The Supremacy of The Son of God

Studies in Hebrews

27) Superior High Priest (part 3) Heb. 7:11-19

**Hebrews 7:11-19** Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? 12 For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. 13 For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar.

14 For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. 15 And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest 16 who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. 17 For He testifies:

“You are a priest forever

According to the order of Melchizedek.”

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.

**Outlines:**

A. Christ is **Superior to the Prophets** (1:1-3)

B. Christ is **Superior to the Angels** (1:4–2:18)

C. Christ is **Superior to Moses** (3:1–4:16)

            D. Christ is **Superior to Aaron** (5:1-10:18)

1. **Superior High Priest** (5:1-7-28)

a. The Priesthood of Aaron vs Christ (5:1-10)

Third Warning: Don’t Degenerate (5:11–6:20)

b. Christ is a superior high priest in comparison to Aaron’s (7:1-28)

1) Because Christ’s priesthood is of a **greater** order 1-10

- Melchizedek is a type of Christ 1-3

- Melchizedek greater than Aaron 4-10

2) Christ’s priesthood of a **different** order 11-19646

- The insufficiency of the levitical priesthood v11-12

-  A better High priest is announced v13-17

\*  negatively: Not like Aaron 13-14

\*  Positively:  Like Melchizedek 15-17

- The sufficiency of the new priesthood 18-19

3) Superior because of the divine oath 20-22

4) Superior because of its permanence 23-25

5) Superior because of who Jesus is 26-28

2. **Superior Priesthood** (8:1-10:18)

The main purpose of 7:11–19 is to substantiate the insufficiency of the Levitical priesthood and the system based on it. The fact that Ps 110:4 proclaimed the appointment of a different kind of priest implied an essential weakness in the existing order. the Levitical system has been replaced by a better hope is the demonstration that Christ is a priest of superior quality “like Melchizedek” and that this exaltation signals the inauguration of the better priesthood announced in the psalm citation (vv 16–19).647

**The insufficiency of the levitical priesthood v11-12**

v11-12 **Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? 12 For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.**

In an attempt to indicate more particularly the inadequacy of the Levitical priesthood, the writer specifies its inability to secure τελείωσις, “perfection.” This term poses for the first time the concept of perfection as applied to the people of God, rather than to Christ (2:10, 5:9)648

The “Levitical priesthood” did not bring “perfection” (v. 11). When the author uses the term perfection he is not speaking of moral perfection. The Greek word means “to complete, bring to its goal, consummate.” The precise sense must be determined by usage, and a clue to the author’s usage is found in 7:19. In contrasting the old and new priesthoods, he says, “The Law (the Aaronic priesthood in particular) made nothing perfect,” but under the Melchizedekian priesthood we may “draw near to God.” Through the new priesthood of Melchizedek believers reach perfection (i.e., their goal) in a direct and lasting personal relationship with God. The Law (the old priesthood of Aaron) failed to remove the obstacle to free access to God, namely sin. The priesthood of Melchizedek is “better” (v. 22) because it gives the believer the freedom to approach God through the sacrifice of Christ. If the Levitical priesthood had removed sin and given people access to God, there would be no need of another kind of priest (v. 11). However, the Levitical priesthood had failed. This proves that the Melchizedekian priesthood was necessary.649

The statement that “the people received regulations concerning the Levitical priesthood” is basic to the argument of 11*c* and anticipates the premise expressed in v 12, that a change in the priesthood necessarily implies a change in the law.650 **The author says that the Law was received on the basis of the priesthood.** The Levitical priesthood was “the pillar upon which the Mosaic system rests” (Hewitt). Of necessity, then, when the Levitical priesthood was set aside the Mosaic Law must also have been set aside651.

**A better High priest is announced v13-17**

**\*  negatively: Not like Aaron 13-14**

V13-14 **For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.**

“these things are spoken” is a reference to Psalm 110:4. Just as Melchizedek proved to be ἀγενεαλόγητος, “without recorded [priestly] descent” (v 3*a*), the new priest lacks legal qualification. The significance of this fact is indicated in v 13*b*: no one from this tribe ever officiated at the altar (θυσιαστήριον, with reference to the altar of burnt offering in the inner forecourt of the tabernacle or temple; cf. Lev 16:7–9, 18). There was no precedent for priestly performance. In v 13 the writer is commenting on the wording of Ps 110:4, but he is clearly thinking of the prophecy as historically fulfilled in Jesus652.

v 14 enforces v 13 and verifies that the priesthood of Jesus does not depend on physical descent but on a radically new arrangement653.

**A better High priest is announced v13-17**

**\*  Positively:  Like Melchizedek 15-17**

v15-17 **And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest 16 who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. 17 For He testifies: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”**

“in the likeness of Melchizedek” The oracle has reference to a priest whose quality would be like Melchizedek as he is described in Gen 14:18–20 and in Ps 110:4. The promise was fulfilled in Christ who *is* actually what Melchizedek *was* symbolically, an eternal priest who exercises his priestly prerogatives in a nonlegal, universal ministration.654

v 16 “**who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment”**

The negative phrase here reflects on v 11, “**and not be called according to the order of Aaron?**” The law here (fleshly commandment) is perceived in terms of the ordinance regarding legal descent and certain standards of bodily qualification and ritual purity. Like Melchizedek, Christ could not have been declared a priest on the basis of the Mosaic law, where the priesthood was implicated with and dependent upon fleshly descent.655

“**but according to the power of an endless life.”**656

The positive description, “but by virtue of the power of an indestructible life,” further defines the corresponding expression in v 11, “**another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek,**”

In contrast to νόμος, “law,” δύναμις, “power,” in Hebrews connotes effectiveness.

The term ἀκατάλυτος, “indestructible,” which occurs elsewhere in the Greek Bible only in 4 Macc 10:11, appears to have been carefully chosen. It was well suited to acknowledge that although Jesus’ human life had been exposed to κατάλυσις, “destruction,” through crucifixion, his life was not destroyed by the death suffered on the cross. The phrase δύναμιν ζωῆς ἀκαταλύτου describes the new quality of life with which Jesus was endowed by virtue of his resurrection and exaltation to the heavenly world, where he was formally installed in his office as high priest

The characterization of “power” in v 16 by the qualitative genitives ζωῆς ἀκαταλύτου, “of indestructible life,” offers a striking definition of the meaning of the phrase εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, “forever,” in Ps 110:4, which is cited in v 17. It designates the eternity of the new priest from the perspective of his postresurrection existence. (cf. Hebrews 5:5-6)

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. The acknowledgment that Jesus is a priest “like Melchizedek” implies that he is priest by virtue of his resurrection

The emphasis of v 17 seems to be on the word **“forever”** in “you are a high priest forever.” Jesus was appointed high priest by the power of his unending, indestructible life thus he has fulfilled the symbolism in the eternality of Melchizedek.

**The sufficiency of the new priesthood 18-19**

v 18-19 **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**657**.**

The climax to the argument is expressed here in many ways:

1- By means of a contrast, introduced by the construction (“on the one hand … but on the other,” vv 18, 19*b*). This construction is enforces the expressions ἀθέτησις, “annulment,” and ἐπεισαγωγή, “introduction.” A former commandment has been declared invalid: a better hope has been introduced.

2- By replacing the word “changed” or “alteration” on v 12 with a stronger term “annulment,” where it assumes a technical legal sense for the annulment of a decree or the cancellation of a debt. That shows the dramatic change in God’s manner of relating to his people.

3- The descriptive term προαγούσης, “former, previous in time,” in the expression “former commandment,” is not incidental to the argument. It emphasis the total abrogation of the Old priesthood and the law associated with it.

in v 18, The author of Hebrews gives us 2 reasons why the Levitical law was annulled:

1- Because of its weakness:

Its “weakness” (ἀσθενής) inheres not in the law or its purpose, but in the people upon whom it depends for its accomplishment (cf. 4:15; 5:2; 7:28).

This resembles Romans 8:3-4 “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

2- Because of its ineffectiveness:

Its “uselessness” (ἀνωφελής) derives from the fact that the law regulated the approach to God in a cultic sense and was able to cleanse only externally (9:9–10, 13, 23; 10:14)

Because of both the weakness and uselessness of the law, the author of Hebrews concluded “**for the law made nothing perfect**” 19a i.e. “nothing was brought to its appointed end” which reflects on v 11 that there is no perfection through the law. The particular concern in v 19*a* is the failure to bring the people into a right relationship with God through the cleansing of the conscience or heart (cf. 9:14). The institutions of priesthood, sacrifice, and atonement were not able to achieve a definitive arrangement of the relationship to God.

The term κρείττων, “better,” is the characteristic word for the new redemptive arrangement in Hebrews (cf 7:22; 8:6; 9:23). The hope now extended to the people is better by virtue of its effectiveness, which is guaranteed by God’s fidelity (6:18; 10:23). It concerns what the law and its priesthood had failed to realize and could only point forward to in a symbolic way, namely, direct and lasting access to God. 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.

In Hebrews the “drawing near658” certainly has a future aspect (cf. 6:18–20), but it also occurs in the present and is indispensable for receiving help that is needed in a time of stress or crisis (cf. 4:16). The accent in the present passage falls upon the certainty of the “drawing near,” which is the legacy of the Christian as the result of the absolute effectiveness of the priesthood of Christ.