

# CHAPTER 7

The doctrine of the priestly office of Christ is so excellent in itself, and so essential a part of the Christian faith, that the apostle loves to dwell upon it. Nothing made the Jews so fond of the Levitical dispensation as the high esteem they had of their priesthood, and it was doubtless a sacred and most excellent institution; it was a very severe threatening denounced against the Jews (~~3874~~ Hosea 3:4), that the children of Israel should abide many days without a prince or priest, and without a sacrifice, and with an ephod, and without teraphim. Now the apostle assures them that by receiving the Lord Jesus they would have a much better high priest, a priesthood of a higher order, and consequently a better dispensation or covenant, a better law and testament; this he shows in this chapter, where,

- I.** We have a more particular account of Melchisedec (v. 1-3).
- II.** The superiority of his priesthood to that of Aaron (v. 4-10).
- III.** An accommodation of all to Christ, to show the superior excellency of his person, office, and covenant (v. 11 to the end).

## ~~3870~~ HEBREWS 7:1-10

### MELCHISEDEC'S PRIESTHOOD

The foregoing chapter ended with a repetition of what had been cited once and again before out of ~~3870~~ Psalm 110:4, *Jesus, a high priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec*. Now this chapter is as a sermon upon that text; here the apostle sets before them some of the strong meat he had spoken of before, hoping they would by greater diligence be better prepared to digest it.

**I.** The great question that first offers itself is, Who was this Melchisedec? All the account we have of him in the Old Testament is in ~~3870~~ Genesis 14:18, etc., and in ~~3870~~ Psalm 110:4. Indeed we are much in the dark about him; God has thought fit to leave us so, that this Melchisedec might be a more lively type of him whose generation none can declare. If men will not be satisfied with what is revealed, they must rove about in the dark in

endless conjectures, some fancying him to have been an angel, others the Holy Ghost; but,

**1.** The opinions concerning him that are best worthy our consideration are these three: —

**(1.)** Therabbin, and most of the Jewish writers, think he was Shem the son of Noah who was king and priest to their ancestors, after the manner of the other patriarchs; but it is not probable that he should thus change his name. Besides, we have no account of his settling in the land of Canaan.

**(2.)** Many Christian writers have thought him to be Jesus Christ himself, appearing by a special dispensation and privilege to Abraham in the flesh, and who was known to Abraham by the name *Melchisedec*, which agrees very well to Christ, and to what is said, ~~488~~ John 8:56, *Abraham saw his day and rejoiced*. Much may be said for this opinion, and what is said in v. 3 does not seem to agree with any mere man; but then it seems strange to make Christ a type of himself.

**(3.)** The most general opinion is that he was a Canaanite king, who reigned in Salem, and kept up religion and the worship of the true God; that he was raised to be a type of Christ, and was honoured by Abraham as such.

**2.** But we shall leave these conjectures, and labour to understand, as far as we can, what is here said of him by the apostle, and how Christ is represented thereby, v. 1-3.

**(1.)** Melchisedec was a king, and so is the Lord Jesus — a king of God's anointing; the government is laid upon his shoulders, and he rules over all for the good of his people.

**(2.)** That he was *king of righteousness*: his name signifies *the righteous king*. Jesus Christ is a rightful and a righteous king — rightful in his title, righteous in his government. He is the Lord our righteousness; he has fulfilled all righteousness, and brought in an everlasting righteousness, and he loves righteousness and righteous persons, and hates iniquity.

**(3.)** He was king of Salem, that is, king of peace; first king of righteousness, and after that king of peace. So is our Lord Jesus; he by his righteousness made peace, the fruit of righteousness is peace. Christ speaks peace, creates peace, is our peace-maker.

(4.) He was *priest of the most high God*, qualified and anointed in an extraordinary manner to be his priest among the Gentiles. So is the Lord Jesus; he is the priest of the most high God, and the Gentiles must come to God by him; it is only through his priesthood that we can obtain reconciliation and remission of sin.

(5.) He was *without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life*, v. 3. This must not be understood according to the letter; but the scripture has chosen to set him forth as an extraordinary person, without giving us his genealogy, that he might be a fitter type of Christ, who as man was without father, as God without mother; whose priesthood is without descent, did not descend to him from another, nor from him to another, but is personal and perpetual.

(6.) That he *met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him*. The incident is recorded <sup>GEN</sup>Genesis 14:18, etc. He brought forth bread and wine to refresh Abraham and his servants when they were weary; he gave as a king, and blessed as a priest. Thus our Lord Jesus meets his people in their spiritual conflicts, refreshes them, renews their strength, and blesses them.

(7.) That *Abraham gave him a tenth part of all* (v. 2), that is, as the apostle explains it, of all *the spoils*; and this Abraham did as an expression of his gratitude for what Melchisedec had done for him, or as a testimony of his homage and subjection to him as a king, or as an offering vowed and dedicated to God, to be presented by his priest. And thus are we obliged to make all possible returns of love and gratitude to the Lord Jesus for all the rich and royal favours we receive from him, to pay our homage and subjection to him as our King, and to put all our offerings into his hands, to be presented by him to the Father in the incense of his own sacrifice.

(8.) That this Melchisedec was *made like unto the Son of God, and abideth a priest continually*. He bore the image of God in his piety and authority, and stands upon record as an immortal high priest; the ancient type of him who is the eternal and only-begotten of the Father, who abideth a priest for ever.

**II.** Let us now consider (as the apostle advises) how great this Melchisedec was, and how far his priesthood was above that of the order of Aaron (v. 4, 5, etc.): *Now consider how great this man was*, etc. The greatness of this man and his priesthood appears,

**1.** From Abraham's paying the tenth of the spoils unto him; and it is well observed that Levi paid tithes to Melchisedec in Abraham, v. 9. Now Levi received the office of the priesthood from God, and was to take tithes of the people, yet even Levi paid tithes to Melchisedec, as to a greater and higher priest than himself; therefore that high priest who should afterwards appear, of whom Melchisedec was a type, must be much superior to any of the Levitical priests, who paid tithes, in Abraham, to Melchisedec. And now by this argument of persons doing things that are matters of right or injury in the loins of their predecessors we have an illustration how we may be said to have sinned in Adam, and fallen with him in his first transgression. We were in Adam's loins when he sinned, and the guilt and depravity contracted by the human nature when it was in our first parents are equitably imputed and derived to the same nature as it is in all other persons naturally descended from them. They justly adhere to the nature, and it must be by an act of grace if ever they be taken away.

**2.** From Melchisedec's blessing of Abraham, *who had the promises; and, without contradiction, the less is blessed of the greater*, v. 6, 7. Here observe,

**(1.)** Abraham's great dignity and felicity — that he had the promises. He was one in covenant with God, to whom God had given exceedingly great and precious promises. That man is rich and happy indeed who has an estate in bills and bonds under God's own hand and seal. These promises are both of the life that now is and of that which is to come; this honour have all those who receive the Lord Jesus, in whom all the promises are yea and amen.

**(2.)** Melchisedec's greater honour — in that it was his place and privilege to bless Abraham; and it is an uncontested maxim *that the less is blessed of the greater*, v. 7. He who gives the blessing is greater than he who receives it; and therefore Christ, the antitype of Melchisedec, the meriter and Mediator of all blessings to the children of men, must be greater than all the priests of the order of Aaron.

## MELCHISEDEC AND CHRIST COMPARED

Observe the necessity there was of raising up another priest, after the order of Melchisedec and not after the order of Aaron, by whom that perfection should come which could not come by the Levitical priesthood, which therefore must be changed, and the whole economy with it, v. 11, 12, etc. Here,

**I.** It is asserted that perfection could not come by the Levitical priesthood and the law. They could not put those who came to them into the perfect enjoyment of the good things they pointed out to them; they could only show them the way.

**II.** That therefore another priest must be raised up, after the order of Melchisedec, by whom, and his law of faith, perfection might come to all who obey him; and, blessed be God, that we may have perfect holiness and perfect happiness by Christ in the covenant of grace, according to the gospel, for we are complete in him.

**III.** It is asserted that the priesthood being changed there must of necessity be a change of the law; there being so near a relation between the priesthood and the law, the dispensation could not be the same under another priesthood; a new priesthood must be under a new regulation, managed in another way, and by rules proper to its nature and order.

**IV.** It is not only asserted, but proved, that the priesthood and law are changed, v. 13, 14. The priesthood and law by which perfection could not come are abolished, and a priest has arisen, and a dispensation is now set up, by which true believers may be made perfect. Now that there is such a change is obvious.

**1.** There is a change in the tribe of which the priesthood comes. Before, it was the tribe of Levi; but our great high priest sprang out of Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning the priesthood, v. 14. This change of the family shows a real change of the law of the priesthood.

**2.** There is a change in the form and order of making the priests. Before, in the Levitical priesthood, they were made after the law of a carnal

commandment; but our great high priest was made after the power of an endless life. The former law appointed that the office should descend, upon the death of the father, to his eldest son, according to the order of carnal or natural generation; for none of the high priests under the law were without father or mother, or without descent: they had not life and immortality in themselves. They had both beginning of days and end of life; and so the carnal commandment, or law of primogeniture, directed their succession, as it did in matters of civil right and inheritance. But the law by which Christ was constituted a priest, after the order of Melchisedec, was the power of an endless life. The life and immortality which he had in himself were his right and title to the priesthood, not his descent from former priests. This makes a great difference in the priesthood, and in the economy too, and gives the preference infinitely to Christ and the gospel. The very law which constituted the Levitical priesthood supposed the priests to be weak, frail, dying, creatures, not able to preserve their own natural lives, but who must be content and glad to survive in their posterity after the flesh; much less could they, by any power or authority they had, convey spiritual life and blessedness to those who came to them. But the high priest of our profession holds his office by that innate power of endless life which he has in himself, not only to preserve himself alive, but to communicate spiritual and eternal life to all those who duly rely upon his sacrifice and intercession. Some thing *the law of the carnal commandment* refers to the external rites of consecration, and the carnal offerings that were made; but *the power of an endless life* to the spiritual living sacrifices proper to the gospel, and the spiritual and eternal privileges purchased by Christ, who was consecrated by the eternal Spirit of life that he received without measure.

**3.** There is a change in the efficacy of the priesthood. The former was weak and unprofitable, made nothing perfect; the latter brought in a better hope, by which we draw near to God, v. 18, 19. The Levitical priesthood brought nothing to perfection: it could not justify men's persons from guilt; it could not sanctify them from inward pollution; it could not cleanse the consciences of the worshippers from dead works; all it could do was to lead them to the antitype. But the priesthood of Christ carries in it, and brings along with it, a better hope; it shows us the true foundation of all the hope we have towards God for pardon and salvation; it more clearly discovers the great objects of our hope; and so it tends to work in us a more strong and lively hope of acceptance with God. By this hope we are

encouraged to draw nigh unto God, to enter into a covenant-union with him, to live a life of converse and communion with him. We may now draw near with a true heart, and with the full assurance of faith, having our minds sprinkled from an evil conscience. The former priesthood rather kept men at a distance, and under a spirit of bondage.

**4.** There is a change in God's way of acting in this priesthood. He has taken an oath to Christ, which he never did to any of the order of Aaron. God never gave them any such assurance of their continuance, never engaged himself by oath or promise that theirs should be an everlasting priesthood, and therefore gave them no reason to expect the perpetuity of it, but rather to look upon it as a temporary law. But Christ was made a priest with the oath of God: *The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec*, v. 21. Here God has upon oath declared the immutability, excellency, efficacy, and eternity, of the priesthood of Christ.

**5.** There is a change in that covenant of which the priesthood was a security and the priest a surety; that is, a change in the dispensation of that covenant. The gospel dispensation is more full, free, perspicuous, spiritual, and efficacious, than that of the law. Christ is in this gospel covenant a surety for us to God and for God to us, to see that the articles be performed on both parts He, as surety, has united the divine and human nature together in his own person, and therein given assurance of reconciliation; and he has, as surety, united God and man together in the bond of the everlasting covenant. He pleads with men to keep their covenant with god, and he pleads with God that he will fulfil his promises to men, which he is always ready to do in a way suitable to his majesty and glory, that is, through a Mediator.

**6.** There is a remarkable change in the number of the priests under these different orders. In that of Aaron there was a multitude of priests, of high priests, not at once, but successively; but in this of Christ there is but one and the same. The reason is plain, The Levitical priests were many, because *they were not suffered to continue by reason of death*. Their office, how high and honourable soever, could not secure them from dying; and, as one died, another must succeed, and after a while must give place to a third, till the number had become very great. But this our high priest continues for ever, and his priesthood is *aparabaton* — *an unchangeable one*, that does not pass from one to another, as the former

did; it is always in the same hand. There can be no vacancy in this priesthood, no hour nor moment in which the people are without a priest to negotiate their spiritual concerns in heaven. Such a vacancy might be very dangerous and prejudicial to them; but this is their safety and happiness, that this ever-living high priest is able to save to the utmost — in all times, in all cases, in every juncture — all who come to God by him, v. 25. So that here is a manifest alteration much for the better.

**7.** There is a remarkable difference in the moral qualifications of the priests. Those who were of the order of Aaron were not only mortal men, but sinful men, who had their sinful as well as natural infirmities; they needed to offer up sacrifices first for their own sins and then for the people. But our high priest, who was consecrated by the word of the oath, needed only to offer up once for the people, never at all for himself; for he has not only an immutable consecration to his office, but an immutable sanctity in his person. He is *such a high priest as became us, holy, harmless, and undefiled*, etc., v. 26-28. Here observe,

**(1.)** Our case, as sinners, needed a high priest to make satisfaction and intercession for us.

**(2.)** No priest could be suitable or sufficient for our reconciliation to God but one who was perfectly righteous in his own person; he must be righteous in himself, or he could not be a propitiation for our sin, or our advocate with the Father.

**(3.)** The Lord Jesus was exactly such a high priest as we wanted, for he has a personal holiness, absolutely perfect. Observe the description we have of the personal holiness of Christ expressed in various terms, all of which some learned divines consider as relating to his perfect purity.

**[1.]** He is holy, perfectly free from all the habits or principles of sin, not having the least disposition to it in his nature; no sin dwells in him, though it does in the best of Christians, not the least sinful inclination

**[2.]** He is harmless, perfectly free from all actual transgression, has done no violence, nor is there any deceit in his mouth, never did the least wrong to God or man.

**[3.]** He is undefiled, he was never accessory to other men's sins. It is a difficult thing to keep ourselves pure, so as not to partake in the guilt of other men's sins, by contributing in some way towards them, or not doing



what we ought to prevent them. Christ was undefiled; though he took upon him the guilt of our sins, yet he never involved himself in the fact and fault of them.

[4.] He is separate from sinners, not only in his present state (having entered as our high priest into the holiest of all, into which nothing defiled can enter), but in his personal purity: he has no such union with sinners, either natural or federal, as can devolve upon him original sin. This comes upon us by virtue of our natural and federal union with the first Adam, we descending from him in the ordinary way. But Christ was, by his ineffable conception in the virgin, separate from sinners; though he took a true human nature, yet the miraculous way in which it was conceived set him upon a separate footing from all the rest of mankind.

[5.] He is made higher than the heavens. Most expositors understand this concerning his state of exaltation in heaven, at the right hand of God, to perfect the design of his priesthood. But Dr. Goodwin thinks this may be very justly referred to the personal holiness of Christ, which is greater and more perfect than the holiness of the hosts of heaven, that is, the holy angels themselves, who, though they are free from sin, yet are not in themselves free from all possibility of sinning. And therefore we read, *God putteth no trust in his holy ones, and he chargeth his angels with folly* (~~CHRIS~~ Job 4:18), that is, with weakness and peccability. They may be angels one hour and devils another, as many of them were; and that the holy angels shall not now fall does not proceed from an indefectibility of nature, but from the election of God; they are elect angels. It is very probable that this explanation of the words, *made higher than the heavens*, may be thought too much strained, and that it ought to be understood of the dignity of Christ's state, and not the perfect holiness of his person; and the rather because it is said he was *made higher genomenos*; but it is well known that this word is used in a neutral sense, as where it is said, *genesthe ho Theos alethes* — *Let God be true*. The other characters in the verse plainly belong to the personal perfection of Christ in holiness, as opposed to the sinful infirmities of the Levitical priests; and it seems congruous to think this must do so too, if it may be fairly taken in such a sense; and it appears yet more probable, since the validity and prevalency of Christ's priesthood in v. 27 are placed in the impartiality and disinterestedness of it. He needed not to offer up for himself: it was a disinterested mediation; he mediated for that mercy for others which he did not need for himself; had he needed it himself, he had been a party,

and could not have been a Mediator — a criminal, and could not have been an advocate for sinners. Now, to render his mediation the more impartial and disinterested, it seems requisite not only that he had no present need of that favour for himself which he mediated for in behalf of others, but that he never could stand in need of it. Though he needed it not to-day, yet if he knew he might be in such circumstances as to need it to-morrow, or at any future time, he must have been thought to have had some eye upon his own interest, and therefore could not act with impartial regard and pure zeal for the honour of God on one hand, and tender pure compassion for poor sinners on the other. I pretend not here to follow the notes of our late excellent expositor, into whose labours we have entered, but have taken the liberty to vindicate this notion of the learned Dr. Goodwin from the exceptions that I know have been made to it; and I have the rather done it because, if it will hold good, it gives us further evidence how necessary it was that the Mediator should be God, since no mere creature is of himself possessed of that impeccability which will set him above all possible need of favour and mercy for himself.