

Melchizedek's Priesthood Trumped Aaron's priesthood
Hebrews 7:15-19
Part Two

Let me ask this question. If we believe that on the other of side of this door God is waiting to bless us, and as long as we keep coming through that that door He will continue to bless us, would that belief or in other words that certain "hope" encourage us to enter through the door and to continuously enter that door? And I believe that the answer would have to be yes? Of course, such a belief or in other words "such a certain hope" would encourage us to enter through the door and to continuously enter through the door.

And what a beautiful thing that would be, for when we are in His presence we will be far better able to appreciate what we have been saved from and what we have been saved to, thus filling us with this wonderful sense of blessedness.

Now hopefully what I have just shared will come alive for us this morning as we return back to our study of Hebrews, which was written to a group of struggling Hebrews believers living in Rome who in the midst of a great persecution were actually considering returning back to Judaism. And what did the author choose to do in order to strengthen their faith so that they would not return to Judaism?

The author of Hebrews in seeking to strengthen their faith chose to focus on the superiority of Christ.

He began with emphasizing Christ's superiority over the Old Testament prophets, then he focused on Christ's superiority over the angels, then he focused on Christ's superiority over Moses and now he is presently, in our ongoing examination of this book, focusing on the superiority of Christ's priesthood over all other priesthoods. This section began in **Hebrews 4:14** and will continue all the way down in **Hebrews 10:18**. So, what have we seen so far?

In **Hebrews 4:14-16** the author introduced Christ's heavenly high priestly ministry, which he then pointed out in **Hebrews 5:1-10** was according to the order Melchizedek. This was followed by a warning section which extended

from **Hebrews 5:11-6:20**. And then after completing this warning section what did the author do next? The author returned back to the subject of Melchizedek, highlighting his greatness in **Hebrews 7:1-10**.

And why did he do this? He did this since both Melchizedek and his priesthood were Old Testament types of Christ, to demonstrate the far greater and fuller reality of Christ and His priesthood, which were the New Testament fulfillments of the Old Testament types.

So after this author highlighted the greatness of Melchizedek and his priesthood for the reason that I just stated, what then did he do?

The author in Hebrews 7:11-28 explained why it was necessary for Aaron's priesthood to be replaced by Christ's priesthood which was according to the order of Melchizedek. So why was it necessary? This is the question that we will continue to answer this morning.

First of all, as we saw last week, it was necessary because Aaron's priesthood could not bring about "perfection" (Hebrews 7:11-14).

And what was this "perfection" that Aaron's priesthood or in other words the Levitical system was unable to bring about? As I mentioned to you last week, the word "perfection" (TELEIOSIS) here, as elsewhere in Hebrews, does not mean "without flaws," but rather it has to do with "arriving at a desired end" or "reaching a particular goal."

So in this case what would have been the desired end or the particular goal that Aaron's priesthood was unable to achieve? The desired end or the specific goal that Aaron's priesthood was unable to achieve was making people acceptable to God in such a way that they gained personal access to God. Aaron's priesthood did not do this very well at all, in other words it was unable to bring about "perfection."

And of course this is very graphically demonstrated for us by the fact that under the Levitical system the only person who was ever able to gain access to the visible manifestation of God's presence in the Holy of Holies was the High priest and that was only once a year on the Day of Atonement.

So, what was the first reason that this author put forward to explain why it was necessary for Aaron's priesthood or in other words the Levitical system

to be replaced by Christ's priesthood, which was according to the order of Melchizedek? It was necessary because Aaron's priesthood could not bring about "**perfection.**"

So, what was another reason why it was necessary for Aaron's priesthood to be replaced by Christ's priesthood? It was necessary because its replacement brought about a "better hope" (Hebrews 7:15-19). This point was made by this author in **Hebrews 7:15-19**

So now let me read these verses for you and see if this is not so and this is what these verses say "**And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, (16) who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. (17) For it is attested of Him, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'** (18) For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (19) (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God." So based on these verses, can we say that the replacement of Aaron's priesthood with Christ's priesthood was necessary in order to provide a "**better hope**"? Yes, I believe we can. So let us now look more carefully at these verses and see if this is not so.

And we will begin with **verse 15**. And how does it begin? It begins with these words, "**And this is clearer still.**" This author at this point in time, using this phrase, was introducing further argumentation beyond what he had already introduced in **verses 12-14** to support what he had said earlier in **verse 11**, about the necessity of the Levitical priesthood having to be replaced by Christ's priesthood. But this time his argumentation will not be focused on highlighting the inherent weakness of the Levitical priesthood but on highlighting the inherent strength of Christ's priesthood as an explanation for why the replacement of the Levitical priesthood was so necessary. And this argumentation will go all the way down through **verse 19**. So now let us go back to **verse 15**.

So after this author introduced his intention to provide further argumentation beyond what he had already supplied in **verses 12-14** at the beginning of **verse 15** using the phrase, "**And this is clearer still,**" what did the author do next? He began to introduce his further argumentation, beginning with the

word “**if.**” And isn’t this exactly right? Look at the verse, how does it read? **“And this is clearer still, if ...”**

This word “**if**” can be understood in a number of different ways but here in this context I believe, the best way to understand this conditional “if” is as a factual “if” with the meaning of “since” (Hebrews 7:15).

So now let us now go back to **verse 15** but this time let us reread this verse with what I believe is this better understanding. And how would it read? It would read like this, **“And this is clearer still, since another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek.”**

This statement of fact in **verse 15**, that another priest of a totally kind has arisen, is in essence the same statement of fact, that this author introduced in **verse 11**. But this time this author will not be using this statement of fact to highlight the weakness of the Levitical priesthood, as he had in **verses 12-14** but rather he will be using this statement of fact to highlight the strength of Christ’s priesthood in **verses 16-19**.

But before we begin to examine these verses more carefully I believe it would be important for us to note the change that has occurred in how the author described Christ’s priesthood in **verse 11** over and against how he chose to describe Christ’s priesthood here in **verse 15**.

In **verse 11** he had chosen to describe priesthood as being **“according to the order of Melchizedek,”** but now here in **verse 15** he has chosen to describe His priesthood as **“according to the likeness of Melchizedek.”** Is this change in any way significant? I believe it is.

The significance of this change of wording from **“the order of Melchizedek”** to **“the likeness of Melchizedek”** should have hopefully made it clear to his readers that though Melchizedek’s priesthood was typologically similar to Christ’s priesthood it was not in fact Christ’s priesthood. It was only an Old Testament shadow of His priesthood that God was using to point people to its New Testament fulfillment, the far superior and totally unique priesthood of Christ.

So in what sense was the priesthood of Christ so totally unique to all other priesthoods and more specifically to the Levitical priesthood?

The priesthood of Christ is unique for it is not built upon a law of physical requirement but rather upon the power of an indestructible life (Hebrews 7:16).

So let us first of all establish the fact that Christ's priesthood was not built upon a law of physical requirement. What did the first part of **verse 16** say? **“Who [referring to Christ] has become such [or in other words a priest according to the likeness of Melchizedek] not on the basis of a law of physical requirement.”** So did this part of the verse establish the fact that Christ's priesthood was not built upon a law of physical requirement? Yes! Absolutely! So, what does this mean?

The Mosaic Law spelled out certain physical requirements that every priest of Israel had to conform to. And what were those requirements? They had to be of the tribe of Levi and a male descendant of Aaron according to **Numbers 18**. They also had to be free of certain blemishes and abnormalities according to **Leviticus 21:16-23**. And they also had to be between the age of 25 and 50 according to **Numbers 8:24-26**.

These were the physical requirements as spelled out in the Mosaic Law and it would have been the physical nature of these requirements that led this author to refer to them **“as a law of physical requirement”** in **verse 16** as we just read.

Apart from these physical requirements there were no other requirements that had to be met in order for those living under the Mosaic Law to be qualified as a Levitical priest, for these physical requirements formed the basis upon which the Levitical priesthood was built.

But this was not true of Christ's priesthood. So let us now go back and read the rest of **verse 16**. **“Who [referring to Christ] has become such [or in other words a priest according to the likeness of Melchizedek] not on the basis of a law of a physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life.”** So what does this phrase mean, **“according to the power of an indestructible life.”**

The word “power” (DUNAMIS) in this context is referring to the inherent power residing in Christ, the eternal Son of God, whose life, because of His eternity, was indestructible.

So, what have we learned about Christ's priesthood in **verse 16** that makes it so unique? We have learned that what makes Christ's priesthood so unique is that Christ's priesthood is not built upon a law of physical requirement but rather upon the power of an indestructible life.

So after this author had made this point in **verse 16**, how did he then drive this point home in **verse 17**?

The author in Hebrews 7:17, in seeking to further drive home the uniqueness of Christ's priesthood and the fact that it was based on the indestructibility of His life, quoted from Psalm 110:4.

So let me now read for you **Hebrews 7:17**. **“For it is attested of Him [referring to a certain portion of Psalm 110:4], ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’”**

In this portion of Scripture, this Psalmist prophetically recorded for His readers a 1000 years before it would happen what God the Father would say to His Son after He had completed His atoning work on our behalf and had sat down at His right hand as our great heavenly high priest. And what was it that this Psalmist said that He would tell Him? **“You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”**

So why is the priesthood of Christ so unique, and why does it stand in such sharp contrast to all other priesthoods and more specifically the Levitical priesthood?

The priesthood of Christ is not built upon a law of physical requirement but rather upon the power of an indestructible life, which is the reason why His priesthood, as was attested to by the Psalmist, would be **“forever.”**

So, what will the author do now? The author in **verse 18** will now return to a thought he had introduced earlier in **verse 12**, which is that with a change of priesthood there is also a change of Law. So now let me read for you **verse 18** and see if this is not so. **“For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness.”** So did this author return to a thought he had introduced earlier in **verse 12**? Yes. He did.

But this time the change of the Law, referred to here as “**a former commandment,**” is described by a much more emphatic term, which was the term “**setting aside.**”

The word translated as “**setting aside**” was used for an official annulment of a decree, the cancellation of a debt, or the abrogation of a will.”

So, what was this author telling his readers when he used this term? Because of the failure of the Levitical priesthood to bring about perfection or in other words its failure to bring about acceptability and accessibility to God, God the giver of the Law has annulled it, has canceled it, and abrogated it. He has swept it away, just as He as also swept away the priesthood.

So should we get upset about this? No! Why? Let me now read for you **verse 19. “(For the Law made nothing perfect)”** or in other words the Law made no one or acceptable to God nor had it provided a way for them to gain access to God. The people of God under the Law were forever on the outside looking in. So should we get upset that the Law has been swept away? No! Absolutely, not!

In fact, if anything let us rejoice! Why? It because, “**on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope.**” In other words, the Law had to be swept away so that a better hope might come.

So, what is this better hope? The “better hope” is the direct and lasting access to God that has been provided us through Christ, our great heavenly high priest. This of course was the “perfection” that the Levitical priests under the Levitical system were unable to bring about.

Christ our great heavenly high priest, through His death on Calvary, has opened a door! He has opened this door extremely wide, and He has opened this door in such a way that it cannot be shut. This door or in other words this direct and lasting access to God, that the Levitical priests could not bring about, is the better hope “**through which we draw near to God**” as we see at the end of **verse 19.**

We do not have to live lives separated from God and the blessings of God for we have a better hope, and because we have a better hope we can

continuously draw near to God and enjoy the blessedness of His presence filling us with joy, filling us with satisfaction, filling us with satisfaction.

So in light of this glorious opportunity that has been provided us, there is only one thing left for us to do.

May we by God's grace continuously draw near to God in light of the direct and lasting access that Christ, our great heavenly high priest, has provided us.