

Hebrews 7:20-28

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If human perfection could have come through the Levitical priesthood and the Old Covenant (the law), we would not have needed the greater priest (Christ) and the New Covenant He brought.

Jesus is much greater than the Levitical priests because He became a priest with an oath. To demonstrate this, the Pauline Author quotes Psalm 110—when God swore that the Messiah (Jesus) is a priest forever.

The oath makes it clear that Christ's appointment as priest is greater than the Levites since they became priests through their lineage, not an oath from God: *But He [became a priest] with an oath through the One who said to Him, "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You are a priest forever'"* (v 21).

Levites were not given their position as priest through an oath from God, they were simply appointed to that position because of their lineage: *And inasmuch as it was not without an oath (for they indeed became priests without an oath* (vv 20–21). Following Jesus in faith, who is the greater High Priest, is clearly superior to religious observance under the Levites.

The previous verses explained that the law (covenant) and the priesthood were directly connected, so when a change occurred in the priesthood the covenant must also change. And since Jesus is greater than the Levite priests, this New Covenant is also better. *So much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant* (v 22). The word *guarantee* means that something is given as an assurance that a promise will be kept. Jesus is our guarantee that this New Covenant is a better one.

The Pauline Author continues demonstrating how Jesus is a better high priest. He had already pointed out that Jesus has an "indestructible life" while mortal priests are limited by death (v 16). *The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently* (vv 23–24).

Although there were many Levite priests, they had short ministries because they were limited by death. In contrast, Jesus lives forever, and His ministry continues forever. Because Jesus's ministry continues forever, *He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them* (v 25).

The Pauline Author is not talking about Christ saving us from Hell to Heaven, which happens the moment we trust in Christ's finished work on the cross. Instead, this passage refers to the continual intercession that Jesus makes on our behalf to help us overcome trials, give us grace, mercy, and the ability to persevere (4:14–16). Verse 28 tells us Jesus is *perfect* forever. *Perfect* here is again from the Greek root "teleo," which means "to finish" or "complete."

Jesus clearly had moral perfection before He came to earth as a human. So what did Jesus finish or complete? He finished the work, the job His Father assigned Him to do during His human

advent to earth. When Jesus died on the cross, He uttered the words “It is finished”—“finished” also being from the Greek root “teleo.” Jesus could not have done this amazing work, could not have finished this job while sitting in heaven; He had to come to earth in order to finish the job.

Likewise, Jesus gives us the enormous gift to also do a work here on earth. In heaven we will no longer be able to live by faith. Here intersect two of the major themes of the book of Hebrews: faith and finishing. Jesus asks us to walk in faith, and to do so until our lives on earth are complete. Just as He did.

If we as believers continue to depend on Christ as our high priest while we walk daily in faith, we will receive our inheritance as a Son. This inheritance is different from our eternal salvation (being justified in the presence of God) and is, instead, our reward if we faithfully live on this earth as we are called to by God, depending on Christ as our high priest.

Unlike the Levite priests, Christ not only lives forever but is also perfectly righteous and holy: *For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens* (v 26). The Levite priests were flawed, sinful humans and had to offer sacrifices not only for the Israelite people but also for themselves. Christ has no need to offer sacrifices for Himself since He is perfect (without sin).

He does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself (v 27). The priests had to offer sacrifices continuously because of their imperfection and the imperfect sacrifices they offered. Christ offered one sacrifice, once, and for all people.

Because of this, the Pauline Author writes that *the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak* (v 28), needing to atone for themselves and their people. However, *the word of [God’s] oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever* (v 28). God appointed Christ as high priest after He lived a perfect life on earth and suffered and died on the cross—He is now our perfect high priest, able to sympathize with us in our weakness, and intercede for us forever. Jesus is our greater high priest.

There is an application for modern believers in Jesus, who are not also Jewish. If you replace “Levite” and the sacrificial system with any other form of religious practice, you can make the same points. Following Jesus is our key calling. It is not only fine, but can also be very helpful to attend church, do devotional studies, perform Christian ordinances, or any other devotional “religious” activity. But if in any case these practices become an end rather than a means to equip us to follow our High Priest Jesus in a daily walk of faith, then they become a hindrance rather than a help.

Biblical Text

²⁰ And inasmuch as *it was not without an oath* ²¹ (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him,

**“The Lord has sworn
And will not change His mind,
‘You are a priest forever’”);**

²² so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

²³ The *former* priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, ²⁴ but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. ²⁵ Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

²⁶ For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; ²⁷ who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. ²⁸ For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, *appoints* a Son, made perfect forever.