

The Book of Hebrews

מְאֹנְשׁ מִנְמָה דָא מִנְהָת אַקְלָא
צְמַאַלְלָא נְתַחְצְרָה דְרַחְסָנָה סָקָה
אַחֲרַ פְּקָלָא תְּסִנְ סְרְבָּאַלְלָה
רַרְתָּא סָקָה תְּאַקְסָנָה דְמַמָּצָה
תְּאַתְּפָלָשָׁה נְתַרְדְּנָה הַרְפָּרָה נְרַלְדָה
תְּאַגְּשָׁה רַלְדָה מְלַלְצָה סָסָה תְּלָשָׁה



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Outline of Hebrews

“Jesus is Better”

- I. Jesus Is Better Than the OT Prophets (1:1-4)
- II. Jesus Is Better Than the Angels (1:5-2:18)
- III. Jesus Is Better Than Moses (3:1-4:13)
- IV. Jesus’ Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)**

Outline of Hebrews

IV. Jesus' Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)

- A. Jesus Is a Compassionate But Sinless High Priest (4:14-16)
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- C. Jesus Is Better – Don't Apostatize (5:11-6:20)
- D. Jesus Is a Priest After the Order of Melchizedek (7:1-28)
- E. The New Covenant Mediated By Jesus Is Better than the Old Covenant (8:1-13)
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Outline of Hebrews

D. Jesus Is a Priest After the Order of Melchizedek (7:1-28)

1. Melchizedek Is Superior to Levi (7:1-10)
2. The Obsolescence of the Levitical Priesthood and Mosaic Law (7:11-16)
3. The Stunning Announcement of Psalm 110 and It's Implications (7:17-28)

The Obsolescence of the Levitical Priesthood and Mosaic Law (7:11-16)

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? 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. 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.

The Obsolescence of the Levitical Priesthood and Mosaic Law (7:11-16)

- In the section of the letter that we're covering today, the author of Hebrews reaches the ***pinnacle*** of his argument for the appointment of the Son as a ***superior high priest*** after the order of Melchizedek.
- The author began his ***introduction*** of Jesus' Melchizedekian high priesthood in [Heb 5:1–10](#).
- In that section, he alluded ***two times*** to [Psalm 110:4](#), which says:
 - *The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest ***forever*** after the order of Melchizedek.”*

The Obsolescence of the Levitical Priesthood and Mosaic Law (7:11-16)

- Then, after some warning and encouragement to his readers in [Heb 5:11-6:20](#), the author used the account of Abraham and Melchizedek in [Genesis 14:18-20](#) to demonstrate the *superiority* of Melchizedek over the Levitical priests, as we saw last week in [Heb 7:1-10](#).
- Now, as we begin looking at [Heb 7:11-16](#), we see the author *once again* bringing [Psalm 110:4](#) to the forefront, as he *continues* arguing for the superiority of Jesus, as our Melchizedekian high priest.

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?

- Heb 7:11–12, are perhaps the ***two most important*** *verses* in the entire letter, and perhaps the most important ***clause*** is the one in parentheses, though it is often overlooked.
- *“Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood... (We’ll skip the parentheses for now.) what further need would there have been for another priest to arise ...”*
- In other words, if the ***ultimate*** revelation about how priesthood would work came with Levi and the Mosaic code, if that was the ***high point***, then why is there need for ***another*** priest to come *“after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron”*?

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?

- Though the author doesn't yet **explicitly** mention it (yet), the assumptions **behind** what he is saying here is based on **Psalm 110**, a Davidic psalm written almost half a millennium after Moses and the law.
- In Psalm 110, **God** talks about a priesthood "*after the order of Melchizedek*" – and yet the **law of Moses** says you mustn't have priests from any other tribe but **Levi**.
- If you're not allowed to have any other priests than priests from **Levi**, and now in Psalm 110 **God himself** is announcing some priests "*after the order of Melchizedek*", **in principle** you're announcing the **obsolescence** of the Levitical priesthood.

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?

- Now go back to the parenthetical clause in verse 11. This is stunning: “*Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (**for under it the people received the law**)....*” Do you see what he’s saying here?
- What the author is saying here is ***precisely*** how most Christians today do ***not*** look at the law.
- Most Christians today think of the law as basically ***moral***.
- Then we’ve got these ***ceremonial*** and ***civil*** parts that are attached.
- But now that Jesus has come, we can detach the ceremonial and civil parts of the law because we’ve still got the central “moral” part of the law.
- But that’s ***not*** how the author of Hebrews sees it ***at all!***

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?

- The writer of Hebrews sees that more **foundational** than **anything** is the **priestly structure**, and, he says, the entire law covenant was given on the **basis** of the priestly structure. Do you see that?
- When you stop to think about it, if you just read through Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, where is most of the attention put? On an exposition of Exodus 20 and the Ten Commandments? I don't think so.
- It's on the priestly garments. It's on what you do on Yom Kippur. It's on what you do on this festival and that festival. It's on what kind of animal skins you use to build the tabernacle, and on and on and on.

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?

- The great burden of the entire Mosaic code is deeply **priestly**, and on the basis of this priestly function, the whole law covenant was given.
- That's what the text says in the parenthesis of verse 11: *under [the Levitical priesthood] the people received the law*

¹² *For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.*

- What **conclusion** does the author draw from this? Look at verse 12: If, in fact, the law came out of the Levitical priesthood, then if you then change the priesthood, you **have** to change the **whole thing – including** the law covenant. You don't have any choice!
- It's not a question of lopping off the inconvenient "ceremonial parts" of the law, because, based on what the author of Hebrews is telling us **here**, those so-called "ceremonial parts" (which consist in large part of things related to the Levitical priesthood) lie at the **heart** of the entire Mosaic covenant.
- So when there is "*a change in the priesthood*", there must **also** be "*a change in the law* ." "*Law*" here refers to the law covenant, i.e., the whole Mosaic Law.

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.*

- Verse 13 begins with the word “*for*” – a **connecting** word that lets us know that the author is about to draw **further conclusion** from the things he has just said – a conclusion pertaining to the priesthood of Jesus.
- So he says: “*the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe...*”
- Both the author of Hebrews and his readers know that Psalm 110 applies to Jesus, and they know Jesus comes from the tribe of Judah and “*no one*” from that tribe “*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.*”

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.*

- The words “***This becomes even more evident***” introduce verse 15. **What** has become more evident?
- That God has ***unmistakably*** communicated that a ***new*** priesthood has arrived, and therefore the ***old*** Levitical priesthood is ***no longer applicable***.
- The readers of the letter were not facing an ambiguous, complex situation where they could legitimately claim that perhaps the Levitical system was the best option for them.
- The ***superiority*** of the Melchizedekian priesthood and the ***obsolescence*** of the Levitical priesthood are plain to see, for God has now fulfilled – as the resurrection of Jesus makes especially evident – his promise (in Psalm 110:4) to bring in a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

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.

- The word “*arises*” is probably a play on words so that it refers not only to Jesus appearing on the scene as a priest, but also to his resurrection.
- The author continues to explain why Jesus’s priesthood is ***superior*** and ***permanent***, while the Levitical arrangement was ***inferior*** and ***temporary***.
- Levitical priests served “*on the basis of a legal requirement*” – the NIV does a good job of capturing the author’s intent here when it says that Jesus was not appointed “*on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry...*”
- No intrinsic virtue qualified someone to be a Levitical priest. All a person needed to become a Levitical priest was the right family tree, the appropriate genealogical roots.

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.

- Jesus' priesthood, however, was of a radically ***different*** nature.
- He didn't qualify as priest by virtue of his genealogy. In fact, he ***failed*** the genealogical test, for he was clearly ***not*** from the tribe of Levi.
- Jesus didn't merely meet an external legal requirement. He became a priest by "***the power of an indestructible life.***"
- ***All*** Levitical priests ***die***, but Jesus is a priest who has triumphed over death ***forever*** by his resurrection.
- His life will ***never*** be brought to an end. Surely such a priesthood is superior to one where death leads to an endless ***succession*** of priests.

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.

- The whole Levitical system is now **obsolete** – you no longer need priest, who replaces a previous priest, who replaced an earlier one, who replaced a still earlier one. You don't need that.
- You've got one who now has a genuine **endless life**. After all, isn't that what that great messianic text said, "*You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*"
- So the author is arguing here that when you put together the **only two passages** that actually **explicitly** mention Melchizedek, then the later one (Psalm 110), whatever else it does (he's going to mention some more things later on), because it comes **after** the inauguration of the Levitical priesthood, it renders that priesthood obsolete in principle.

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- And if the **priesthood** is rendered obsolete, then the **law covenant** is obsolete as well, because verses 11–12 say that it's on the basis of the priesthood that the entire thing hangs together.
- That's very strong language. But it's no stronger than what you get in the **next** chapter.
- In the next chapter, Jesus is presented as the high priest of a **new covenant**, and the author begins in Heb 8:8 by quoting Jer 31:31 :
 - *Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah..."*
- And then the inference is drawn in verse 13:
 - *In speaking of a **new covenant**, he makes the first one **obsolete**.*

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.

- I hope you can see from what we have read in our text this morning, this is a very clear passage that makes very strong point that, if understood rightly, will come as a theological shock to most modern conservative evangelicals.
- D.A. Carson puts it this way: *Now no matter what position you approach this text from, you simply have to stick that in your systemic structure and smoke it. That's what the text says. If you can't say that the Mosaic law covenant is obsolete... then you're not very biblical. That's what the text says.*

Class Discussion Time



*Class Discussion Time

- We have focused this morning on the argument presented by the writer of Hebrews. It should not come as a surprise to you that **other** New Testament writers make many of the same points, though put in a slightly different way.
- The Apostle Paul, for example, makes this comment:
 - *To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though **not being myself under the law**) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but **under the law of Christ**) that I might win those outside the law.*
(1Cor 9:20-21)
- Can you see how Paul's comment here meshes well with the theological idea expressed by the author of Hebrews that the entire Mosaic system is now obsolete – the Mosaic Law covenant and the Levitical priesthood upon which it is deeply dependent.
- As such, Paul no longer considered himself to be under “*the law*” of Moses, but instead, “*under the law of Christ*”.

*Class Discussion Time

- Can you see how this view of the Mosaic law is antithetical to what is taught by many modern conservative evangelicals who try to justify the fact that there are parts of the law that we all agree we should not longer keep by breaking the Law into three parts and throwing away two of them (something the *scriptures never* do) rather than realizing that the *entire* Mosaic law is now *obsolete*, having been *replaced* by an entirely *new law*, which the apostle Paul refers to as “*the law of Christ*”.
- Does this view that we have seen presented by the author of Hebrews this morning makes sense to you? Do the ideas we have looked at this morning make you think that there are perhaps aspects of your previously held views in this area that may need to be adjusted?