

The Power of an Indestructible Life

Hebrews 7:1-25

This begins a new section in the Book of Hebrews. To this point, our author has been arguing for the Superiority of the Jesus' Person. Now, he turns to arguing for the Superiority of the Jesus' Priesthood.

Chapter 7 – Because of a Better Order: Melchizedek, not Aaron

Chapter 8 – Because of a Better Covenant: New not Old

Chapter 9 – Because of a Better Sanctuary: Heavenly not earthly

Chapter 10 – Because of a Better Sacrifice: Jesus, not animals

As he has all along, proving the superiority of Jesus' Person and Priesthood also demonstrates the permanence and power and perfection of the new and living way.

This text intertwines the answer to two important questions:

Why do we not live by Law now?

Why do we not have priests now?

The Old Testament had Law and Priests, why don't we? Most religions have priests and even some religious groups within Christendom have priests, why don't we? What about Catholicism and Greek and Russian Orthodox with their priests and even Protestant churches whose pastors many times are fulfilling priestly roles?

Well, this text provides for us an unending and irrefutable reason why there are to be no more priests. That is because Jesus has come as the final priest whose office extends forever. Those who want to continue the priesthood, whether in paganism, or Judaism or in Christianity, are taking away from the finality and sufficiency and majesty and glory of the Jesus Christ.

The Author's argument hinges on this mysterious person coming to us out of the mists of the Old Testament. As we follow our author in his development of his thesis, I want us to not only revel on the grand truths he unpacks, but also to reflect on the way he handles the Bible.

¹ For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him,

Historical Argument

(v.1-10)

The author begins by identifying who Melchizedek is and establishing his importance for Jesus' priesthood. This person appears in Genesis 14 as Abraham is returning from rescuing Lot. Turn with me and read that account from **Genesis 14:17-15:1**.

¹⁷ After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). ¹⁸ And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) ¹⁹ And he blessed him and said,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth;

²⁰ and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. ²¹ And the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.” ²² But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven

and earth, ²³ that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' ²⁴ I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share."

¹ After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward *shall* be very great."

Personal Identity

(v.1-3)

And now our text:

¹ For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, ² 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. ³ 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.

Who is this person? He was King of Salem which means peace. Scholars believe that he was the ruler of what later became Jerusalem. His name means "righteousness". And he was a priest of the Most High God. Now don't miss this. *This is the only time in all of Scripture that any one besides Jesus Christ is both King and Priest.* This is the point of verses 1-2. Here was a character in the Old Testament *who could not possibly have been under the Law.* In this Melchizedek, righteousness of character and peace in his rule come together in this King-Priest.

In the Old Testament, important people are usually identified by their family or tribal heritage. Developing and maintaining one's family tree is not a new idea. Verse three observes that according to the Scriptural record, he had no recorded genealogy, no mother, no father, no birth nor death. He simply appears on the scene. He engages Abraham. He disappears with only a trace in Psalms 110:4. There, the Messiah, the Son of God, is declared to be a priest forever under God's oath.

We do have a mystery here, one that has led to varying opinions. Some believe that Melchizedek is Jesus Christ. That Jesus Himself is the one who met Abraham. Others believe that this was a man whose life and historical record were providentially directed so that he was like Jesus in anticipation of the coming of the Law and the Levitical priesthood. I believe that this is what is indicated by "like the Son of God" in verse three and the "this man" of verse 6. Therefore the author is making a connection through a Biblical type.

Permanent Importance

(v.4-10)

But why is this man important? Why does the Old and New Testament identify the priesthood of Jesus as being in the order of Melchizedek?

⁴ See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! ⁵ 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. ⁶ But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. ⁷ It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. ⁸ 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. ⁹ One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes,

paid tithes through Abraham,¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

MELCHIZEDEK RECEIVED TITHES which was a uniquely priestly function in the Old Testament. Only priests were authorized to receive the tithe. It was a part of the public recognition of their office.

MELCHIZEDEK BLESSED ABRAHAM establishing that he was greater than Abraham. This is another of those “if that, then how much more than that” arguments of the New Testament. If Abraham was great, then how much greater is Melchizedek. If Levi was a great priest, then how much a greater priest must Melchizedek be. If Melchizedek is a great priest, then how much greater is Jesus.

On the principle of Headship, *LEVI (AND ALL ABRAHAM’S HEIRS) PAID THE TITHE* through Abraham. In the Bible, certain people are designated by God whose actions are imputed to their descendants accounts. Adam, Abraham and Jesus Christ are clearly functioning in this way. In Adam, all sinned. In Abraham, his descendants paid tithes. In Jesus Christ, we have died to sin and have been raised to newness of life.

So we have this mysterious person. He is like Christ as King and Priest. In him righteousness and peace are brought together. On the record, he has no genealogy, no birth or death. He receives tithes and imparts blessings. And his priesthood is both before and apart from the Law and from Levi. And his priesthood is the order in which Jesus Christ exercises His own priesthood.

Expositional Argument

(v.11-24)

Having established the historical existence of this person, his identity and importance, our author now takes up Psalm 110. From this text he begins to develop his interpretation of the Genesis account through a Christ-centered, New Covenant lens. Please turn to **Psalm 110:1-4** and let’s read it as our author does so we can follow the argument he makes.

As the author follows the trajectory of a Canonical Theology, He does what the Scriptures always demand that we do: what we formulate in doctrine always is developed directly from the time and space facts of the Biblical record. Logic and reasoning must be tied to and never separated from the inerrant and infallible Word of God. The New Testament is an interpretation – it is taking the Old Testament record, getting it right in its setting, establishing connections through other texts pointing to Christ and then interpreting them in a New Covenant framework. Thus the Bible writers establish and model a hermeneutic *that we are to follow*.

The Problem Asked

(v.11)

The question simply asks: if the Old Testament system was perfect, why is Jesus a priest in another order?

¹¹ 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?

You know, we come to the Scriptures often with our own questions. We want the Scriptures to answer our questions. But it is very important for us to take careful note of the questions the Scriptures ask. We hear this question and its answer in our day and basically it looks to us like a given. But, of course, to a Jew living in 70-80 AD, this was a fundamental question.

What happened to the Old Testament system? How can Jesus be a priest when He was from the wrong tribe?

But look carefully at how the question is phrased: "If perfection could have been attained..." There you have it. Can any other system of religion apart from the New Covenant sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our Prophet, Priest and King bring perfection? Now that is a powerfully relevant question for Jews in the 1st century and Gentiles in the 21st century.

Because the answer is, "No, nothing has or can bring perfection except the life, death, resurrection and reign of Jesus Christ." Now how can I say that? On what principles does this simple affirmation rest?

The Principles Argued

(v.12-24)

Many of us have lived to see amazing changes in our lifetime. In a hundred years we have come from the thrill of Kitty Hawk to the wonder of Saturn fly-byes and now, a solitary Voyager is trekking across the vast interstellar plains beyond our system. We have gone from typewriters to word processors. I have a computer in my briefcase that would have occupied this room 15 years ago.

Nothing in our world, as amazing and breath-taking as it may be, is as important as the change that occurred in the 33 ½ years of Jesus' life.

Melchizedek, not Aaron

(v.12-14)

¹² For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. ¹³ For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

The first change is the **family** of the priesthood. For 2,000 years, men and women and children who wanted to draw near to God brought sacrifices, were met by priests and were barred from physical nearness by a massive curtain. Day after day, Sabbath after Sabbath, priests ministered. To be a priest, you had to be a Levite. You were ordained in Aaron's line. But Jesus, God's final High Priest, was in the tribe of Judah and ordained in the line of Melchizedek.

Life, not law

(v.15-19)

¹⁵ This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, ¹⁶ who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

¹⁸ For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

The second change is in the **foundation** for the Priesthood. The Old Covenant system of Law was knit together with the priesthood in an indivisible fabric. There could be no change in one without a change in the other. One could not exist without the other. But, Jesus comes as a priest, not on the basis of the Law, but on "the power of an indestructible life."

Verse 18 is the heartbeat of our author's point and our message. The system of Law and priests was permanently set aside because it was weak and useless. It could not bring the perfection, the mature and finished product that was the point of God's purposes. It could not bring sinners into the actual presence of God and interposed a regular system of sacrifices, a retinue of priests and a myriad of detailed legislation which only one single person in all of human history has ever kept. Romans 8:3-4 argue this same point.

Jesus is our perfect priest and sacrifice on the principle of life. He lived without sin, was sacrificed for sin, was raised from the dead to destroy sin and rules and reigns forever *on the basis of an indestructible life*. This gives us the better hope by which we draw near to God. Beloved, you do not come to God on the basis of Law and legislation. You come to God on the basis of Life. You do not serve God on the basis of Law and legislation. You serve God on the principle of life.

Oath, not office

(v.20-22)

²⁰ And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, ²¹ 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.' " ²² This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

The third change is the **filling** of the office. No Old Covenant Mosaic Law priest was sworn into his office. He was a priest because of heredity. He entered the office as long as he did not personally disqualify himself. And he could be barred from office for any number of offenses.

Jesus is a priest forever. God has sworn that this is so. He has covenanted and promised and then driven the stake deeply into the rock of His character by taking an oath. He has risen from His throne, raised His left hand to all eternity and placed His right hand on His own holy and unchanging character and sworn that Jesus is a priest forever.

What does this mean for us? That the indestructible life of Jesus Christ and the inviolable oath of Almighty God guarantee the New Covenant. All that God is for us in Christ as expressed in the New Covenant will, without fail, come to fulfillment.

Permanent, not passing

(v.23-24)

²³ The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.

The fourth change is the **finality** of the office. Old Testament families watched the passing of priests. Maybe they had familiar and favorite ones. Often, they sat down to fellowship around the meal made from the sacrifice. But, sometimes they came to the Tabernacle or the Temple to be greeted by sad news and new faces. The Old Testament priests could not sustain their efforts forever. Weariness, sickness, senility and finally and inevitably, death ended every single ministry.

But this is not so with Jesus. He continues because He never dies. He lives forever. We can never come to the mercy seat and find there a new face. It is and will always be Jesus whose sacrifice and intercession greets us with mercy and grace.

Here then is why we have no priests here. This is why pastors are not priests. This is why Catholic Fathers are not true priests. This is why trying to return to earthly priests is folly. Simply because of Jesus. His priesthood is sufficient and final because it is Melchizedek not Aaron, life not law, by oath not office, and it is permanent, not passing.

Practical Conclusion

(v.25)

So what conclusion are we to draw from all this?

²⁵ 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.

Two faith sustaining, hope giving truths emerge. Jesus is able:

To Save Completely

In other words, what the law could not do in its weakness and powerlessness and uselessness because of our sinful nature, the power of Jesus' indestructible life has wrought. He is able to save completely. What a word! What a hope! What an assurance!

But notice: this is true of those who come to God through Him. For the recipients of the book of Hebrews, they must leave the Old Testament system and embrace Christ. They must no longer come to God through animal sacrifice and human priests. They must come to God through Jesus Christ.

And so must you. You cannot come to God on any other principle or any other person or by any performance and be saved completely except through the cross and the resurrection.

To Intercede Eternally

That Jesus can save completely is because He does intercede eternally. This will only be a life-transforming reality for us when we recognize that our major problem is not finances, or health, or friends, or psychological wholeness or fulfillment or meaning in life. When, by grace through the Word, the Spirit unfolds to us our surpassing sinfulness, then we will cling with obeying trust to the sustaining power of Jesus continuing intercession.

Reflect and Respond

Some of you are a bit uncomfortable with such a clear and edged attack on a religious system on which some of your friends and family are relying to draw near to God. Beloved, the Bible tells us that Jesus is able to save completely those who come to God by Jesus alone. These are serious and sobering words. And it is my fervent hope that they will stir up in you courage and clarity about the eternal condition of those who rely on this false hope.

How do you draw nigh to God? On the principles of the Old Mosaic system? Are you relying on priests or law or religious office or human effort? Or do you draw near to God on the power of Jesus' indestructible life and eternal mediation?

Jesus is our sufficient and our final High Priest. He is able to save completely for He intercedes eternally. Let us draw near to God through Him, and Him alone.