

THE EPISTLES TO THE HEBREWS

HEBREWS 4:14-10:18, THE SUPERIORITY OF THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

- A. An outline of Hebrews (to be finalized at completion of Hebrews study)
1. The superiority of the person of Christ (1:1-4:13)
 - a. Christ has the superior message (1:1-2a)
 - b. Christ is the superior person (1:2b-3)
 - c. Christ is superior to angels (1:4-2:18)
 - d. Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-4:13)
 2. The superiority of the priesthood of Christ (4:14-7:28)
 - a. A superior confession (4:14-16)
 - b. Superior qualifications (5:1-10)
 - c. A warning to keep moving forward (5:11-6:20)
 - 1) A dangerous spiritual condition (5:11-14)
 - 2) A call to spiritual maturity (6:1-12)
 - a) An encouragement to become mature (6:1-3)
 - b) A warning concerning apostasy (6:4-8)
 - c) An encouraging prospect (6:9-12)
 - d) Encouragement from God's promises (6:13-20)
 - d. The superior priestly ministry of Christ (7:1-10:18)
 - 1) Christ is the superior priest (7:1-28)
 - a) The priesthood of Melchizedek (7:1-10)
 - b) The superior priesthood of Jesus (7:11-28)
- B. Review of Hebrews 7:1-10
1. The purpose of Hebrews 7 is not that we learn about Melchizedek but that through him we learn more about Jesus.
 2. Jesus is the righteous King who gives peace and our forever High Priest selected by God the Father .
 3. William L. Lane, *It is only in the perspective of the eternal Son that the "eternal" character of Melchizedek and his priesthood becomes evident. Melchizedek bears the eternal character of the Son, but it is the Son who remains primary. Accordingly, christology, and not speculation, is the determining factor in the portrayal of Melchizedek in 7:1-10.*
- C. Introductory comments on Hebrews 7:11-28
1. Ray Stedman, *This section asserts unequivocally that the death and resurrection of Jesus has introduced a new and permanent priesthood that brings the Levitical priesthood to an end and, with it, the demise of the law of Moses.*
 2. Warren Wiersbe, *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."*
 3. Douglas Mangum, *As the priest like Melchizedek, Jesus is the guarantor of a new and better covenant, which will be the focus of chapter 8.*

HEBREWS 7:1-10:18, THE SUPERIOR MINISTRY OF CHRIST (7:1-10:18)

HEBREWS 7:11-28, THE SUPERIOR PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS

- A. The inferior Levitical priesthood (11-14)
1. In ministry (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?*
 - a. *Now if*
 - 1) *Now if* means, *then, therefore.*
 - 2) It introduces a rhetorical question and answer - perfection was not attained through the Levitical priesthood.
 - b. *perfection*
 - 1) In Greek, *perfection* means *perfection.*
 - 2) William L. Lane, *This term (perfection), which occurs only here in Hebrews, poses for the first time the concept of perfection as applied to the people of God, rather than to Christ.*
 - 3) The purpose of the Levitical priesthood was to represent man to God by providing a means for humanity to draw near to God but the sacrifices could not atone for sin.
 - 4) R. Kent Hughes, . . . *some assume "perfection" here means "completeness in relation to God." But actually the meaning here is more specialized and means "to put someone in the position in which he can come, or stand, before God" —access to God. Note the same meaning in verse 19.*
 - 5) William L. Lane, *The old Levitical system could not enable the worshiper to approach God because its sacrifices were impotent . . .*
 - 6) Note the following verses.
 - a) Hebrews 9:9b, . . . *gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper,*
 - b) Hebrews 10:1, *For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.*
 - c. *for under it the people received the law*
 - 1) The Law was tied to the Levitical priesthood and with the change of priesthood there was a change concerning Law.
 - 2) This statement is addressed by the writer in verse 12.
 - d. The priesthood of Aaron was replaced by one who alone could make perfection attainable.
 - 1) Thomas Constable, *If the Levitical priesthood had been adequate, the Messiah would have functioned as a Levitical priest.*
 - 2) H. D. M. Spence, *The new thought is that the very mention in the psalm of a different order of priesthood implies that the old order, and with it the whole legal dispensation which depended on it, was imperfect and to be superseded.*
 - 3) William L. Lane, *The writer denies that perfection could be achieved through the Levitical system, as Silva remarks, "not because there was anything intrinsically wrong with it, but because in the divine arrangement it was designed as a shadow, anticipating the substance.*
 - 4) R. Kent Hughes, *The problem, of course, was the radical holiness of God and the radical sinfulness of man—a dilemma which the Old Covenant was powerless to reconcile. . . The Levitical sacrifices covered over sin, but they did not remove it. Hebrews later will tell us, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (10:4), and "Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins" (10:11).*
 - 5) F. F. Bruce, *The whole apparatus of worship associated with sacrifice and ritual and priesthood was calculated rather to keep men at a distance from God than to bring them near.*

- d. *another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek*
 - 1) Psalm 110:4 was God's promise that the Messiah would be a priest after the order of Melchizedek.
 - 2) Raymond Brown, *If the ministry of the Levitical or Aaronic priesthood had been spiritually effective, it would have been quite unnecessary for God to have sent another priest after Melchizedek's order rather than Levi's.*
 - 3) William L. Lane, . . . *the fulfillment of the promises of the new covenant in the priestly ministry of Christ makes possible an access to God and relationship with him that was not possible under the former covenant.*
 - 4) William Barclay, *On his cross, Jesus made the perfect sacrifice which atones for sin. Fear is gone; sin is conquered; the way to God is open to all.*
 - e) Benefits of the New Covenant through *another priest after the order of Melchizedek* as seen in Jeremiah 31:33-34, *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*"
 - 1) Atonement - 1 Peter 2:24, *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*
 - 2) Eternal life - John 11:25, *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,*
 - 3) Clear conscience - Hebrews 9:14, *how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*
 - 4) Access to God - John 14:6, *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*
2. In Law (12), ***For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.***
- a. Zane Hodges, *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.*
 - b. Consider Paul's affirmation that there was a change in the Law, Romans 6:14, *For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*
 - c. R. Kent Hughes, *Christ, our Melchizedekian priest, tells us that he did not destroy the Law but fulfilled it (Matthew 5:17). He lived out its every requirement. And now in place of the old external principle, he brings a new internal principle. Because of this we have perfection—access.*
 - d. William Barclay, *The whole paraphernalia of the ceremonial law was wiped out in the priesthood of Jesus.*
 - e. Ray Stedman, *It is important to note in verses 11–12 that the law was originally given to support the priesthood, not the other way around. The priesthood and the tabernacle with its sacrifices were the means God employed to render the sinful people acceptable to himself. They constituted the shadow of Jesus in the Old Testament. Then the law was given with its sharp demands to awaken the people to their true condition so that they might avail themselves of the sacrifices.*
3. In lineage (13-14), ***For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.***
- a. *The priest after the order of Melchizedek*
 - 1) Jesus was not from the line of the Levitical priests.
 - 2) The break between the Levitical priesthood and the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek is evidenced by a break from the priestly lineage.
 - 3) William L. Lane, *The significance of this fact is indicated in v 13b: no one from this tribe ever officiated at the altar . . .*
 - 4) Raymond Brown, *The necessary authentication for Christ's priesthood is not a legal requirement like physical membership of a specified tribe, but his vindication and attestation by God at his resurrection.*

- b. Jesus is the One descended from the line of Judah.
 - 1) Genesis 49:10, *The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.*
 - 2) Zane Hodges, *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.*
 - 3) William L. Lane, *The tribe of Judah was not appointed to priestly service . . . the priesthood of Jesus does not depend on physical descent but on a radically new arrangement.*
 - 4) Donald Hagner, *Moses here, of course, refers to the Pentateuch.*
 - 5) Ray Stedman, . . . it is plain that the present priesthood of Jesus does not rest on Moses or his law. It is the ultimate provision for dealing with human sin and weakness toward which the Levitical priesthood and law pointed.
 - 6) R. Kent Hughes, *The profound inadequacy of the old priesthood was further emphasized by the fact that the new had nothing to do with the old Aaronic priesthood . . . the insistence that Jesus, from the tribe of Judah, was a priest was shocking to the Hebrew ear. It was, in fact, illegal . . . This careful distancing of the Melchizedekian priesthood from the Levitical system, along with showing the new priest to be Messianic, was meant to be a warning to those in the beleaguered Jewish church to not turn back to Judaism and to not mix Old Testament priestly ritual with their Christianity.*

B The superior priesthood of Jesus (15-25)

1. He has an indestructible life (15-17)
 - a. He is a priest not based on lineage but on never-ending life (15-16), ***This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.***
 - 1) The writer emphasizes the point made in verses 13-14, that the new priestly system is not based on a legal requirement of a certain lineage.
 - 2) The new system is based on the *power of an indestructible life*.
 - a) *Indestructible means endless, eternal life, one that can't be brought to an end.*
 - b) Raymond Brown, *By the power of an indestructible life he lives eternally and can thus serve as our effective and only mediator, a priest for ever.*
 - c) William L. Lane, *The power of life that the resurrection conferred upon Jesus demonstrated that his priesthood is not limited by the temporal, transitory character of the old priesthood based on physical descent; it is undergirded by a power that overcame mortality and corruption, and consequently is beyond the reach of mortality and corruption.*
 - d) R. Kent Hughes, . . . *this new priest (Christ), like Melchizedek, has one grand qualification, which is not external but internal—"the power of an indestructible life" (v. 16b). This does not mean that he never died. It means that our priest died a death that could not hold him—a death that was followed by resurrection! . . . Thus, the resurrection not only declared Jesus to be the Son (Romans 1:4), but it also marks the inauguration of Christ as our high priest.*
 - b. God the Father witnessed to Jesus' never-ending priesthood (17), ***For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."***
 - 1) The witness concerning Jesus was by God the Father.
 - 2) Zane Hodges, *Psalm 110:4 was here quoted again to show that such an unending life is an inherent part of the order of Melchizedek.*
 - 3) Ray Stedman, *All the limitations created by sinful humanity are removed and a perfect priest now serves who works effectually and lives forever.*
 - 4) Douglas Mangum, *The author just compared the temporality of the priesthood based on a law of fleshly requirement with the abiding, imperishable priesthood of Jesus. He then quotes from the psalm as the foundation of this claim. He will continue expounding on the verse from the psalm in the following paragraph as well.*

2. He alone draws people to God (18-19)
 - a. The Law was set aside because its purpose was imperfect (18-19a), *For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect);*
 - 1) *For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside*
 - a) The writer of Hebrews will explain why the Law was set aside.
 - b) *Set aside means annulment.*
 - 1] William L. Lane, *The use of a legal term in v 18 is appropriate to the argument, which concerns the law.*
 - 2] Warren Wiersbe, *The annulling . . . of the Law meant the abolishing of the priesthood. But nobody can annul "the power of an endless life!"*
 - 2) The Law could not accomplish what is needed.
 - a) He declared that it was *weak and useless.*
 - 1] Romans 8:3, *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,*
 - 2] Galatians 4:9, *But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?*
 - 3] Hebrews 9:9b, *According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper,*
 - 4] Hebrews 10:1, *For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.*
 - 5] Acts 13:39, *and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.*
 - 6] Donald Hagner, . . . *the law had a proper role to play before the fulfillment brought by the Christ, once that fulfillment has been realized, the law is outmoded and hence useless.*
 - b) It could not make sinners perfect.
 - 1] Thomas Constable, *He (God) has replaced the old system with a system that can do what the old one could not do, namely, bring us into intimate relationship with God.*
 - 2] Zane Hodges, *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.*
 - 3] James Moffatt, *The uselessness of the Law lay in its failure to secure an adequate forgiveness of sins, without which a real access or fellowship was impossible . . .*
 - 4] Ray Stedman, *Sometimes the personal faith of the offerer did see beyond the animal blood to the promised sacrifice which God would offer. David evidently saw this for he cries to God, "You do not delight in [animal] sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings" (Ps 51:16).*
 - b. Jesus is the way to God (19b), *but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.*
 - 1) *but on the other hand*
 - a) This looks back to verse 18, *For on the one hand*
 - b) The writer is emphasizing the difference between the priesthood that was set aside and the priesthood that accomplish what people need.
 - 2) *A better hope*
 - a) This *better hope* has come through a priest *after the order of Melchizedek.*
 - b) William L. Lane, *The Levitical priesthood and law have been superseded by the new and "better hope" based on the superior quality of the new priest . . . Through this "better hope" the new people of God have secured the assurance of a quality of access to and a relationship with God that were not possible under the Levitical institution.*
 - c) Simon Kistemaker, *Through his unique sacrifice he [Jesus] fulfilled the responsibilities of the Aaronic priesthood, and through his endless life he assumes the priesthood in the order of Melchizedek."*
 - d) Charles Spurgeon, *If God had ever meant that this covenant should be temporary He would never have given His Son to bleed and die as the substance of that covenant.*

- 3) *draw near to God.*
 - a) Hebrews 4:16, *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*
 - b) Thomas Constable, *He has replaced the old system with a system that can do what the old one could not do, namely, bring us into intimate relationship with God.*
 - c) Raymond Brown, *The saving work of Christ has introduced a better hope and it is by this way, and this way alone, that we draw near to God.*
 - d) David Brown, *The access through the legal sacrifices was only symbolical and through the medium of a priest; that through Christ is immediate, perfect, and spiritual.*
 - e) R. Kent Hughes, *Today, perfection—access—is ours through Jesus Christ. The veil has been sundered, inviting us to the Holy of Holies. Let us come with joyful boldness to our constant priest and Savior and Lord!*
 - f) William Barclay, *On his cross, Jesus made the perfect sacrifice which atones for sin. Fear is gone; sin is conquered; the way to God is open to all.*
 - g) Warren Wiersbe, *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.*

To be continued, Lord willing.

3. He has a better covenant based on an oath (20-22)
 - a. Jesus' priesthood was made by an oath (20a), ***And it was not without an oath.***
 - b. Levitical priests became priests without an oath (20b), ***For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath,***
 - c. God made the oath which was recorded in Scripture (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.'"***
 - d. Jesus guarantees a better covenant (22), ***This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.***
4. He has a never-ending priesthood (23-25)
 - a. There were many Levitical priests because they died and had to be replaced (23), ***The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office,***
 - b. Jesus is a priest forever because He lives forever (24), ***but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.***
 - c. Jesus saves forever those who come to faith in Him alone because He lives forever (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.***
5. He has a superior sacrifice (26-28)
 - a. It is based on His person (26), ***For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.***
 - 1) Levitical priests offered animal sacrifices but Jesus sacrificed Himself.
 - b. It was the sacrifice of Himself (27), ***He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.***
 - c. It was a better appointment made by an oath (28), ***For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.***

CONCLUSION
