

The High Priest Forever

Heb 7:1-3, 18-28

SS Lesson for 10/23/2016

Devotional Scripture: Ps 110

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson helps us to realize that Jesus is **The High Priest Forever**. The study's aim is to understand that Jesus is eternal and that we have a relationship between His eternity and our salvation. The study's application is to grow in confidence in the security of our salvation.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Heb 7:24-25

24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Here begins the longest single expository passage in the epistle. Its very length suggests its importance. Its theme is the core theme of Hebrews. The real resource of the readership, in the midst of their pressures, is the high priesthood of Christ. They must realize the greatness of that priesthood, its superiority to the Levitical institutions, and the perfect access they have to it on the basis of Christ's death. The writer returned to the theme he had introduced in 5:1-10, but which he doubted his readers would comprehend (cf. 5:11). In the conclusion of his most recent warning (5:11-6:20) he had renewed the subject of the Melchizedek priesthood (6:19-20). The exposition of that theme is now given.

7:1-3. To begin with, the writer set forth the personal greatness of the Old Testament figure **Melchizedek**. As a fit prototype for Christ Himself, Melchizedek was both a **king and a priest**. He both **blessed... Abraham** and received his tithes. Melchizedek's name and title suggest the messianic attributes of **righteousness and peace**. So far as the Old Testament record is concerned, he was **without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life**. In saying this, the author is often taken to mean that the silence of the inspired record presents Melchizedek as typologically **like the Son of God**. But though this is possibly true, the statements do not sound like it, particularly the assertion that Melchizedek **remains a priest forever**. The word "forever" translates a phrase (*eis to diēnekēs*) that occurs only in Hebrews (here and in 10:12, 14) and means "continuously" or "uninterruptedly." It seems more natural that the author meant that Melchizedek belonged to an order in which there was no end to the priesthood of those engaged in it. (He later said in 7:8 that Melchizedek "is declared to be living.") If this is correct, Melchizedek may have been an angelic being who reigned for a time at Salem (i.e., Jerusalem). If so, the statement that he was "without beginning of days" would not mean that he was eternal, but simply that he had a pretemporal origin. Nor would this concept of Melchizedek as an angel elevate him to the same level as God's Son, since the author painstakingly asserted the Son's superiority to the angels (1:5-14). There is indeed evidence that, at Qumran, Melchizedek was regarded as an angelic personage. If this is the case in Hebrews, then the Son of God is the *High Priest* in an order in which Melchizedek is simply a priest.

7:4-10. The personal superiority of Melchizedek over the patriarch Abraham is guaranteed by the fact that **Abraham gave him a 10th of the plunder**. And though Melchizedek had no connections with the Levitical order, still he both received this tithe from **Abraham and blessed him**. This act of blessing reinforced his superiority to the patriarch. Moreover, he was evidently superior to the Levites as well, who

collected tithes but were nonetheless subject to death. By contrast the tithe collected from Abraham was collected **by him who is declared to be living**. Furthermore, in a sense Levi paid the tithe **through Abraham because... Levi was still in the body of his ancestor**. The original expression, rendered **one might even say**, probably means something like “so to speak.” The writer knew that Levi did not literally pay tithes to Melchizedek, but on the principle that an ancestor is greater than his descendants, Abraham’s act affirmed Melchizedek’s superiority even to the Levitical priests themselves. Melchizedek thus has a greatness which the Old Testament record clearly attests. Having established Melchizedek’s greatness both personally and in comparison with Abraham and Levi, the writer was ready for a new point. This superiority was needed, since the Law was superseded. The inadequacy of the legal and Levitical systems had to be replaced by something better.

7:11-12. In the simplest manner, the author argued for the imperfection of **the Levitical priesthood** on the basis of God’s promise (recorded in Ps. 110:4) that a new Priest would arise belonging to an order other than Aaron’s. 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. Here the writer virtually affirmed the Pauline truth that “you are not under Law” (Rom. 6:14), though he approached it from a different angle.

7:13-14. 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.

7:15-19. A further proof (**and what we have said is even more clear**) is found in the consideration that the new Priest has **an indestructible (akatalytou) life**. Psalm 110:4 was here quoted again to show that such an unending life is an inherent part of the order of Melchizedek. (The author probably had this text in mind when he made the statement about Melchizedek in Heb. 7:8.) Thus the new Priest does not hold His office **on the basis of a regulation as to His ancestry**. This rendering freely translates the original which is more nearly represented by the words “not after the Law of a carnal commandment.” The writer seems to mean that the Law which regulated the priestly institution and succession was “carnal” or “fleshly,” not in the sense of being evil, but in the sense that it pertained to people of flesh who died. But this **former regulation** has been replaced because of its inherent weakness and uselessness. What has replaced it is the new priesthood which constitutes **a better hope... by which we draw near to God**. 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. If, as the author has shown, Melchizedek was greater than Levi (vv. 4-10) and the new priesthood necessarily abrogates the old (vv. 11-19), then the new Priest has to be greater than the Levitical priests.

7:20-22. The priesthood of Christ differs dramatically from the Levitical priesthood in that it was instituted **with an oath**. By contrast, the descendants of Aaron assumed their jobs **without any oath**. The writer then quoted again the divine oath of Psalm 110:4 whose very solemnity argues for the superiority of the new Priest, who was majestically inducted into His role. Moreover, **because of this oath, Jesus became the guarantee (engyos, used only here in the NT) of a better covenant**. In His own person, Jesus assured the superiority of the new order over the old because His oath secured His permanent installation in the priestly office.

7:23-25. No Old Testament priest ever functioned in this permanent way, **since** all were subject to **death**. But the **permanent priesthood** of Jesus gives Him the capacity to carry His saving work to completion. When the writer asserted that **He is able to save completely**, he continued to have in mind the salvation-inheritance first referred to in 1:14. The readers were to hold fast to their professions of faith and to continue numbering themselves among **those who come to God through Him**, knowing that He can see them through every trial and difficulty right to the end of the road **because He always lives to intercede for them**. In saying this, the author reverted again to a truth he had already enunciated (4:14-16) where he had invited the readers to avail themselves boldly of the mercy and grace accessible to them through Jesus’ priesthood. As they did so, they would find that their Captain and High Priest could get the job done! He could lead them victoriously into the glory of the many sons. In this way He saves “completely.”

7:26-28. After all, He is the kind of **High Priest** who **meets our need**. His character is utterly without blemish and He has been **exalted above the heavens**. Consequently too, He had no need like the Levitical priests **to offer sacrifices day after day, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people**. At first sight verses 27-28 seem to refer to the ritual of the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16), but that was yearly, not “day after day.” Probably these verses telescope that ritual with the regular sacrificial routine. There seems to be some evidence from Jewish tradition that a high priest was thought to offer daily sacrifice, and the stipulations of Leviticus 6:12-13 may refer to him. In any case the new Priest had no need either for sacrifices for Himself or for repeated sacrifices for others. His one act of self-offering was definitive and

sufficient. Of this more will be said in Hebrews 9 and 10. Here the author was content to conclude that, in contrast with the Levitical priests, the Son is a perfected High Priest. The reference to the fact that He **has been made perfect forever recalls 5:8-10**. The sufferings of the Son, here referred to as His sacrificial offering of Himself **once for all** (*ephapax*, cf. 9:12; 10:10; also cf. *hapax*, “once” in 9:26, 28), are what have constituted Him “perfect” for His role in God’s presence where He intercedes for His followers. Thus **the Law appointed as high priests those who were weak, but the oath, which came after the Law, appointed** this kind of Priest. Accordingly the readers could go to Him at all times, fully confident of His capacity to serve their every need.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The Lord of the Rings trilogy, published in the mid-1950s, is a classic story of the victory of virtue and providence over the power of evil. A mysterious ring, which proves to be an instrument of evil, falls into the possession of a humble hobbit named Frodo. He learns that the ring must be destroyed at the mountain where it was forged, and he sets out with friends on a journey that proves to be momentous and dangerous. Early in their journey, the travelers are rescued by Tom Bombadil. He is a powerful and enigmatic character, but he shows the weary hobbits rich hospitality and provides wise counsel for their perilous journey. Similarly, the enigmatic Melchizedek appears on the scene of Old Testament history to render aid to a virtuous person who is on a journey, namely Abraham (Genesis 14:18-24). Tom Bombadil is fictional, but Melchizedek was real.

Melchizedek appears in the Old Testament only in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110. These passages note his considerable status, but otherwise give very little information about him. As a result, the identity of Melchizedek has been the subject of speculation. Some Jewish scholars propose that he was a visitation of Enoch, a man who had “walked faithfully with God” (Genesis 5:22, 24). Others suggest that Melchizedek was the angel Michael, the defender of God’s people (Daniel 12:1). Some Christian scholars, for their part, propose that Melchizedek was actually a theophany (a visual manifestation of God). But if Melchizedek’s presence and ministry in Canaan as “priest of God Most High” (14:18) was part of why God called Abraham to settle in that land (12:1), then such theories should be set aside. The opening “this Melchizedek” of today’s text picks up on the closing verses of chapter 6. There the writer focuses (1) on the oath by which God confirmed his promise to Abraham as support for our hope of salvation and (2) on the work of Jesus as our “high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” By this the writer is not indicating the existence of a continuing priestly order led by Melchizedek. The idea is that of a special category rather than of an established institution.

Psalm 110 looks forward to the Messiah and the deliverance he will bring about. The importance the New Testament writers assign to this psalm is revealed by its 10 quotations and 14 allusions in the Gospels, Acts, the letters of Paul, and the letter to the Hebrews. Psalm 110:4 affirms that “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.’” The writer of Hebrews repeatedly points to this divine decree in calling the reader to remain faithful to Christ (Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:17-20; 7:11-17, 21). Melchizedek, whose genealogy and death are not recorded in Scripture, is a type of Christ—Christ who continues to minister to us as king and high priest by “the power of an indestructible life” (7:16). The phrase type of Christ recognizes that the New Testament writers use a technique known as typology to draw on patterns from the Old Testament to understand aspects of the era of the new covenant. One example is that of Adam, described by Paul as “a pattern [type] of the one to come” (Romans 5:14).

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Jesus Priest of God (Heb 7:1-3)

- 1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him,
- 2 to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated “king of righteousness,” and then also king of Salem, meaning “king of peace,”
- 3 without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.

Priest of God deserving of Tithes (1-2)

Giving of tithes purposely and cheerfully (2 Cor 9:7)

7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Giving of tithes by setting it aside for consistent giving (1 Cor 16:1-2)

16 Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

Giving of tithes that honors God (Prov 3:9)

9 Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops;

Giving of tithes that are offered to God (Lev 2:12)

12 You may bring them to the Lord as an offering of the firstfruits, but they are not to be offered on the altar as a pleasing aroma.

Giving of tithes that come from what God has given (Deut 26:1-2)

26 When you have entered the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it, 2 take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the Lord your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name

Giving of tithes to the Church (Mal 3:10)

10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.

Giving of tithes that come from abundance to supply the lacking of others (2 Cor 8:14)

14 At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality,

Priest of God with no beginning or end (3)

Eternal because He is the Rock (Isa 26:4)

4 Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal.

Eternal because He is the true God and eternal King (Jer 10:10)

10 But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King. When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath.

Eternal because as King, His dominion endures forever (Dan 4:3)

3 How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.

Eternal because His ways are eternal (Hab 3:6)

6 He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed. His ways are eternal.

Eternal because He has eternal power (Rom 1:20)

20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Eternal because He is the eternal God (Rom 16:25-27)

25 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him— 27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Eternal because He is the eternal Spirit (Heb 9:14)

14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Jesus Priest By Divine Oath (Heb 7:18-22)

18 For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, 19 for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. 20 And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath 21 (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: "The Lord has sworn And will not relent, 'You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek' "), 22 by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.

Oath of better hope (18-19)

Better hope because God called us into it (Eph 4:4)

4 There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called

Better hope because God is faithful (Heb 10:23)

23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Better hope because that is what faith is all about (Heb 11:1)

11 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Better hope because God has regenerated us into a living hope (1 Peter 1:3)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Better hope because of belief in God (1 Peter 1:21)

21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Oath of better covenant (20-22)

Better covenant that was introduced through Jesus' blood (1 Cor 11:23-26)

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Better covenant that is mediated by Jesus (Heb 9:13-15)

13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! 15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

Better covenant that was illustrated by the two women of Hagar and Sarah (Gal 4:21-31)

21 Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. 23 His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. 24 These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. 25 Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. 27 For it is written: "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." 28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. 30 But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." 31 Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

Better covenant that is made in the hearts and mind (Heb 10:15-18)

15 The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: 16 "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." 17 Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." 18 And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

Better covenant that is eternal (Ps 105:8-10)

8 He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, 9 the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. 10 He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant:

Jesus' High Priestly Greatness (Heb 7:23-28)

23 Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing.
24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.
25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.
26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;
27 who 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.
28 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.

Greatness in intercession (23-25)

Greatness in intercession because Jesus is at the right hand of God (Rom 8:34)

34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Greatness in intercession because Jesus asked for the Holy Spirit for us (John 14:16)

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—

Greatness in intercession because Jesus is the great mediator (1 Tim 2:5)

5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

Greatness in intercession because Jesus appears for us in God's presence (Heb 9:24)

24 For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.

Greatness in character (26)

Greatness in character because He is majestic in holiness (Ex 15:11)

11 "Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you — majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?

Greatness in character because He declares Himself holy (Lev 11:44)

44 I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground.

Greatness in character because He is above all (Ps 99:2-3)

2 Great is the Lord in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations. 3 Let them praise your great and awesome name — he is holy.

Greatness in character because He is holy in His calling (1 Peter 1:15)

15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;

Greatness in character because He is holy in His righteousness (1 John 1:5)

5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

Greatness in power (27-28)

Greatness in power because of His great majesty (Ex 15:6-7)

6 "Your right hand, O Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy. 7 In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you. You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble.

Greatness in power because He is great and awesome (Deut 7:21)

21 Do not be terrified by them, for the Lord your God, who is among you, is a great and awesome God.

Greatness in power because He is known (Ps 62:11-12)

11 One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, 12 and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.

Greatness in power because He causes His enemies to cringe (Ps 66:3)

3 Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you.

Greatness in power because He is mighty (Ps 147:5)

5 Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Summation and Transition (Hebrews 7:18-19)

18 On the one hand a former command is set aside because it is weak and useless, 19 for the law made nothing perfect. On the other hand a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God (Hebrews 7:18-19).

Here our author gives two reasons why it was necessary to replace both the law and the Levitical priesthood. The first reason is set forth in verse 18 and the first half of verse 19: the law was not able to perfect anything. It was unable to fulfill God's covenant promise to Abraham and his descendants. It was unable to fulfill the Davidic Covenant. It was unable to draw men near to God. At best, it established boundaries to keep men from getting too close to God, and dying as a result.

The second reason why the law and the priesthood must be replaced is that a better hope has been introduced (I take it by Psalm 110:4), and by this means – the priesthood of our Lord Jesus, after the order of Melchizedek – we have a better hope, and we can thus draw near to God. So, to sum it up, the law and the Aaronic priesthood needed to be replaced because the law failed to draw men near to God, and the new priesthood would do so. The Old is inferior and inadequate; the new is better because it does perfect (draw men near to God).

A Better Covenant and a Better Priesthood Replaces the Old (Hebrews 7:20-25)

20 And since this was not done without a sworn affirmation - for the others have become priests without a sworn affirmation, 21 but Jesus did so with a sworn affirmation by the one who said to him, "***The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever'***" - 22 accordingly Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. 23 And the others who became priests were numerous, because death prevented them from continuing in office, 24 but he holds his priesthood permanently since he lives forever. 25 So he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them (Hebrews 7:20-25).

These words take me back to chapter 6, where we read:

16 For people swear by something greater than themselves, and the oath serves as a confirmation to end all dispute. 17 In the same way God wanted to demonstrate more clearly to the heirs of the promise that his purpose was unchangeable, and so he intervened with an oath, 18 **so that we who have found refuge in him may find strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us through two unchangeable things, since it is impossible for God to lie** (Hebrews 6:16-18, emphasis mine).

In my mind, we have now come to the second thing our author has in mind which is guaranteed by God's oath. *The first is the Abrahamic Covenant, which God swore to Abraham with an oath (6:13-15). The second is the oath God swore to the Son in Psalm 110 concerning His priesthood after the order of Melchizedek:*

4 **The Lord makes this promise on oath and will not revoke it:**

"You are an eternal priest after the pattern of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4, emphasis mine).

As the author points out, this oath regarding Christ's priesthood was confirmed by God's oath. This was not the case with the priesthood under the Old Covenant, for those priests were selected on the basis of their genealogy. Not so with the Lord Jesus. The oath God swore made this new order of priesthood certain and changeless (7:20-22).

The new order of priesthood will have but one priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, because He lives forever. This is a far cry from the old order of Aaronic priests. Over Israel's history, there were many such high priests, and for a very simple reason – they all died, and thus they were replaced by another high priest. Our Lord is, and will continue to be, our Great High Priest *forever*. And so He is able to save those who draw near to Him forever.

But how does the fact that He lives forever assure us that He is able to save us forever? I believe that the author is referring to His ability to initially save us through His atoning death on the cross of Calvary, as well as His on-going preservation of the saints through His continual intercession for us as our Great High Priest.

It works something like this. When I go to the computer store to purchase a new hard drive for my computer, the store sells it to me. And when I go to the checkout counter to pay for it, I am certain that this person will attempt to sell me a kind of add-on warranty. If I pay a little more money, the store guarantees that if the hard drive fails within the warranty period, they will exchange it on the spot when I return the defective part. In a similar way, I enter into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ by faith when I trust in Him for the forgiveness of my sins and the gift of eternal life. But I also realize (soon, if not immediately) that I will still sin. It is His high priestly ministry on my behalf that assures me that the salvation I initially experienced will be secure forever. This is because my salvation depends upon Christ, and He lives forever, to save and to keep everyone who draws near to God by faith in Him.⁷

Conclusion

Let us begin by summing up what the author has told us in our text. The author has shown us the weakness of the Aaronic priesthood and the law, which were not able to perfect us by drawing us near to God in an intimate relationship. Indeed, rather than draw us near to God by removing the offense of our sin, the law served to expose our sin.

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20 For *no one is declared righteous before him* by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:19-20).

Instead of drawing us near to God, the Aaronic priesthood and the law placed barriers between sinners and God, so that they would not be destroyed.

10 The Lord said to Moses, “Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and make them wash their clothes 11 and be ready for the third day, for on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12 **You must set boundaries for the people all around, saying, ‘Take heed to yourselves not to go up on the mountain nor touch its edge. Whoever touches the mountain will surely be put to death!’**” (Exodus 19:10-12, emphasis mine)

20 The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain, and the Lord summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. 21 The Lord said to Moses, “**Go down and solemnly warn the people, lest they force their way through to the Lord to look, and many of them perish.** 22 Let the priests also, who approach the Lord, sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break through against them” (Exodus 19:20-22, emphasis mine).

3 Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go up among you, for you are a stiff-necked people, and I might destroy you on the way” (Exodus 33:3).

The priesthood was composed of a limited number of men who would stand before God on behalf of the many. Thus, the priests were able to draw nearer to God than the multitudes. But even the priests were restricted in their access to God. So, too, with the high priest, for he was permitted to enter into the holy of holies only once a year.

When the people possessed the Promised Land, the temple was built and men could approach God, but only through the priesthood, and still the holy of holies was accessible only to the high priest once a year. And remember that the Israelites did not all live in or near Jerusalem. Most Israelites lived at a distance from Jerusalem. Three times a year the men of the nation were required to appear in Jerusalem for one of the three feasts.⁸ This is not anything like the intimate fellowship we can have with God through the Lord Jesus on a daily, moment-by-moment, basis.

And so, as our author has shown, while the Old Covenant and the Aaronic priesthood provided a means whereby men could enter into a relationship with God, it was weak and powerless to enable sinners to draw near to God in intimate and constant fellowship with Him. Thus, a New Covenant and a new priesthood were required by the weaknesses of the Old (covenant and priesthood).

What application did all this have to the original readers of this Epistle to the Hebrews? We know that they were Jewish Christians who had trusted in Jesus as the promised Messiah. By now² they had either withdrawn from Judaism or had been cast out by unbelieving Jews. But some were tempted to fall back into their old practices and beliefs, especially as persecution loomed on the horizon. So what did our text mean to this audience?

I was teaching a Bible study in the Gospel of John this past week, and I came across these verses in chapter 12:

31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” 33 (Now he said this to indicate clearly what kind of death he was going to die.) 34 Then the crowd responded, **“We have heard from the law that *the Christ will remain forever. How can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’?*”** Who is this Son of Man?” 35 Jesus replied, “The light is with you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. 36 While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become sons of light.” When Jesus had said these things, he went away and hid himself from them (John 12:31-36, emphasis mine).

42 Nevertheless, even among the rulers many believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they would not confess Jesus to be the Christ, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue. 43 For they loved praise from men more than praise from God (John 12:42-43).

I found it very interesting that when the people in Jerusalem heard Jesus speak about being **“lifted up,”** they (rightly) understood Him to be speaking of His death.¹⁰ They understood the Scriptures to teach that the Christ would live forever, and thus they struggled with Jesus’ words concerning His death. My point here is that they expected Messiah to live forever, and they much preferred this to a Messiah who merely died (as did the Aaronic priests).

In verses 42 and 43, we find another indication of the tremendous pressure the unbelieving Pharisees exerted on those who believed in Jesus. They had such power that they were able to silence some of the Jewish rulers (folks like Nicodemus – see John 7:45-53). No wonder some of the Hebrews were considering falling away from their profession of faith in Jesus as Messiah.

Our text very plainly points out the weakness of the Old Covenant and of the Aaronic priesthood. It could not perfect men by enabling them to draw near to God in intimate fellowship. It could not deliver them from sin, but could only expose them as sinners. The New Covenant and the new priesthood, however, are able to perfect men. Men and women can experience the forgiveness of sin, and thus they can draw near to God through Christ’s priestly work. To fall back into Judaism, then, was to fall away from what is superior and to settle for what is inferior. It is to fall back from Him who can save and keep to a system that can neither save nor keep. No wonder falling back is seen as such a serious matter.

So, having considered the application of our text to its first readers, what does this text have to say to Christians today? First, we should appreciate how privileged we are to live under the New Covenant, and to have the Lord Jesus Christ as our Great High Priest. We have it so much better than the ancient people of God who lived under the Old Covenant. We can draw near at any time, without fear or hesitation. And all of this is made possible by our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ. He atoned for our sins on the cross of Calvary, and He continually intercedes on our behalf with the Father. He saves and He keeps His own.

Our text underscores the absolute and complete sufficiency of the Lord Jesus. We need nothing else than that which He has accomplished and that which He continues to provide. The “old” is not better; it is inferior. We need to draw near to God and to persevere in the faith, confident in the person and work of Jesus. We need to recognize that falling back to the old is really falling away, and that it has dire consequences.

For most of us, the temptation is not to fall back into Judaism. Our temptation is to trust in some “priest” or some system of rules, rather than Jesus. If Jesus is our Great High Priest, then we dare not seek to follow any other priest. The Corinthian saints seemed to be following men, rather than Jesus.¹¹ Sometimes, in the name of discipleship or mentoring, we are tempted to place too much trust in men, rather than in our Great High Priest. Discipleship and mentoring can be a wonderful thing, but not if it puts men before our Great High Priest. We need most of all to draw near to Him, to seek His wisdom and His guidance. Godly mentors and disciplers will always point us to Jesus, and not to themselves. John the Baptist is surely our model in this regard:

25 Now a dispute came about between some of John’s disciples and a certain Jew concerning ceremonial washing. 26 So they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, the one who was with you on the other side of the Jordan River, about whom you testified – see, he is baptizing, and everyone is flocking to him!” 27 John replied, “No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven. 28 You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but rather, ‘I have been sent before him.’ 29 The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly when he

hears the bridegroom's voice. This then is my joy, and it is complete. 30 He must become more important while I become less important." 31 The one who comes from above is superior to all. The one who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is superior to all (John 3:25-31).

So, too, with counselors and shepherds. Those of us who are elders understand that we are to shepherd the flock of God, but we are to do this as "under shepherds" (1 Peter 5:1-5). We are not to usurp the preeminence, glory, or authority of our Lord. In secular psychiatry and counseling (and in some Christian versions of this as well), counselors have become the "high priests" of our age. People confess their sins to their counselors, and not to Christ, or to those they have wronged. Counseling can be a wonderful blessing, but let us always remember that Christ is our Great High Priest, and no man should dare to take His place in the life of the Christian. To Him be the glory!

(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/good-great-better-priest-and-better-covenant-hebrews-711-25>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Surely there was no one in Abraham's day (about 2000 BC) who anticipated that Melchizedek's dual positions as king and priest foreshadowed those two roles of the Messiah to come! But that foreshadowing and its implications are precisely what the book of Hebrews establishes. Times of affliction and the discouragement they bring may make us feel far from God, unable to communicate with him. Job certainly felt this way during his time of suffering as he lamented, "[God] is not a mere mortal like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court. If only there were someone to mediate between us, someone to bring us together" (Job 9:32, 33). Job depicts a mediator, one who stands between two others and attempts to reconcile them. Job longed for a mediator, for someone who was able to speak directly to God on Job's behalf. God has answered that longing in Christ, our high priest who offered the once-for-all-time sacrifice and who always intercedes for us with God. As Paul reminded Timothy, "There is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

The long section of Hebrews dealing with the high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ makes numerous comparisons between the priests of Israel and the priesthood of Christ. In the context of our text, the author was making the point that there were many priests in Israel (Heb. 7:23). It is the high priests that are in view here. It is true that there was only one high priest at a time. Through the years, however, many different men served as high priest. This was simply because they were all human beings, and humans eventually die. As each high priest died, he was replaced by another, and so it continued through the centuries. Jesus Christ, however, continues forever; that is, He does not die. Thus, "the author contrasts the Levitical priesthood with the person of Jesus. What a contrast when we look at Jesus! The priests were many; Jesus is the only priest. Their term of office was limited by death; 'Jesus lives forever.' The Aaronic high priest was overcome by death; Jesus conquered death" (Kistemaker, Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Baker). Because He continues forever, Christ's priesthood is unchangeable. Every earthly high priest had a successor, and some high priests no doubt were held in higher regard than others. "No misgivings could be entertained with regard to the high priesthood of Christ, however. He would never have to hand it over to someone less well qualified to discharge its mediatorial functions. Those who entrusted their cause to Him knew therefore that it was permanently secure in His hands" (Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, Eerdmans). Israel's priests served an important role in God's plan for His chosen people. But their service as priests was limited by their own humanity. They were mortals, and they were sinners, and they could not do what our Great High Priest does. The Old Testament priesthood was designed to point people to the Saviour, but the priests could not save people. Jesus Christ can save sinners, and He saves them "to the uttermost" (Heb. 7:25). This means that He saves them completely, or the emphasis could be that it is for all time. Perhaps both ideas are present here. The ones our High Priest saves are those who come to God by Him. Salvation is only through faith in Christ. Jesus said, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). The great assurance we have is that when we do come to God through Christ— God the Son—we are saved completely. We are in the all-powerful hands of our Great High Priest, and we are secure there because He lives forever and He forever intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). Our salvation, our assurance, our hope, and our confidence rest not in ourselves or any other fallible and limited human being but in Jesus Christ, the God-Man, our Great High Priest. He saved us. Because He continually intercedes for us, He will bring our salvation to completion.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. Abraham blessed the one who was greater, just as we should bless the Lord (Heb. 7:1)
2. As the High Priest, Jesus is also the King of righteousness and peace like Melchizedek (vs. 2)
3. Melchizedek's origin and end are not recorded, which points to Jesus, who has no beginning or end (vs. 3)
4. Jesus is the ultimate guarantee that the new covenant will succeed (vss. 19-22)
5. Jesus is able to be our Priest forever and our Saviour because He never dies (vss. 23-25)
6. Jesus' one perfect sacrifice covers all our sin (vss. 26-28)