

JESUS CHRIST IS THE GREATER HIGH PRIEST: THE WAY TO GOD IS NOW CHANGED FOREVER

HEBREWS 07:01–24

Introduction

How does a man approach God? This is the great question of the ages. Why? Because man is sinful and imperfect and God is perfect. Sin and imperfection do not honour God: they dishonour Him. Therefore, the great question of the ages is, how can we approach God? There is only one way: someone has to stand before God for man. Man has to have some person who is perfect and acceptable to God and who will represent man before God. Is there such a person — such a perfect mediator and priest? This is the purpose of the present passage: to show the inadequacy of earthly priests and the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus Christ. No earthly priest ever has been or ever will be perfect. No earthly priest has ever been able to do anything perfectly or to bring perfection to man. Jesus Christ is the only perfect and acceptable Priest who has ever lived. He alone can represent men before God. But how can this be proven? How can men be convinced that the priests of earthly religion, including the Jewish Levitical priesthood, are inadequate and unacceptable to God? How can the priesthood of Jesus Christ be shown to be superior?

There has never been a more religious people than the Jews, God's very own ancient people. Therefore, if the priesthood of Jesus Christ can be shown to be superior to the Jewish Levitical priesthood, His superiority over all earthly priests should be acknowledged. Jesus Christ has changed forever the priesthood of men; He has changed forever the way men are to approach God.

This is the purpose of the present passage, to show the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, how Jesus Christ has changed the priesthood of men forever. The priesthood of Jesus Christ is superior to the Levitical or Jewish priesthood. And in a most interesting way, this is shown by way of illustration. A story is taken from the Old Testament to illustrate the fact, a story involving Abraham and a king and priest named Melchizedek. Some enemies had attacked Abraham and his people, and Abraham had fought and won the victory. Then seemingly out of nowhere Melchizedek, the priest of God, appeared and refreshed Abraham, giving him bread and wine. In appreciation and thankfulness to God for the victory and for sending the priest to him, Abraham gave Melchizedek ten percent of all the spoils. This is the story — all there is to it. But it is full of meaning as will be seen here in chapter seven.

If time allows, it is suggested that this whole outline be preached and taught in one session to keep from losing the thought and meaning of the passage. *Jesus Christ is the greater High Priest — the way to God is now changed forever.*

- I. The change of our approach to God is illustrated in the historical event of Melchizedek (v. 1-3).
- II. The change of our approach to God is seen in the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood (v. 4-10).
- III. The change of our approach to God is seen in Jesus Christ (v. 11-24).

I. *Hebrews 07:01–03 Priesthood of Melchizedek*

The change of our approach to God is illustrated by the priesthood of Melchizedek. Note the historical events of Melchizedek. Four significant facts are mentioned.

1. Melchizedek was the king of Salem which was probably Jerusalem (cp. Psa. 76:2).
=> *His name Melchizedek means king of righteousness.*
=> His realm of rule, Salem or Jerusalem, means king of peace.
=> Remember: earthly Jerusalem is a type of the heavenly Jerusalem, that is, of heaven itself (Heb. 11:10; Rev. 21:1f).
2. Melchizedek was a priest of the most high God, of the living and true God.
3. Melchizedek was paid tithes by Abraham himself, the very first man to whom God gave His great promise. It happened when Abraham was returning from battle. Almost out of nowhere Melchizedek appeared and refreshed and blessed Abraham by giving him bread and wine and pronouncing a blessing upon him. As a result Abraham gave a tenth of his spoils to the priest in appreciation to God. The significance is this: Abraham, who was to give birth to the priesthood of God's people, paid tithes to a much greater priest, Melchizedek. Remember: Abraham was the father of Levi, the Levi who was to be the first High Priest of Israel and who was to give his name "Levi" to the *Levitical priest*.
4. Melchizedek was an eternal priest just like the Son of God. How can it be said that he was eternal? Because so far as men know, he had no genealogy. There was no record of his roots whatsoever, and this was most unusual. In that day and time it was important for a priest to have a record of his genealogy. If he had no record of a priestly genealogy, he could not serve as a priest. The point is this: there is no record in Scripture of Melchizedek's roots; therefore, he stands as a type of the eternal priest who was to be sent into the world by God, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

Heb 7:3 Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.

As William Barclay says:

"In the old Genesis story Melchizedek is a strange and almost eerie figure. He arrives out of the blue; there is nothing about his life, his birth, his death or his descent. He simply arrives. He gives Abraham bread and wine, which to us,

reading the passage in the light of what we know, sounds so sacramental. He blesses Abraham. And then he vanishes from the stage of history with the same unexplained suddenness as he arrived upon it. There is little wonder that in the mystery of this story the writer to the Hebrews found a type and forecast and symbol of Christ” (The Letter to the Hebrews, p. 75).

II. Hebrews 07:04–10 The Priesthood of Melchizedek

The change of our approach to God is seen in the superiority of Melchizedek priesthood. Just think how great he was.

1. First, why is Melchizedek a greater priest than other earthly priests (the Levitical priests)? Because Abraham paid tithes to him (v. 4). Abraham gave him a tenth of the spoils he had taken in battle. Therefore, Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, which means he must be greater than the priests of Israel, for they trace their roots from Abraham.
2. Second, why is Melchizedek a greater priest than other earthly priests (the Levitical priests)? Because he had a special right to the priesthood (vs. 5-6).
=> His priesthood was not based upon the legal priesthood of the Levites who received tithes according to the law. He was paid tithes because of his greatness, out of Abraham’s heart of appreciation and thankfulness to God.
=> His priesthood was not based upon human roots and genealogy. So far as is known from Scripture, he did not come from an organized priesthood. He did not descend from earthly priests.
3. Third, why is Melchizedek a greater priest than other earthly priests (the Levitical priests)? Because he blessed Abraham. As great as Abraham was, he recognized the superiority of Melchizedek and gladly received his blessing. And without dispute, the less is blessed by the greater. Remember: the legal priesthood (the Levitical priests) was in the bosom of Abraham.
4. Fourth, why is Melchizedek a greater priest than other earthly priests (the Levitical priests)? Because as far as the record of Scripture is concerned, he was not mortal but eternal. Here on earth men who receive tithes die, but Melchizedek received tithes and it is never witnessed or recorded that he died. Therefore, he is the picture of an eternal priest, a far greater priest than any earthly priest.
5. Fifth, why is Melchizedek a greater priest than other earthly priests (the Levitical priesthood)? Because all priests also tithed to him. How could priests who were not yet born be said to have paid tithes to Melchizedek? In Biblical times a man’s descendants were considered to be in his bosom. Therefore when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, his great grandson Levi and all his priestly descendants were represented through Abraham. They, too, paid tithes to Melchizedek. Therefore, Melchizedek was a greater priest than the earthly priests of Levi.

Now remember why all this is being written:

- => to show that men are no longer to approach God through an earthly priesthood and priest.
- => to show that there is a greater priesthood than that of earthly priests.
- => to show that earthly religion and earthly priests are inadequate in representing man before God
- => to show that God has provided a perfect and eternal Priest to represent man before Him.
- => to show that the imperfect priesthood of man has been changed; there is now a perfect and an eternal priesthood.

Remember also the points of the illustration of Melchizedek and Abraham. Abraham represented the earthly or Levitical priesthood of the most religious people who ever lived, the Jews. Melchizedek represented the perfect and eternal priesthood, and in representing the eternal priesthood, he pointed toward the priesthood of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. With these basic facts in mind, we are now ready to look at how Jesus Christ has changed our approach to God — at how Jesus Christ is the perfect and eternal Priest who represents man before God.

III. *Hebrews 07:11–24 Jesus Christ, the Perfect High Priest*

The change of our approach to God is seen in Jesus Christ. He is the perfect and eternal High Priest. Note seven changes in the priesthood that have been wrought by God.

1. There has been a change in the way man seeks perfection, in the way man seeks to become acceptable to God (v. 11). Man has always sought perfection through religion. Man has always sought God through religion, sought to become acceptable to God through religion. Man has used religion to become good enough and perfect enough for God to accept him. And within religion three things have been developed to help man in his search for fellowship with God.
 - => First, there is the law. So long as a person keeps the law, he is thought to be acceptable to God. But if he breaks the law, he is unacceptable to God. And it is this that is the problem, for the thinking and honest man knows that no person can perfectly keep the law. Therefore no person can ever be acceptable to God — not perfectly, not permanently, not forever.
 - => Second, there is the sacrifice for sins. When a person sins, he is guilty; therefore, some sacrifice has to be made for his sins. There has to be a substitute who will bear the person's sins and the guilt for them. There has to be a substitute who will pay the penalty for the person's sins.
 - => Third, there is the priesthood. There has to be some person who will teach the law and demand obedience to it, and then when man fails, who will offer sacrifice to God for

man. There has to be a priest who is acceptable to God and who can stand as a Mediator between God and man. There has to be a priest who can make God accept sinful man.

Now, note verse 11. It says clearly that the earthly or Levitical priesthood could not bring perfection to man. The earthly priests who arose from Aaron just could not make man perfect. If they could have, then there would not have been the need for a priest who was perfect and eternal to arise from the priesthood of Melchizedek. Remember: Melchizedek is a priest of the perfect and eternal priesthood, and God promised to send a priest in the order of Melchizedek — a perfect and eternal priest (Heb. 6:20). If an earthly priest could make man perfect before God, there would never have been a need for God to make that promise. But there is a need; no matter how often we seek God through earthly priests and ministers, they do not make us perfect. Man desperately needs a perfect and eternal priest. This is the reason God promised the perfect and eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ.

2. There has been a change in the law, and note: the change is said to be an absolute necessity (v. 12). Why? Because the whole ministry of the priesthood has to be changed. That is, the law itself in all its ministry and sacrificial system has to be changed. Why? Because the law cannot make man perfect. No matter how much man tries to keep the law, he fails. And no matter how many sacrifices the priest makes for man, they fail to make man perfect. Why? Because both the priest and the sacrifice are imperfect and mortal. Therefore, everything the priest does is imperfect and mortal. He, an imperfect and mortal priest, handles imperfect and mortal sacrifices. Therefore, his whole ministry is imperfect and mortal. His ministry leaves man imperfect and mortal. He does not make man perfect and eternal; he does not make man acceptable to God. Therefore, there has to be a change in the law, in the way man seeks perfection. There has to be change in the law and legal system of the priesthood. Again, this is the reason God promised a priest forever in the Lord Jesus Christ, a priesthood in the order of the perfect and eternal priesthood of Melchizedek.
3. There has been a change in the origin of the priesthood (v. 13-14). By law the earthly priests had to come from the tribe and roots of Levi. But Jesus Christ, the Person of whom these things are being said, did not come from Levi. He came from the tribe of Judah, and no priest ever came from Judah. Therefore, the priesthood of Jesus Christ belongs to a different order entirely. It does not belong to a human or earthly origin. Jesus Christ is a perfect and eternal priest in the order of Melchizedek.
4. There has been a change in the very qualifications of the priesthood (v. 15-17). Men became priests because they met the qualifications of carnal or earthly laws and rules. They were appointed because they met the legal requirements of the law. But not Christ. He was appointed to be the great High Priest because of His endless life. His “life and immortality which He had in himself were his right and title to the priesthood” (Mathew Henry. *Mathew Henry’s Commentary*, Vol. 6, p. 919).

The law knew that men were frail and weak, corruptible and dying; hence, even the priests chosen to represent men before God were frail, weak, corruptible and dying. Therefore, the law laid it down that the priesthood should pass on to the oldest sons. But note: not a single priest — not even all the priests of every generation combined — could give life to a single person. But this is not true with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a High Priest because of His endless life. He is perfect and eternal; He has an endless life — the very perfection for which men seek. Therefore, He is qualified to be the Supreme High Priest for man.

5. There has been a change in the way man draws near to God (v. 18-19). Note that the law has been disannulled and cancelled. Why? As shown above in point one, man has always sought to draw near God by law, that is, by being as good as he could and by keeping enough laws to become acceptable to God. But the law is weak and useless because man is weak and sinful. He does not and cannot keep the law; therefore, the law cannot make him perfect and acceptable to God. In fact all the law can do is show man that he is sinful. Every time man looks at the law and is honest, all he sees is that he comes short and is sinful. Therefore, men cannot approach and become acceptable to God by law. If man is to ever become acceptable to God, it has to be by some way other than law. This is the reason the law has been disannulled and cancelled.

But note: If we cannot become acceptable to God by keeping the law and by being as good as we can, how then can we be saved? Is there any way to become acceptable to God? YES — a thousand times *YES!* God has brought a better hope for man, and it is by this hope that we draw near God. What is that hope? It is the hope for the perfect and eternal High Priest...

- for the High Priest who can offer the perfect and eternal sacrifice for our sins.
- for the High Priest who can present us to God and cause God to accept us.

That High Priest, of course, is Jesus Christ. He is the perfect and eternal priest who is in the order of Melchizedek.

6. There has been a change in the guarantee and covenant of the priesthood. God's Word is enough. If God had just spoken the Word of promise — if He had just promised to send the perfect and eternal High Priest to men — that would have been enough. But God did more. He swore that He would fulfil His promise. This is very significant. It means that the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ shall be exactly as God said it would be. The priesthood of Jesus Christ is doubly sure, for God both promised the perfect and eternal priest and then swore that he would send Him into the world. Note the word *change*. God will never change His mind: Jesus Christ shall remain High Priest forever (cp. Psa. 110:4; Heb. 3:1). God has sworn that He will be a priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Note one other fact: this means that Jesus Christ is *the guarantee of a better covenant*. The old covenant was the law, and as has been seen above, the law never could make

man perfect. But now God has given a better covenant to man, the new covenant that is based upon the love and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. Under the old covenant, men did all they could to approach God by law, being as good as they could. But now, under the new covenant, men approach God through the love and the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ for them. When a person accepts the death of Jesus Christ as the sacrifice for his sins, God accepts the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the man's sin. God takes the person's acceptance of Christ — the person's faith in the sacrifice of Christ — and counts him as having already died in Christ. God counts the man as being free of sin. This is the love of God, the love of the new covenant.

John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

Rom 5:8 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

1 Pet 2:24 *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

Note this fact: the new covenant is guaranteed. God will accept any person who *truly accepts* the sacrifice of Christ as his own sacrifice. God will forgive his sins because he believes — casts himself — upon the sacrifice of Christ. Jesus Christ was made the surety, the guarantee of a better covenant. What more could man ask of God?

7. There had to be a change in the number of priests. Very simply, every priest among men died. The priesthood was always changing. And most tragic of all: the fact that they died meant that they could not give life to men. They did not know how to keep men from dying, not even themselves. They did not know how to change the dying process. They could not make men perfect and acceptable to God — could not deliver men into a perfect and eternal state before God. But note what Scripture declares:

Heb 7:24 *But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.*

Jesus Christ lives forever; He has an *indestructible life* (v. 16). He is the perfect and eternal priest, the indestructible priest who lives forever. Therefore, He can carry men before God forever. His priesthood never changes; He is the unchangeable Priest who can represent men before God throughout all eternity. He makes men acceptable to God forever and ever.

Heb 2:17 *For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*

Heb 4:14-15 *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.*

Heb 6:20 *Where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*

Heb 7:25-26 *Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our need — one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.*

Heb 8:1 *The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.*

Heb 10:19-22 *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ■*