is like the eternal Son of God.

The application is clear: neither Aaron nor any of his descendants could claim to be “without genealogy” (Heb. 7:3, NASB). They could not claim to have an endless ministry. Nor could they claim to be both kings and priests, like Jesus Christ.

He had authority to receive tithes and to bless Abraham (vv. 4–10). The greatness of Melchizedek is seen in the fact that Abraham gave him tithes from the loot of a miniwar. Abraham acknowledged the authority of Melchizedek. Furthermore, Melchizedek blessed Abraham in a special way; and “the less is blessed of the better” (Heb. 7:7). In giving Melchizedek tithes and in receiving his blessing, Abraham affirmed the greatness of this king-priest.

But how does this relate to Aaron? In an interesting way: Aaron and the tribe of Levi were “in the loins” of Abraham, yet unborn! So, when their father, Abraham, acknowledged the greatness of Melchizedek, the tribe of Levi was also involved. The Jewish people believe strongly in “racial solidarity,” and this is one example of it. The paying of the tithes involved not just the patriarch Abraham, but also the unborn generations in his loins.

Since Jesus Christ came “of the seed of Abraham” (Heb. 2:16), does this mean that He too was a part of this experience? No, because Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. His identification with Abraham was for “the days of His flesh” (Heb. 5:7). Since Christ existed before Abraham (John 8:58), He could not have been “in Abraham” as were Aaron and his family.

The Doctrinal Argument: Christ and Aaron (Heb. 7:11–25)

In this section, the writer took his argument one step further. Not only is Melchizedek *greater than* Aaron, but Melchizedek has *replaced* Aaron! It is no longer “the order of Aaron” or “the order of Levi.” It is forever “the order of Melchizedek.” Why would God effect such a radical change?

Because both the priesthood and the Law were imperfect (vv. 11–14). The words translated “perfect” and “perfection” are key words in this epistle (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 6:1; 7:11, 19; 9:9; 10:1, 14). They essentially mean “completed, fulfilled.” The Old Testament priests could not by their ministry complete the work of God in the heart of a worshiper. “For the Law made nothing perfect” (Heb. 7:19). The animal sacrifices could not give any worshiper a perfect standing before God (Heb. 10:1–3). The Mosaic system of divine Law was not a permanent system. It was “added” to serve as a “schoolmaster” to prepare the way for the coming of Christ (Gal. 3:19–4:7).

Since the priests received their authority from the Old Testament Law (Heb. 7:28), and since the priesthood has been changed, there has also been a change in that Law. The President of the United States cannot proclaim himself King of the United States because U.S. law makes no provision for a king. First, the law would have to be changed.

The Law of Moses made no provision for a priesthood from the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14). Since our High Priest *is* from the tribe of Judah, according to His human ancestry, then there must have been a change in Moses’ Law. There has been! The entire system of Old Testament Law has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and has been taken out of the way (Col. 2:13–14). The believer has been set free from the Law (Gal. 5:1–6) and is dead to the Law (Rom. 7:1–4).

This new arrangement does not suggest that a Christian has the right to be lawless. “Free from the Law” does not mean “free to sin.” Rather, it means that we are free to do the will of God. We obey, not because of outward compulsion, but because of inward constraint (2 Cor. 5:14; Eph. 6:6). The indwelling Holy Spirit enables us to fulfill the “righteousness of the Law” as we yield to Him (Rom. 8:1–4).

Because, being imperfect, the priesthood and the Law could not continue forever (vv. 15–19). The word “another” in Hebrews 7:15 means “another of a different kind.” The levitical priests were made priests by the authority of a temporary and imperfect Law. Jesus Christ was made Priest by a declaration of God. Because the Law was “weak and useless” (Heb. 7:18, NIV), it could not continue forever. But because Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, He lives by “the power of an endless life” (Heb. 7:16). What a contrast between the profitless Law and an endless life!

Since Jesus Christ is Priest *forever*, and since He has a nature to match that eternal priesthood, He can never be replaced. The annulling (Heb. 7:18, “disannulling”) of the Law meant the abolishing of the priesthood. But nobody can annul “the power of an endless life”! The logic holds: Jesus Christ is a Priest forever.

The writer kept in mind the temptation his readers were facing to go back into the old temple system. This is why he reminded them (Heb. 7:19) that Jesus Christ has accomplished what the Law could never accomplish: He brought in a better hope, and He enables us to draw near to God. To go back to Judaism would mean losing the enjoyment of their fellowship with God through Christ. The only hope Judaism had was the coming of Christ, and that blessing these believers already had.

Because God’s oath cannot be broken (vv. 20–22). No priest in the order of Aaron was ever ordained and established on the basis of God’s personal oath. The Aaronic priests ministered

“after the law of a carnal [physical] commandment” (Heb. 7:16). Their moral or spiritual fitness was not examined. The important thing was that a priest belonged to the right tribe and met the right physical and ceremonial requirements (Lev. 21:16–24).

Jesus Christ’s heavenly priesthood was established on the basis of His work on the cross, His character (Heb. 2:10; 5:5–10), and the oath of God. “Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 7:21; Ps. 110:4). Note the introduction to the statement: “The Lord swore and will not repent [change His mind].” The matter is finally settled and it cannot be changed.

The presence of this oath gives to the priesthood of our Lord a greater degree of permanence and assurance. Jesus Christ is the “surety of a better testament [covenant]” (Heb. 7:22). The word “surety” means “one who guarantees that the terms of an agreement will be carried out.” Judah was willing to be the surety for Benjamin, to guarantee to their father that the boy would return home safely (Gen. 43:1–14). Paul was willing to be the surety for the slave Onesimus (Phile. 18–19). Perhaps the nearest equivalent we have today is a bondsman who posts bail for someone under indictment and guarantees that the indicted person will appear in court and stand trial.

As the Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5), Jesus Christ is God’s great Surety. Our risen and ever-living Saviour guarantees that the terms of God’s covenant will be fulfilled completely. God will not abandon His people. But our Lord not only guarantees *to us* that God will fulfill the promises. As our Representative *to God*, He perfectly meets the terms of the agreement on our behalf. We of ourselves could never meet the terms; but because we have trusted Him, He has saved us and He has guaranteed that He will keep us.

In Hebrews 7:22, we have the first occurrence of a very important word in Hebrews—“testament.” This word, which is usually translated “covenant,” is used twenty-one times in the letter, and it is the equivalent of “last will and testament.” We will examine the word more closely in our study of Hebrews 8.

The writer has given three reasons why God changed the order of the priesthood from that of Aaron to that of Melchizedek: (1) the priesthood and the Law were imperfect; (2) being imperfect, they could not continue forever; (3) God had sworn by His oath that the new order would be established. Then the writer of this letter to the Hebrews closed this section with a fourth reason.

Because, being men, the priests died (vv. 23–25). Not only was the priesthood imperfect, but it was also interrupted by death. There were *many* high priests because no one priest could live forever. In contrast, the church has *one* High Priest, Jesus the Son of God, who lives forever! An unchanging priest means an unchangeable priesthood, and this means security and confidence for God’s people. “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). “Thou art a Priest forever” (Ps. 110:4).

Occasionally we read a story in the newspaper about the illegal handling of a will. Perhaps some unscrupulous relative or business partner managed to get his hands on a will and use it for his own selfish purposes. But this could never happen to our Lord’s “last will and testament” in His blood. He wrote the will and then died to make it take effect. But He arose from the dead and ascended to heaven, and there He is “probating” His own will!

The fact that the *unchanging* Christ continues as High Priest means, logically, that there is an “unchangeable priesthood” (Heb. 7:24). The Greek word translated “unchangeable” carries the idea of “valid and unalterable.” The word was used at the end of legal contracts. Our Lord’s priesthood in heaven is “valid and unalterable.” Because it is, we can have confidence in the midst of this shaking, changing world.

What is the conclusion of the matter? It is stated in Hebrews 7:25: “Wherefore [because He is the ever-living, unchanging High Priest], He is able also to save them to the uttermost [completely, forever] that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.” It is unfortunate that this verse is often read, “He is able to save *from* the uttermost” instead of “*to* the uttermost.” To be sure, it is true that Christ can save any sinner from any condition; but that is not the import of the verse. The emphasis is on the fact that He saves completely, forever, all who put their faith in Him. Because He is our High Priest forever, He can save forever.

The basis for this completed salvation is the heavenly intercession of the Saviour. The word translated “make intercession” simply means “to meet, to approach, to appeal, to make petition.” We must not imagine that God the Father is angry with us so that God the Son must constantly appeal to Him not to judge us! The Father and the Son are in total agreement in the plan of salvation (Heb. 13:20–21). Neither should we imagine our Lord Jesus uttering prayers on our behalf in heaven, or repeatedly “offering His blood” as a sacrifice. That work was completed on the cross once and for all.

Intercession involves our Lord’s representation of His people at the throne of God. Through Christ, believers are able to draw near to God in prayer and also to offer spiritual sacrifices to God (Heb. 4:14–16; 1 Peter 2:5). It has well been said that Christ’s life in heaven is His prayer for us. It is what He *is* that determines what He *does*.

In reviewing the reasoning found in this long section (Heb. 7:11–25), we are impressed with the logic of the writer. Jesus Christ’s priesthood after the order of Melchizedek is superior to that of Aaron and has replaced it. Both the historical argument and the doctrinal argument are sound. But the writer adds a third argument.

The Practical Argument: Christ and the Believer (Heb. 7:26–28)

No matter how devoted and obedient the Aaronic priests were, they could not always meet the needs of all the people. But Jesus Christ perfectly meets all of our needs. “For such an High Priest became us” means “He was suited to us; He meets our needs completely.” The emphasis here is on His sinlessness. Being perfect, He is able to exercise a perfect ministry for His people. Because of their sins, some of the Old Testament priests not only were unable to serve the people, but actually abused them. This could never happen with Jesus Christ and His people.

The Old Testament priests were “set apart” for their ministry, so in that sense they were “holy.” But they were not always holy in character. They were sinners like the people to whom they ministered. “Harmless” (Heb. 7:26) means “blameless.” No Jewish priest could claim this distinction. “Unfiled” means “unstained.” Again, only Jesus Christ can claim these characteristics. When He was ministering on earth, our Lord was a friend of publicans and sinners (Matt. 9:10; 11:19), but His contact with them did not defile His character or His conduct. There was contact without contamination. He was not isolated; He was separated. Today, He is “separate from sinners” because of His position (“made higher than the heavens”); but He is not separated from the people to whom He ministers. He is always available to us at His throne of grace.

Another proof of His sinlessness is the fact that our Lord never had to offer sacrifices for His own cleansing, as did the priests. On the *annual* Day of Atonement, the high priest first had to sacrifice for himself before he could sacrifice for the people (Lev. 16). There were also *daily* sacrifices offered as a part of the temple ritual; and, if a priest had sinned, he had to bring a

sacrifice for his own cleansing (Ex. 29:38–46; Lev. 4:3ff). But Jesus Christ offered just one sacrifice for our sins and settled the matter forever (see Heb. 9:23–28).

This is the kind of High Priest we need! We are prone to sin daily, even hourly; and we need to be able to turn to Him for spiritual help. As our High Priest, Jesus Christ gives us the grace and mercy that *we need not to sin*. But if we do sin, He is our Advocate at God’s throne (1 John 2:1–2). If we confess our sins to Him, He forgives us and restores us (1 John 1:9).

The application is obvious: why turn away from such an adequate High Priest? What more can you find in any other person? The men who served under the Law of Moses had human infirmities and weaknesses, and they often failed. Our heavenly High Priest has been “consecrated [perfected] forevermore” (Heb. 7:28) and there is no spot or blemish in Him. Such a High Priest “suits us perfectly”!

Are you availing yourself of His gracious ministry?

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 797-799). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

C. The greater Priest and His greater ministry (7:1–10:18)

Here begins the longest single expository passage in the epistle. Its very length suggests its importance. Its theme is the core theme of Hebrews. The real resource of the readership, in the midst of their pressures, is the high priesthood of Christ. They must realize the greatness of that priesthood, its superiority to the Levitical institutions, and the perfect access they have to it on the basis of Christ’s death.

1. THE SUPERIOR PRIEST (CHAP. 7)

The writer returned to the theme he had introduced in 5:1–10, but which he doubted his readers would comprehend (cf. 5:11). In the conclusion of his most recent warning (5:11–6:20) he had renewed the subject of the Melchizedek priesthood (6:19–20). The exposition of that theme is now given.

a. The greatness of Melchizedek (7:1–10).

7:1–3. To begin with, the writer set forth the personal greatness of the Old Testament figure **Melchizedek**. As a fit prototype for Christ Himself, Melchizedek was both a **king and a priest**. He both **blessed ... Abraham** and received his tithes. Melchizedek’s name and title suggest the messianic attributes of **righteousness** and **peace**. So far as the Old Testament record is concerned, he was **without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life**. In saying this, the author is often taken to mean that the silence of the inspired record presents Melchizedek as typologically **like the Son of God**. But though this is possibly true, the statements do not sound like it, particularly the assertion that Melchizedek **remains a priest forever**. The word “forever” translates a phrase (*eis to diēnekes*) that occurs only in Hebrews (here and in 10:12, 14) and means “continuously” or “uninterruptedly.”

It seems more natural that the author meant that Melchizedek belonged to an order in which there was no end to the priesthood of those engaged in it. (He later said in 7:8 that Melchizedek “is declared to be living.”) If this is correct, Melchizedek may have been an angelic being who

reigned for a time at Salem (i.e., Jerusalem). If so, the statement that he was “without beginning of days” would not mean that he was eternal, but simply that he had a pretemporal origin. Nor would this concept of Melchizedek as an angel elevate him to the same level as God’s Son, since the author painstakingly asserted the Son’s superiority to the angels (1:5–14). There is indeed evidence that, at Qumran, Melchizedek was regarded as an angelic personage. If this is the case in Hebrews, then the Son of God is the *High Priest* in an order in which Melchizedek is simply a priest.

7:4–10. The personal superiority of Melchizedek over the patriarch Abraham is guaranteed by the fact that **Abraham gave him a 10th of the plunder**. And though Melchizedek had no connections with the Levitical order, still he both received this tithe from **Abraham and blessed him**. This act of blessing reinforced his superiority to the patriarch. Moreover, he was evidently superior to the Levites as well, who collected tithes but were nonetheless subject to death. By contrast the tithe collected from Abraham was collected **by him who is declared to be living**. Furthermore, in a sense Levi paid the tithe **through Abraham because ... Levi was still in the body of his ancestor**. The original expression, rendered **one might even say**, probably means something like “so to speak.” The writer knew that Levi did not literally pay tithes to Melchizedek, but on the principle that an ancestor is greater than his descendants, Abraham’s act affirmed Melchizedek’s superiority even to the Levitical priests themselves. Melchizedek thus has a greatness which the Old Testament record clearly attests.

b. The new priesthood supersedes the old (7:11–19)

Having established Melchizedek’s greatness both personally and in comparison with Abraham and Levi, the writer was ready for a new point. This superiority was needed, since the Law was superseded. The inadequacy of the legal and Levitical systems had to be replaced by something better.

7:11–12. In the simplest manner, the author argued for the imperfection of **the Levitical priesthood** on the basis of God’s promise (recorded in Ps. 110:4) that a new Priest would arise belonging to an order other than Aaron’s. Since there was **a change of the priesthood**, it follows that the whole legal system on which the Levitical institutions were predicated also had to be changed. Here the writer virtually affirmed the Pauline truth that “you are not under Law” (Rom. 6:14), though he approached it from a different angle.

7:13–14. Levitical priesthood was superseded by the fact that **our Lord descended from Judah. That tribe** had no role in the Levitical institutions, and the things God had said about the new Priest applied to One from Judah, which is proof that a change was made.

7:15–19. A further proof (**and what we have said is even more clear**) is found in the consideration that the new Priest has **an indestructible (akatalytou) life**. Psalm 110:4 was here quoted again to show that such an unending life is an inherent part of the order of Melchizedek. (The author probably had this text in mind when he made the statement about Melchizedek in Heb. 7:8.) Thus the new Priest does not hold His office **on the basis of a regulation as to His ancestry**. This rendering freely translates the original which is more nearly represented by the words “not after the Law of a carnal commandment.” The writer seems to mean that the Law which regulated the priestly institution and succession was “carnal” or “fleshly,” not in the sense of being evil, but in the sense that it pertained to people of flesh who died. But this **former regulation** has been replaced because of its inherent weakness and uselessness. What has replaced it is the new priesthood which constitutes **a better hope ... by which we draw near to God**. Thus the writer established the point that **the Law which made nothing perfect** was

replaced by a priestly institution which *can* accomplish its objectives in those who approach God through it.

c. The superiority of the new Priest (7:20–28)

If, as the author has shown, Melchizedek was greater than Levi (vv. 4–10) and the new priesthood necessarily abrogates the old (vv. 11–19), then the new Priest has to be greater than the Levitical priests.

7:20–22. The priesthood of Christ differs dramatically from the Levitical priesthood in that it was instituted **with an oath**. By contrast, the descendants of Aaron assumed their jobs **without any oath**. The writer then quoted again the divine oath of Psalm 110:4 whose very solemnity argues for the superiority of the new Priest, who was majestically inducted into His role. Moreover, **because of this oath, Jesus became the guarantee** (*engyos*, used only here in the NT) **of a better covenant**. In His own person, Jesus assured the superiority of the new order over the old because His oath secured His permanent installation in the priestly office.

7:23–25. No Old Testament priest ever functioned in this permanent way, **since** all were subject to **death**. But the **permanent priesthood** of Jesus gives Him the capacity to carry His saving work to completion. When the writer asserted that **He is able to save completely**, he continued to have in mind the salvation- inheritance first referred to in 1:14. The readers were to hold fast to their professions of faith and to continue numbering themselves among **those who come to God through Him**, knowing that He can see them through every trial and difficulty right to the end of the road **because He always lives to intercede for them**. In saying this, the author reverted again to a truth he had already enunciated (4:14–16) where he had invited the readers to avail themselves boldly of the mercy and grace accessible to them through Jesus' priesthood. As they did so, they would find that their Captain and High Priest could get the job done! He could lead them victoriously into the glory of the many sons. In this way He saves "completely."

7:26–28. After all, He is the kind of **High Priest** who **meets our need**. His character is utterly without blemish and He has been **exalted above the heavens**. Consequently too, He had no need like the Levitical priests **to offer sacrifices day after day, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people**. At first sight verses 27–28 seem to refer to the ritual of the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16), but that was yearly, not "day after day." Probably these verses telescope that ritual with the regular sacrificial routine. There seems to be some evidence from Jewish tradition that a high priest was thought to offer daily sacrifice, and the stipulations of Leviticus 6:12–13 may refer to him.

In any case the new Priest had no need either for sacrifices for Himself or for repeated sacrifices for others. His one act of self-offering was definitive and sufficient. Of this more will be said in Hebrews 9 and 10. Here the author was content to conclude that, in contrast with the Levitical priests, the Son is a perfected High Priest. The reference to the fact that He **has been made perfect forever recalls** 5:8–10. The sufferings of the Son, here referred to as His sacrificial offering of Himself **once for all** (*ephapax*, cf. 9:12; 10:10; also cf. *hapax*, "once" in 9:26, 28), are what have constituted Him "perfect" for His role in God's presence where He intercedes for His followers. Thus **the Law appointed as high priests those who were weak, but the oath, which came after the Law, appointed** this kind of Priest. Accordingly the readers could go to Him at all times, fully confident of His capacity to serve their every need.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 1828 – 1829). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

7:3 Some incorrectly see a contradiction in this verse regarding Melchizedek because they say Gn 3:20 teaches that everyone is descended from Adam and Eve. But in Heb 7:1–3 the author explains Gn 14:17–20 to demonstrate typological links between Melchizedek and the Son of God. The name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness” (from the Hb *melek* and *sedeq*), and the city over which he ruled is called Salem, meaning “peace”; thus he is also “king of peace.” The writer of Heb developed a contrast between Melchizedek’s priesthood and the Levitical priesthood. Genesis 14 says nothing about Melchizedek’s lineage, birth, and death, so his priesthood has neither qualifications nor limitations like those of the Levitical priesthood. Thus the phrases “without father, mother, or genealogy” and “having neither beginning of days nor end of life” are understandable and do not contradict Gn 3:20.

7:11 Some see an inconsistency with this verse because they say that the law was given to the Israelites before the Levitical priesthood ever emerged rather than “under it.” However, the preposition *epi* can have several other meanings than just “under.” For example, the word can also mean “concerning” or “on the basis of.” Thus, this verse could also be translated “for the people were given the law *concerning* it.” In other words, God’s people in the OT had received directives related to the Levitical priests’ ministry through the law.

7:24 Mormonism incorrectly claims Melchizedek’s priesthood for its faith. Several high offices of the Mormon church supposedly grow out of the Melchizedekan order. The Mormons’ doctrine, however, is false because Heb states clearly that Jesus is the only high priest after the order of Melchizedek (3:1; 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:11, 15, 17, 21, 24, 26; 8:1; 9:11).