

Lesson Twelve

(7:11-28)

CHRIST'S 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? ¹²For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. ¹³For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

¹⁵This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, ¹⁶who has become a priest, not according to a legal requirement concerning bodily descent but by the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷For it is witnessed of him,

“Thou art a priest for ever,

after the order of Melchizedek.”

¹⁸On the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness ¹⁹(for the law made nothing perfect); on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw

near to God.

20 And it was not without an oath. ²¹ Those who formerly became priests took their office without an oath, but this one was addressed with an oath,

“The Lord has sworn
and will not change his mind,
‘Thou art a priest for ever.’”

²² This makes Jesus the surety of a better covenant.

23 The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever. ²⁵ Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

26 For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did this once for all when he offered up himself. ²⁸ Indeed, the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect for ever.

Bearing down on the crucial issue of the priesthood, the author now presents the basic issues involved in the matter. One of those issues is about the Mosaic law; the other is about redemption. If Jesus is to be priest, what will that mean to the law system and the priesthood it represents? Part and parcel of any religious system is what it proposes to do for the sinner. What can be said about the two religious systems in our discussion?

7:11 — **perfection** — The Greek word has been used before in 5:9, 14. The ultimate test of any religious system is this point. Recall here that 5:9 spelled out the fact that Jesus was made perfect. Part of the solution to the sinner’s imperfection was stated in 2:9, 14, where Jesus died for the sake of sinners. As 2:17 had it, he made an acceptable sacrifice for the people’s sins. Another part of the solution was to be observed in 5:9, where Jesus, made perfect, was enabled to offer eternal salvation to any whose lives were characterized by obedience to him. Other bits and pieces have been given along, but our present text delineates the problem, and the solution.

what further need — God’s promise in Psalms 110 of another priesthood, unlike that of Aaron’s, to the discerning should have been a crystal-clear statement that something was amiss with the then present priesthood of Aaron. To answer the question in this verse, if perfection

TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON HEBREWS

had to be achievable by means of the Levitical priesthood and the law system it represented, then no other priesthood/law system would have been planned/needed.

V. 12 — As God willed it, the law had to be followed. In the case of the priesthood, the law stipulated that any priest must be of the lineage of Levi and more specifically through Aaron. None else could serve. Jesus, even as God's son, could not serve, since he was not of Levi but of Judah, v. 14. Therefore, if the priesthood were to be changed from that of Aaron, of necessity there must also be a change in laws under which it was to operate. Implied here is the point made clear in 8:8-13, where this will be discussed.

V. 13 — Neither Melchizedek nor Jesus were Levites. Only Jesus was from Abraham's lineage, but not of Levi. Jesus belonged (the word μέτοχος, in 2:14 and 6:4) to Judah's line.

V. 16 — **legal requirement** — As mentioned above, Jesus would have been a usurper and presumptuous to take upon himself the office of priest under the Mosaic law.

indestructible — The Greek term is ἀκατάλυτος, meaning not able to be destroyed or ended. (The Greek word is used of divorce, or to tear up, apart.) In reference to Jesus, since he is of the same quality as God is, naturally death can not affect him as it did all Aaronic priests. All of them died, in contrast to Jesus. As is evident, Melchizedek's abiding priesthood was a type that foreshadowed that of Jesus, not that of Aaron. The repeat of Psalms 110:4 in v. 17 reenforces the thought that God planned for a perfect replacement for the imperfect priesthood of Aaron.

If it be asked why God should have begun with a law system and all the trappings thereof, many good answers could be given. One of the reasons is in Romans 5:20, where the law helped men see how sinful they really were (7:12-25 enforces the point that the law was good but man was not). Galatians 3:1-29 is another text that helps us see the purpose of the law: it was to prepare all of us for the Christ, who was/is the consummation of God's plan for man.

V. 18 — **set aside** — The law had to be changed, v. 12, to make way for the new system. The Greek word ἀθετέω has the idea of nullifying, or invalidating, as in Mark 6:26; 7:9; Luke 10:16; I Corinthians 1:19; Galatians 2:21. The reason here given for this action, is that the law was weak (ἀσθενής, as in 4:15) and useless (ἀνωφελής, unprofitable or bad. See Titus 3:9). Both of these factors in the law system kept it from the primary purpose of any religious system: making the worshipper acceptable (perfect, v. 19) to God.

V. 19 — **perfect** — Mature, complete, as in 5:9, 7:11.

better hope — Some of the reasons for the better hope have already

been listed. The following verses will amplify those and state others.

It is again worth saying that the institution of a new way to deal with man does not mean that the old way was bad or that God made a mistake. The old way was given for a specific purpose and, having fulfilled that purpose, was replaced by that which was the perfect way to deal with man (i.e., Jesus and Christianity). Sin had caused man to be separated from God, Isaiah 59:1-2. The law, weak through the flesh, Romans 8:3, could not provide a remedy. God in Christ provided the means of reconciliation, II Corinthians 5:14-21.

V. 20 — **oath** — The point made in ch. 6:13ff. Notice that no such action was taken with the Aaronic priesthood, since it was designed to be temporal, and to pass away when the perfect came.

V. 21 — **for ever** — As long as the New Covenant remains in force (until Jesus returns, etc.) the New Covenant priesthood of Jesus will remain. Naturally, when Jesus returns for the saints and the new life in heaven begins, there will be no further need for an intercessory priest. Note 9:28 in this regard.

V. 22 — **surety** — If God can be trusted, Christians have the best God can offer in Jesus.

V. 23 — **by death** — Enlarging the idea in the typology of the continuing priesthood of Melchizedek (no death, etc.) and that of a life indestructible, v. 16, the better covenant is that covenant which does not need a new high priest every so often. The Aaronic priests all died — Jesus never shall die. Consequently, Christians have the better of the two covenants.

V. 24 — **holds** — He, like his type Melchizedek, is able to abide in the office.

V. 25 — The Greek text really presents a sharp, clear picture: Jesus, always living, able to keep on saving, even forever, all those who keep coming to him. The special emphasis is upon the constant ability of Jesus, never diminishing, always there. Hence, drawing together the ideas in 2:17-18 and 4:14-16, we as Christians need never hesitate to have Jesus intercede for us, or be afraid to approach God's throne of grace, for Jesus, merciful and faithful, who has made an (acceptable) offering for our sin, will always be there, saving us who confidently ask his understanding help.

V. 26 — This verse depicts several vital characteristics of Jesus that make him the high priest that he is.

fitting — The Greek verb *πρέπω* can be seen in such texts as Matthew 3:15; I Corinthians 11:13; Ephesians 5:3; I Timothy 2:10; Titus 2:1; and Hebrews 2:10. It has the idea of what is correct, proper, needed, what is exactly right.

holy — Of course, the Aaronic priests were to be holy in many ways,

TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON HEBREWS

but they were weak and sinful, 5:2-3; 7:27. Jesus was not.

blameless — No fault was found in Jesus, I Peter 2:22-23, for he was a lamb, without blemish or spot, I Peter 1:19. No Aaronic priest was so in the sense Jesus was.

unstained — As Jesus said, The devil had nothing in him, John 14:30. Pilate knew that he was innocent, and the centurion saw it also, John 19:38; Luke 23:47.

separated from sinners — Since Jesus was not guilty of sin, 4:15, and is now at God's right hand, 1:3, this statement is true of him in a way never true of Aaronic priests, who were permitted only once a year to go into the presence of God, and then only with an offering of blood for their sin.

exalted — He who made the heavens, and sustains them by his word of power, and to whom every knee shall bow — this is Jesus. Mortal high priests have no standing here!

V. 27 — **he has no need** — They always had need, day by day. Jesus always has sufficient help, v. 25, even forever.

V. 28 — Contrastively, as a summation, the law was clearly inadequate, for it had no means of perfecting people. It was imperfect, its priesthood likewise. How could it, starting with imperfections, ever get better?

Contrariwise, Jesus and the New Covenant are God's remedy for just such hopelessness as pictured above — The system known as the New Covenant is without flaw, because that upon which it is founded (Jesus) is without flaw. Moreover, those who accept the redemption in Jesus can always be saved, since he ever lives to save them. What need we more?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 12:

109. Summarize the points made about Jesus and the Aaronic priesthood in 7:11-28.
110. What indications in this text and the preceding ones have you found that show God planned to bring about a change in law/priesthood?
111. What essentially could the law not do?
112. What problems did the Aaronic priests have?
113. List the attributes of Jesus as high priest.
114. What part did God's oath play in these matters?
115. Do you believe that Jesus is always able to save you if you allow him to do so?