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Hebrews 7:11–28

Christ's Perfect Priesthood

Many first-century Hebrew Christians struggled to understand the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Growing up under the Levitical system of animal sacrifices, they had centered their faith in the Aaronic priesthood and Mosaic Law. Hebrews 7:11–28 shows why the Levitical priesthood had to be replaced for theological reasons and, in great detail, explains that Christ's priesthood is superior.

Christ's Priesthood Is Perfect

The Levitical system could not bring people to "perfection" (completeness or maturity):

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? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law (Heb. 7:11–12).

The Law was transitory, and it was abrogated at Christ's resurrection. Christ was a Priest, not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedek. (See "Who Is Melchizedek?" in the September/October issue of *Israel My Glory*.)

Since the priesthood was changed, "of necessity there is also a change of the law" in connection with the priesthood. The Law, being "holy and just and good"

(Rom. 7:12), demanded perfect righteousness—something that sinful men who functioned as priests could never provide. Therefore, mankind's hope for perfect standing before God had to be brought about outside the Aaronic priesthood and Mosaic Law. Thus Christ is the only one qualified to function as High Priest on behalf of sinners.

This was a new concept in the first century, and many Jewish people found it difficult to understand and accept; their faith had been centered in the Aaronic priesthood and Mosaic Law for centuries. Yet Jesus' own words in Mark 2:21–22 state that their new faith could not be poured into old wineskins or used as a patch to strengthen their Jewish beliefs.

Christ's Priesthood Is Permanent

Hebrews 7:13–19 provides a number of reasons why Christ's perfect priesthood supersedes Aaron's.

First, Christ was not from the tribe of Levi but from "another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar" (v. 13). Christ sprang from Judah, from King David's seed (Isa. 11:1; Mt. 1:1; Acts 2:29–31; Rom. 1:3), "of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood" (Heb. 7:14). Although this concept was new to first-century Jewish believers, God graciously planned and foretold this development centuries before it occurred. Christ would be a

different type of Priest, one in the "likeness of Melchizedek" (v. 15).

Second, the Aaronic priesthood was "according to the law of a fleshly commandment" (v. 16). The Levitical priesthood had to be done away with because it sprang out of the Mosaic Law. The Law stipulated that only the family of Aaron from the tribe of Levi could function in the priesthood (Num. 18:1–32). If Christ were to be a Priest, He would need to be from a different order.

Unlike the Aaronic priesthood, Christ's priesthood was "according to the power of an endless [indissoluble] life" (Heb. 7:16). He is the eternal Son of God (Jn. 1:1); Creator and Sustainer of all things (Col. 1:16–17); and, unlike an Aaronic priest, has power to bestow eternal life (Jn. 11:25–26). Whereas the Aaronic priesthood eventually ceased, Christ's appointment as High Priest will last forever because He is "a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 7:17; cf. Ps. 110:4).

Third, for the Aaronic priesthood to change, it was necessary to change the Law (Heb. 7:12). There needed to be the "annulling [putting away or making void] of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness [uselessness]" (v. 18). The Law was unprofitable because (1) it was unable to make people perfect, that is, to complete the process by producing eternal life; (2) it was not possible for the blood of animal sacrifices offered by the Aaronic priesthood to take away sins (10:4, 11); and (3) it was also impossible for the Law to provide or produce righteousness.

Consequently, "the law made nothing perfect [complete]" (7:19). It was incapable of bringing people into a right standing before God. In fact, the Law never brought people near to God; it kept them far from Him. The apostle Paul called the Law "our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24). The Law was added because of sin "till the Seed [Christ] should come" (v. 19), enabling people to be justified by faith in Christ as the *only* way to be declared righteous before God (v. 23).

However, the Law did pave the way for a "better hope" (Heb. 7:19) through

the new priesthood of Christ, who could bring people to a perfect (complete) standing before God. In other words, it was necessary that the Law and Levitical priesthood be put away for Christ to function as a perfect High Priest. The new priesthood of Christ opened a way of access "through which we draw near to God" (v. 19). Through Christ, all believers are encouraged to come boldly to God's throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (4:14-16).

Fourth, Christ's priesthood is sealed with an eternal oath by God; the Aaronic priesthood was not:

And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath (for they have become priests without an oath, but He [Christ] with an oath by Him [God the Father] who said to Him [Christ]: "The LORD has sworn and will not relent [change His mind], 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'"), by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant (7:20-22).

A key difference between these two priesthoods is that Christ's is sealed with an eternal oath insuring its perpetual validity, and the Levitical priesthood was not. Thus Christ was made a Priest by an eternal oath providing "a surety," or guarantee, that He will fulfill the promises made in the "better covenant" (New Covenant) that God inaugurated through His shed blood.

Fifth, Christ's priesthood is superior to the Aaronic priesthood in that it is not interrupted by death. The Aaronic priesthood was temporary; its priests would die and be replaced (v. 23). In contrast, Christ's priesthood will never be terminated "because He continues forever, [and] has an unchangeable priesthood" (v. 24). Unlike the Aaronic priesthood, Christ's priesthood is incapable of being altered, passed on to a successor, or terminated—because He is eternal and His priesthood will abide forever.

Consequently, Christ "is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him" (v. 25). The word *uttermost* speaks of the comprehensiveness or completeness of our salvation. Christ saves the total person (body, soul,

and spirit) from the power and penalty of sin, and at our glorification He will deliver us from the presence of sin.

Christ is able to provide such complete salvation because "He always lives to make intercession" for us (v. 25). The word *intercession* encompasses Christ's entire ministry on behalf of believers, based on the merits of His sacrifice. He is an ever-living Priest who continually intercedes for the needs of all believers before God's throne in heaven.

Christ's Priesthood Portrayed

After describing the perfection and permanence of Christ's high priesthood, the author culminated his argument by shouting, "For such a High Priest was fitting for us" (v. 26). In other words, because of His character, Christ is the only High Priest suitable to officiate before God on behalf of sinful mankind. In simplistic beauty, the writer now pulls together the salient features of what he presented, painting a final portrait of Christ's great priesthood.

His Person: Christ is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens" (v. 26). *Holy* (Greek, *hosios*) speaks of the innate purity of Christ's character. He is "harmless" (guileless) or free from malice and deceit of any kind. He is "undefiled," free from any moral impurity. He is "separate from sinners"; though He ate and drank with sinners, Christ never sinned. He "has become higher than the heavens." Christ has entered into God's presence, being enthroned in the highest place of honor and power. His character makes Him a fitting High Priest to meet humanity's needs.

His Provision: Christ "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" (v. 27). Aaronic priests *continually* had to offer sacrifices for themselves and others because the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin (Heb. 10:4). In

contrast, Christ did not have to offer a sacrifice for His own sins, for He is sinless. Yet for the sins of mankind He offered Himself, once for all, as a blood sacrifice to expiate sins. His sacrifice makes Him a fitting High Priest to meet all the needs of mankind.

His Perpetual Priesthood: "For 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" (7:28).

To persuade Jewish believers of Christ's sovereign priesthood, the writer pulled together the threads of all he had previously stated, contrasting the two priesthoods. Aaronic priests were ordained under the Law, but Christ's perfect priesthood is since the Law (cf. Ps. 110:4), showing that He superseded them. Aaronic priests were ordained by the Law, but Christ was ordained by "the word of the oath, which came after the law" (Heb. 7:28). The Aaronic priests had infirmities (weakness of the flesh), but Christ is perfect. They served only during their lifetimes, but Jesus Christ the Son is a Priest forever. Christ's consecration as High Priest is perfect and permanent in every detail and will continue eternally.

With great enthusiasm, the author shouted, "We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb. 8:1).

Friend, Jesus is an unchangeable High Priest who offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin once for all. He is an ever-living Priest whom we will someday see face to face and enjoy throughout eternity, a Priest who is able to save to the uttermost and is seated at God's right hand, making intercession on our behalf. With the apostle Peter we exclaim, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:68).

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