

## LIFE Bible Study: Hebrews 7:11-28

**For Discussion:** What experiences have you had with keeping something past its usefulness/lifespan and trying to use it later? What was the result of using it beyond its intended time?

### Read Hebrews 7:11-28

**For review:** In Hebrews 7:1-10, the author began a line of argument in which he referenced Genesis 14:18-20 to compare Abraham and Melchizedek, showing that Melchizedek was the greater of the two. This superiority of Melchizedek would have far-reaching implications for the people of God. With more of God's plan revealed through history, it can be seen that the comparison pertained to more than two individuals, but to two orders of priests, the order of Melchizedek and the order of Aaron (Abraham's descendant). In the following section, the author turns to the only other passage to mention Melchizedek, Psalm 110:4, to continue his argument, further developing previously established themes to show how they are fulfilled in Christ and why a new priesthood wasn't simply an option but a necessity.

**The author suddenly transitions from his discussion of Abraham and Melchizedek with a rhetorical question expressing the need for another priest from a different priesthood. What reason does he give for this need?**

**Why is this deficiency of the existing priesthood of such importance (Heb. 12:14)?<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Perfection is not attainable through the Levitical priesthood.

-The subtle introduction of another order of priests in Psalm 110:4 suggests an insufficiency in the first.

<sup>1</sup>Notice that perfection is more than a possibility for people, the author's wording implies it is an expectation and a goal (v.11, 18-19). Prior to this point, perfection was a quality that was mentioned exclusively in reference to the Son of God (Heb. 2:10, 5:9).

<sup>2</sup>A major theme in Hebrews is of people drawing near to God (Heb. 4:16, 7:19, 25, 10:1, 22, 11:6) and sin separates us from God and incurs His wrath (Heb. 3:7-11). Simply being forgiven our past sin will not prevent further sin in the future.

-Moral purity is needed to enter fully into God's presence and to have unhindered fellowship with Him.

-This fellowship had been the goal since the beginning but was not something the Mosaic law could enable/deliver.

**What contrasts does the author make between the Levitical priests and Jesus (the priest of the order of Melchizedek), and how is Jesus' priesthood superior to theirs?<sup>1</sup> The author lists several qualities of Jesus that surpass the shortcomings of the Levitical priests and make Him uniquely able to meet our needs (v.26). Why is it fitting that our great high priest have these qualities?<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Levitical Priests	Priest of Melchizedek
Men became priests on the basis of "a legal requirement concerning bodily descent" (v.16).	Jesus became a priest "by the power of an indestructible life" (v.16).
Men were made priests without an oath (v.20).	Jesus was made a priest with God's oath (v.20-21, Ps. 110:4). <b>[i]</b>
There are many temporary priests who are all mortal, each one dies and is replaced (v.23).	There is one permanent priest who continues forever (v.17, 21, 24-25).
The priests are characterized by their weakness as sinful men who are themselves in need of sacrifices (v.27-28).	The priest is characterized by His perfection as a Son who is holy and blameless (v.27-28). <b>[ii]</b>
The priests had to repeatedly offer sacrifices (v.27).	The priest offered a single sacrifice once for all (v.27, Heb. 10:12-14).
The Levitical sacrifices were inadequate to deal with sin (Heb. 9:9b-10, 10:1-4).	Jesus' sacrifice was sufficient to save to the uttermost all who draw near to God through Him (v.25). <b>[iii]</b>
The priests can only intercede in a limited way and for a limited time (Heb. 9:6-7).	The priest performs unending intercession in God's presence (v.25, Rom. 8:34). <b>[iv]</b>

**[i]** God's oath doesn't add to His reliability but is a further assurance for us of His faithfulness to accomplish what He has said. Both the promise to Abraham and the manner in which that promise was to be fulfilled were confirmed with oaths.

**[ii]** The law can only appoint those who are weak and failing, the entire pool of candidates is tainted by sin. The oath transcends the limitations of the law to appoint one who is innocent.

**[iii]** The Levitical high priests could only serve their own generation and they ultimately didn't accomplish anything lasting because their service didn't improve the people's condition. Jesus' one time sacrifice was effective for all people, not only purchasing a pardon from their sins but securing the perfection for them not available under the law. Salvation to the "uttermost" is complete in both degree and duration (i.e., from all things and for all time).

**[iv]** The Levitical high priests could not approach God without first addressing their own sins, and then only in a limited way and for a limited time. Jesus ascended to take His place at the Father's right hand and continues to intercede for us there.

<sup>2</sup>It is required that not only the sacrifice be perfect but the priest who offers it be morally unblemished as well, so that his service and communion with God are not impeded.

<sup>2</sup>Many of the qualities pertain to Jesus' purity, in His life as well as in His person. His sinless humanity makes Him the only acceptable offering that is effective in achieving a permanent cleansing in us (i.e., sacrificed "once").

<sup>2</sup>His exalted status makes the worth of His sacrifice enough to cover all the sins of all His people (i.e., sacrificed "for all").

<sup>2</sup>As a high priest, Jesus is fully and perfectly able to advocate for us in accordance with God's will, so His prayers for us are always answered (Jas. 5:16b).

**How can the law, which was given by God for the good of Israel, rightly be called weak and useless elsewhere in His Word (Rom. 8:3-4)?<sup>1</sup> What was the value of people's adherence to it before the time of Christ (Deut. 10:12; Gal. 3:15-26)?<sup>2</sup>**

**The priesthood and the law are inseparably tied because much of the law governs the duties and regulations of the priests and transgression of the law required the intercession of the priests. They are so closely associated that if one were to change, the other would necessarily need to as well (v.12).**

<sup>1</sup>Neither the author nor Christ disparage the law. Christ came to fulfill it on our behalf and accomplish what it was never intended to accomplish (Matt. 5:17-18).

<sup>1</sup>From the perspective of attaining perfection (v.11, 19a) the law is useless because it has no ability to change people, only to show God's righteous standards and make evident where people fell short of them. The law was meant to point us to our need for God's actual solution to sin, His better hope (Heb. 10:3).

<sup>2</sup>The hope of those who only had the law was also Christ, even if they did not know Him by name. There was enough revealed for people to respond in faith (**Gal. 3:5-6**). He is the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15) and Abraham's promised descendant who would bring blessing to the nations (Gen. 12:2-3).

-God only holds people accountable for responding to what has been revealed to them.

<sup>2</sup>Obedience in the ways God makes available, however limited, is a way to love God, which is always of value.

<sup>2</sup>The law revealed God's character and trained the people who lived by them (Gal. 3:24-25). It guarded people from unintentional sin but also made the sins that people did commit deliberate acts of rebellion.

<sup>2</sup>God's commands had practical benefits as well (E.g., dietary restrictions, prohibitions against intermarriage, rites for cleansing).

**What are some qualities the world promotes as a means to salvation and/or significance?<sup>1</sup> In what ways do these fall short of what they promise?<sup>2</sup> It wasn't only for our preservation that Christ sacrificed Himself and now intercedes as our high priest, it was for our perfection. If this is the extent to which God will go to purify us, how ought we to be seeking and looking forward to fully attaining this perfection in our lives?<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Examples: beauty, youth/longevity, strength, wealth, power/influence, popularity, discipline, self-sufficiency, altruism/charity, spirituality/piety

<sup>2</sup>Not every quality is vain or selfish. However, without addressing our sinfulness, all of them will inevitably be corrupted.

<sup>2</sup>Along with these qualities, any benefits gained through them are bound to be fleeting.

<sup>2</sup>Like with the Levitical sacrifices, none of these can save us from God's righteous wrath for our sins.

<sup>3</sup>Do we understand the blessings of a life marked by this perfection? Is this desirable to us or have we set our affections elsewhere?

<sup>3</sup>This is first and foremost a work of the Holy Spirit. We must turn to God and ask Him to effect this change in us and guide us in the specific circumstances in which He places us.

## **Reflection and application**

Amid the trials experienced by the recipients of the author's letter, there was a need for them to endure in their faith and not return to the systems of the past. The Mosaic law and its associated priesthood had no power to change hearts, it failed to draw people to God, and left them continuing to fall short of His glory. The very mention of a priest from another priesthood hundreds of years after the establishment of the first implied the need for him. The appearance of such a priest for a second time in history confirmed this and revealed God's hand at work to supply that need.

What the law failed to do to make us acceptable before God, Jesus did as both the offeror and offering. He was not destroyed by His sacrifice like the animals offered in the past, His life was revealed to be indestructible, and He now intercedes for us before God. Having tasted God's salvation, we like the first readers of Hebrews would only stand to lose in turning back to the notions of the past that have no power to save and were never intended to bring about lasting transformation. Draw near to God in thanksgiving for our eternal guarantor of the better covenant, seeking from Him endurance to look ahead and an ever-growing desire for His perfection to be made manifest in your life.