



Hebrews - Chapter Seven

II Hebrews 3:1-10:18 - Jesus Is Superior to the Mosaic Law (continues)

II.c Hebrews 4:14-10:18 - The high priesthood of Jesus (continues)

Summary of Chapter Seven

Having returned to the theme of Jesus being a high priest in the order of Melchizedek in the concluding verses of Chapter Six, the writer now takes a deeper look at Melchizedek, giving a deeper insight into who he may have been and what he represented, especially with regard to his supremacy over the patriarch Abraham, and the subsequent human priesthood that came through the descendancy of his great grandson Levi.

The writer then turns his attention to Jesus, comparing him with Melchizedek and the reason why there needed to be a new priesthood. The Mosaic Law had established a human priesthood that could not make anyone perfect, for the priests themselves could never be perfect, since they were mortal and inherently sinful.

For that reason a new and much more superior priesthood had to be established, which Melchizedek's brief appearance had pointed towards and which was fulfilled in the person of Jesus as both the Son and Christ of God. His personal perfection, being the only mortal to be sin free, and his holy and righteous status as the only true Son, made him the only candidate that could bring others to righteousness, for he was righteous in the sight of God, having offered himself as the atoning sacrifice for all sin.

II.c.iv Hebrews 7:1-10 - Return to main argument: the priestly order of Melchizedek

This section discusses the mysterious high priest Melchizedek, drawing out points that will later be applied to Jesus in vv.11-28. It focuses on Abraham's recognition of Melchizedek as his superior, thus making him superior to the priesthood that would later come from the descendants of Abraham.

¹ This 'King Melchizedek of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham as he was returning from defeating the kings and blessed him'; ² and to him Abraham apportioned 'one-tenth of everything'. His name, in the first place, means 'king of righteousness'; next he is also king of Salem, that is, 'king of peace'.

Hebrews 7:1-2

The author summarises the brief account of Melchizedek as it appears in Scripture: <<And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!' And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything>> (Genesis 14:18-20), highlighting important interpretative points.

Elsewhere in the OT, Melchizedek is only mentioned in Psalm 110:4, where David wrote: <<The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek'>>; however, Judaism around the time of Christ did speculate about him, for example, in the Qumran scroll 11QMelchizedek.

Priest of the Most High God is an indication of the highest possible standing that this man had in the eyes of his creator. That some believe it to be an early introduction or an epiphany of Christ will be discussed in comments made on v.3, which argue that it seems unlikely to have been so.

Abraham was returning from defeating the kings refers to an incident where several kings attacked the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, taking captive Abraham's nephew Lot and his family. Abraham pursued and defeated the kings, rescuing his family and taking the plunder from the defeated armies. The account is recorded in Genesis 14:1-16.

Abraham apportioned 'one-tenth of everything'. This was a spontaneous gesture by Abraham long before the law introduced tithing. It is an indication that Abraham recognised Melchizedek as God's high priest.

His name. In the OT, and in later Judaism, the meaning of a name could indicate a person's relationship to God: <<No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations>> (Genesis 17:5), <<God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her'>> (Genesis 17:15-16), and: <<Then the man said, 'You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed'>> (Genesis 32:28).

Likewise, Jesus renamed Simon to Peter at their first meeting: <<He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter)>> (John 1:42), where Cephas is Aramaic for a piece of rock, as is the Greek Petros. This was done for a specific purpose, for he later said: <<And I tell you, you are Peter, and on

this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it>> (Matthew 16:18).

Melchizedek. The Hebrew name means 'king of righteousness' by combining the Hebrew *melek* or king and *tsedeq*, which means righteousness.

Salem was Melchizedek's home city, which is Hebrew *shalem*, and is from the same root as the Hebrew for 'peace', i.e. *shalom*. The city is now known as Jerusalem, God's own city: <<*or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King*>> (Matthew 5:35b).

Shalom has a much richer connotation than the English word does since it conveys not merely the absence of conflict and turmoil but also the notion of positive blessing, especially in terms of a right relationship with God. It gives the overall impression and the idea that 'all is well' in one's life. This may be manifested most clearly amid persecution and tribulation.

³ Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest for ever.

Hebrews 7:3

That he was without father, mother or genealogy probably means simply that this information is not given anywhere in Scripture, in contrast to the Levitical priests, whose genealogies are recorded.

The next phrase should probably be understood in the same way. That is, Melchizedek had neither beginning of days nor end of life recorded in Scripture; he suddenly appeared in Genesis Chapter 14 and then disappeared just as quickly as he came.

Some have suggested that Melchizedek was a pre-incarnate, temporary appearance of the eternal Son of God. They tend to look to Jesus' own words to support this: <<*Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad*>> (John 8:56). As this passage indicates, however, Melchizedek was not in fact the Son of God but someone resembling the Son of God, literally 'having been made like the Son of God'; he was an ordinary human being who was 'king of Salem' (v.1). It is also unlikely that David would record that the Messiah would come in the order of himself, simply under different names.

The language should not be confused with that of the prophet: <<In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence>> (Daniel 7:13), where the reference to 'one like a son of man' is accepted as representing a vision of the Messiah with God. The difference is about reading the whole topic in its own context.

As far as the OT narrative is concerned, it shows no end to his priesthood, so in that sense he remains a priest forever. He was a priest, yet there is no prior reference to a priesthood in Scripture. That came hundreds of years later through the Mosaic Law.

Thus Hebrews seems to view Melchizedek as mortal even if he was an extraordinary man, who was a 'type' or foreshadowing of Christ. Paul had described Adam as a type of the Christ yet to come: <<**Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come**>> (Romans 5:14). Paul viewed Adam as a covenantal head of humankind in the way that Jesus is, yet Adam was flawed for he broke an oral commandment of God. In a similar way, Melchizedek is comparable to the eternal high priesthood of the righteous Son of God, for he was a forerunner to the priestly role; yet only Jesus is truly the 'king of righteousness' (v.2), the one who brings true peace to all.

Although both Melchizedek and Jesus are both anointed as king and priest, it is Jesus who fulfilled all righteousness at his baptism (Matthew 3:15), and it was he whom the prophet had named as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). Jesus' commission and anointing came from the highest authority, as was witnessed at his baptism: <<**And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased'**>> (Mark 1:11), as well as on the Mount of Transfiguration: <<**Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!'**>> (Luke 9:35), and: <<**For he received honour and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased'**>> (2 Peter 1:17).

⁴ See how great he is! Even Abraham the patriarch gave him a tenth of the spoils.

Hebrews 7:4

Even Abraham highlights the pre-eminence of the author's forefather. Abraham was revered by the Jews, yet even the writer is prepared to concede that Melchizedek had to be even greater in God's eyes.

A tenth of the spoils. Abraham tithed to Melchizedek as already noted from Genesis 14:20 and commented on previously. This was a voluntary and spontaneous gift, not one that was ordained by law and represents the heart of true faith. In the same way, those in the modern church should be just as spontaneous in their giving, no longer requiring a law to oblige them to tithe, but given as an offering from the heart to recognise their faithfulness to God in response to the love and grace he pours out on them.

Patriarch here means 'father of a nation or people'. This is a reminder that all Israel traces its lineage through Abraham: <<**Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'** They answered him, 'We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, "You will be made free"?'>> (John 8:31-33). Refer also to vv.9-10.

⁵ And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to collect tithes from the people, that is, from their kindred, though these also are descended from Abraham.

⁶ But this man, who does not belong to their ancestry, collected tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had received the promises.

Hebrews 7:5-6

Those descendants of Levi is a reference to the fact that Levites were called to serve God with specific tabernacle and later temple duties, or other religious roles in communities, with it being only the direct descendants of Aaron who receive the priestly office.

This man, who does not belong to their ancestry. Although nothing is known of Melchizedek's roots, it is clear that a Levite, for they were to come from the body of Abraham through his descendants and therefore did not even exist at the time of this mystical king and priest.

Commandment in the law to collect tithes from the people. In the Mosaic Law, God had commanded the Israelites to tithe to the Levitical priesthood: <<*To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for a possession in return for the service that they perform, the service in the tent of meeting. From now on the Israelites shall no longer approach the tent of meeting, or else they will incur guilt and die. But the Levites shall perform the service of the tent of meeting, and they shall bear responsibility for their own offences; it shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations. But among the Israelites they shall have no allotment, because I have given to the Levites as their portion the tithe of the Israelites, which they set apart as an offering to the Lord. Therefore I have said of them that they shall have no allotment among the Israelites*>> (Numbers 18:21-24), who are themselves fellow descendants of Jacob, i.e. Israel, and of Abraham.

It was Abraham who had received the promises: <<*When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you and multiply you.' And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise*>> (Hebrews 6:13-15). These promises also encompassed the offspring of Abraham, both physical and spiritual. Refer to comments made on vv.9-10.

Blessed him who had received the promises. Abraham was the recipient of God's promises to become the father of many nations, and Melchizedek blessed him for that. It should be noted that the very act of blessing was the rite performed only by a priest or by God himself. It is an indication of the superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham that is expressed in v.7.

⁷ It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.

Hebrews 7:7

The superior person, i.e. Melchizedek, blessed the inferior, that is, Abraham, thus the Melchizedek priesthood is superior to Abraham and all his descendants, implicitly including the Levitical priesthood.

⁸ In the one case, tithes are received by those who are mortal; in the other, by one of whom it is testified that he lives.

Hebrews 7:8

Tithes are received by those who are mortal is again a reference to the role of the Levites. The writer then continues with a comparison of the tithe being collected by one who appeared to be immortal, although he was just a pointer to the one who alone is immortal.

He lives. Melchizedek is a 'priest forever', stated in v.3 and Psalm 110:4, as already noted. Hence, the Melchizedek priesthood, being eternal, is superior to the mortal Levitical priesthood (vv.23-25). The author is probably not arguing that Melchizedek never died, but that he is a type of Christ in his God given priesthood, and that nothing is stated in the biblical text about his death as noted in v.3; so the figure of Melchizedek forecasts the risen Jesus.

⁹ One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, ¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

Hebrews 7:9-10

Levi himself, paid tithes through Abraham to Melchizedek. The author's reasoning is that the offspring of Abraham, especially Levi, who share in Abraham's promises, also share in Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek, and therefore the Levitical priesthood is inferior to the Melchizedekian priesthood.

Tithes were paid to all the Levites as they did not receive a land allocation with the other tribes. This was to be in recognition for the work they did for God and his people, to be used for their upkeep and the work of the church; yet through Abraham, Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek - a forerunner to Christ.

In addition to the tithes, the Levites did receive a proportion of the offerings that could be eaten by them and their families: <<*The levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, shall have no allotment or inheritance within Israel. They may eat the sacrifices that are the Lord's portion but they shall have no inheritance among the other members of the community; the Lord is their inheritance, as he promised them. This shall be the priests' due from the people, from those offering a sacrifice, whether an ox or a sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder, the two jowls, and the stomach*>> (Deuteronomy 18:1-3).

II.c.v Hebrews 7:11-28 - Jesus compared to Melchizedek

The Mosaic Law was unable to make men perfect, since it was administered by a succession of sinful, mortal priests, as all mankind are. Jesus however is, by God's oath, established forever as the Holy Priest and Son, permitting his followers to draw near to God on the basis of his person and work, not their own.

¹¹ Now if perfection had been attainable through the levitical priesthood – for the people received the law under this priesthood – what further need would there have been to speak of another priest arising according to the order of Melchizedek, rather than one according to the order of Aaron? ¹² For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.

Hebrews 7:11-12

Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood. The law and the Levitical priesthood pointed to the good things to which the people of God should aspire, yet it could not bring them to the perfection or righteous state that was required in order for them to dwell with a holy and righteous God. God's plan was always intended to show the need to replace the human institutions with a divine and perfect alternative. Therefore, it was necessary to speak of another priest arising according to the order of Melchizedek.

In Hebrews, several reasons are presented for why the Mosaic Law could not bring people to perfection (vv.18-19), as also seen in: <<*This is a symbol of the present time, during which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper*>> (Hebrews 9:9), and: <<*Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who approach. Otherwise, would they not have ceased being offered, since the worshippers, cleansed once for all, would no longer have any consciousness of sin?*>> (Hebrews 10:1-2); the work of Jesus in: <<*For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified*>> (Hebrews 10:14), <<*since God had provided something better so that they would not, without us, be made perfect*>> (Hebrews 11:40), and: <<*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect*>> (Hebrews 12:22-23). However, it should be noted that the law itself was perfect, as it reflected the lawgiver and lawmaker, something confirmed by the words of David: <<*The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring for ever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether*>> (Psalm 19:7-9).

Here, the fact that there existed a priestly order of Melchizedek, taken also from Psalm 110:4, shows that the Levitical priesthood, and its high priesthood reserved for the Aaronic line, was insufficient to the task: <<*Then bring near to you your brother Aaron, and his sons with him, from among the Israelites, to serve me as priests – Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar*>> (Exodus 28:1); with greater detail of priestly ordination given in Exodus 29:1-46.

The people received the law under this priesthood. This priesthood was a key part of Jewish life and worship that focused on the tabernacle and then the temple. Thus any threats of change or its removal from them would have come as a hard blow, something that had occurred before: <<*For the Israelites shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim*>> (Hosea 3:4). Thus the news that Jesus introduced a permanent priesthood and covenant was indeed exciting news for the Jewish Christians and its significance should not be lost on the Gentile believers. This teaching is indeed solid food and not milk: <<*I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready*>> (1 Corinthians 3:2), and: <<*For though by this time you ought to be teachers,*

you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food>> (Hebrews 5:12). Despite these observations by Paul and by the author of this letter, it was clear that they would receive the depth of teaching needed in order to gain enlightenment.

Change in the law. The establishment of a better priesthood, that is, Christ's, shows Christians that there also has been a change from the Mosaic Law, since that law required a succession of priests, all descended from Levi (vv.18-19). Thus, Jesus' role as a non-Levitical high priest is strong evidence that the Mosaic covenant, the 'old covenant', is no longer in effect.

Jesus thus makes the temple and the Levitical priesthood redundant, something made even more explicit when God ordained that the temple and its incumbents should be destroyed by the Romans in AD70, as acknowledged by Josephus in Jewish Wars. Therefore, believers in Jesus can put their full hope and trust in him as the perpetual high priest.

¹³ Now the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

Hebrews 7:13-14

Jesus was from the tribe of Judah rather than the priestly tribe of Levi. Yet he qualifies as the eternal high priest because he is the Davidic Messiah, called both Lord and a priest after the messianic priestly order of Melchizedek, something long foreseen and recorded in King David's prophetic writings, that is, in Psalm 110:1, and Psalm 110:4.

From which no one has ever served at the altar. The Jerusalem kings came from the tribe of Judah, with only Solomon recorded as offering sacrifices successfully in the temple: <<*Three times a year Solomon used to offer up burnt-offerings and sacrifices of well-being on the altar that he built for the Lord, offering incense before the Lord. So he completed the house*>> (1 Kings 9:25), and: <<*King Solomon offered as a sacrifice twenty-two thousand oxen and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God*>> (2 Chronicles 7:5). The former quote may well have been a personal offering by the king, whereas the second was clearly Solomon providing the meat from his own herds for the priests to offer at the altar. All the priests designated by the law were direct descendants of Moses' brother Aaron, who was of the tribe of Levi.

¹⁵ It is even more obvious when another priest arises, resembling Melchizedek, ¹⁶ one who has become a priest, not through a legal requirement concerning physical descent, but through the power of an indestructible life.

¹⁷ For it is attested of him,

'You are a priest for ever,
according to the order of Melchizedek.'

Hebrews 7:15-17

Another priest arises, resembling Melchizedek is a further indication that his appearance to Abraham was not an epiphany of Christ but a man who was a pointer to him.

The power of an indestructible life. Jesus' resurrection from the dead indicates his eternal priesthood, again a reference to Psalm 110:4 quoted here in v.17, and reflected in: <<*as he says also in another place, 'You are a priest for ever, according to the order of Melchizedek'*>> (Hebrews 5:6). Death could not conquer Jesus; therefore, his priesthood lasts forever; refer also to vv.23-24.

According to the order of Melchizedek. There is no mention where Melchizedek acquired his priestly status, or indeed if the order preceded or succeeded his life. It makes no reference as to whether he was born a priest or if his priesthood lapsed at his also unrecorded death, if indeed he did die! The key point the author is making is that Jesus' priesthood does not depend on human birthright as it does for the Levitical priests. Although Jesus had a human birth through Mary, as God he was not born but has always existed, one of the deep mysteries of God; therefore, God has sworn on oath declaring the immutability, excellence, efficacy, and eternity of the priesthood of Jesus as his Christ.

Some commentators and scholars have speculated that Melchizedek may have been an earlier patriarch. Noah died when Abraham was 52 years old, which was 23 years before Abraham was called by God. Noah's three sons were still alive at that time and many writers have put forward Shem as a candidate. However, this seems unlikely for there is no record of him settling in Canaan and there would seem little point in renaming such a well known character. Melchizedek's origin is known to God and was recognised by Abraham. Therefore, these facts should be sufficient for any reader to accept the credentials of this priest and king as being of God.

¹⁸ There is, on the one hand, the abrogation of an earlier commandment because it was weak and ineffectual ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect); there is, on the other hand, the introduction of a better hope, through which we approach God.

Hebrews 7:18-19

An earlier commandment. The institution of the Levitical priesthood was therefore set aside and thus so too the Mosaic Law (v.12), since it was not able to accomplish God's saving purpose, hence its weakness and uselessness. In other words, only Jesus' work on the Cross brought people to perfection, as indicated in v.11, and the comments made there.

A better hope. That is, the hope of salvation and perfection through Jesus' high priesthood (vv.25-28).

Hope is a key theme for the author: <<*Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope*>> (Hebrews 3:6), <<*And we want each one of you to show the same diligence, so as to realise the full assurance of hope to the very end*>> (Hebrews 6:11), <<*so that through two unchangeable things, in*

which it is impossible that God would prove false, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us>> (Hebrews 6:18), and: <<Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful>> (Hebrews 10:23).

The Gospel dispensation is fuller, freer, more perspicuous, spiritual and efficacious than that of the law.

Approach God. Jesus' work permits true interpersonal fellowship with God as commented on in Hebrews 4:16; and repeated in v.25. The writer continues the theme: *<<let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water>> (Hebrews 10:22), <<And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him>> (Hebrews 11:6).*

Verse 11 and v.19 are about perfection, or completeness. This is not moral perfection, for that will only come about with the return of Christ. This perfection in Jesus goes way beyond human behaviour; it refers to all of creation being reflected in the nature and person of Christ.

Jews believed that if they focused on the temple and their absolution through the sacrifices offered by the Levitical priests on their behalf, then God would work perfection into them and through them to the world. It didn't happen that way as God never intended that it should. That was not the lesson.

Indeed, the Levitical priesthood was established to point forward to a different one that could bring God's plans to final perfection. The difference is highlighted here in that it came through the tribe of Judah and not Levi; a tribe of whom Moses made no reference with regard to priesthood.

It was Jacob who had pointed the way for Judah: *<<Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness – who dares rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his. Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes; his eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk>> (Genesis 49:8-12).*

It is Jesus' resurrection and eternal life that is the power behind the perfection: *<<Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?>> (John 11:25-26).*

²⁰ This was confirmed with an oath; for others who became priests took their office without an oath, ²¹ but this one became a priest with an oath, because of the one who said to him,

‘The Lord has sworn
and will not change his mind,
“You are a priest for ever”’ –

Hebrews 7:20-21

This was confirmed with an oath; the Lord has sworn. Although God instituted the Levitical priesthood, he did not promise its eternal validity. The priesthood of Jesus rests securely on God’s promise or oath in Psalm 110:4, which was fully discussed in comments on Hebrews 6:13-20.

For others who became priests took their office without an oath. All descendants of Aaron automatically qualified as priests, with the high priest being from the family that was most directly descended. In Jesus’ day, the high priests were all Sadducees, coming from wealthy middleclass backgrounds and they were more interested in the social status the role gave them than they were in serving the purposes of God.

The Sadducees became vehement opponents of the early church: <<Then the high priest took action; he and all who were with him (that is, the sect of the Sadducees), being filled with jealousy, arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison>> (Acts 5:17-18).

²² accordingly Jesus has also become the guarantee of a better covenant.

Hebrews 7:22

The new, better covenant based on Jesus’ eternal high priesthood comes with God’s oath and with Jesus as its guarantor, and thus it is superior to the Mosaic covenant: <<*For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant*>> (Hebrews 9:15).

The word translated better appears more times in Hebrews than elsewhere. The author is not comparing bad with good, but good with better.

This new dispensation in the coming of Jesus is better than, and supersedes, the old law and temple practices that were the bedrock of Judaism.

²³ Furthermore, 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 approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Hebrews 7:23-25

The mortality of the many former Levitical priests is again contrasted with the eternity of Jesus as high priest; refer back to v.8.

The temple priesthood, just like any parish church, had mortal men, both good and bad, wise, faithful or whatever, as incumbents for a period of time. Their tenure then comes to an end for various reasons but eventually it is death that overtakes them. At such times, others are then called to fulfil the duties, so that the service continues, although the individual does not, indeed he cannot because of death. This is not the case with Jesus, who is both perfect and eternal. He is the final, faithful minister.

For all time does not specify whether completeness in time, i.e. 'for ever', or completeness in extent, i.e. 'completely', is intended; the Greek *eis to panteles* can mean both. Since a 'complete' salvation would endure for all time, and since a salvation for all time would eventually include every aspect of life, perhaps the author intends readers to hear both senses.

On those who approach God, approach is the Greek *proserchomai*, which can also be translated as 'go to' or 'draw near to'. It is used consistently in Hebrews to represent a person approaching God. Refer to comments made on Hebrews 4:16.

Jesus Christ always lives to make intercession, that is, to bring the requests of believers to the Father: <<*Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us*>> (Romans 8:34), for those who approach God through him. Since the ever-living Christ intercedes for believers, they can have great confidence that they will never perish. In fact, they can know that 'all things' in their lives will 'work together for good' <<*We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose*>> (Romans 8:28), for God the Father will answer the prayers of his Son.

Jesus died, rose and now lives to intercede for those who choose to come to God through him. He will continue to do so until it is time to bring all things to a conclusion. The promises of the new covenant are only guaranteed through this route, if indeed there is any other way still open.

The question that needs to be asked is: 'why would we seek a different route when this one guarantees hope and rest in the very presence of God forever, as sworn by God on oath in Psalm 110?'

²⁶ For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

Hebrews 7:26

Fitting that we should have such a high priest. Jesus' high priesthood is appropriate and is for the benefit of believers. Several words emphasise Jesus' excellence in terms of his sinlessness: holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners: <<*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin*>> (Hebrews 4:15), <<*how much more will the blood of*

Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!>> (Hebrews 9:14), and: <<*But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. And I did not know it was against me that they devised schemes, saying, 'Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, so that his name will no longer be remembered!'*>> (Jeremiah 11:19), and his heavenly position, exalted above the heavens.

Exalted above the heavens. Jewish understanding was that heaven was in multiple layers, seven in all, something that Paul experienced personally: <<*I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows*>> (2 Corinthians 12:2). Jesus could be afforded the permanent honour of existing above all the heavens since he was without sin even in his conception: <<*The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'* Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God'>> (Luke 1:30-35). All other humans have imputed sin through Adam.

Jesus elevation here shows that he is no longer considered lower than the angels, for even though the majority remained faithful to God they had the capability to reject God as many had done to follow Satan, something alluded to in: <<*And the angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgement of the great day*>> (Jude 6), therefore they did not retain the full trust of God: <<*Even in his servants he puts no trust, and his angels he charges with error*>> (Job 4:18).

Therefore, the role of mediator between mankind and God has to be someone who has earned God's trust and can speak on equal terms with both God and his people. That is, he has to be both God and human at the same time.

²⁷ Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself.

Hebrews 7:27

Unlike the other high priests. Multiple points of contrast are made between the Levitical high priests, who need to repeatedly offer sacrifices day after day, and Jesus as the one eternal high priest.

First for his own sins, and then for those of the people. This was the ritual that the high priest performed on the Day of Atonement: <<*Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin-offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house*>> (Leviticus 16:6).

He offered himself is an obvious reference to Christ enduring the Cross as the once for all sacrificial offering to atone for the sins of everyone: <<*And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross*>> (Philippians 2:7d-8).

²⁸ For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect for ever.

Hebrews 7:28

The law in its weakness (vv.18-19) appoints sinful mortal men in their weakness to be a continuous succession of high priests (vv.23-24). God, however, made an oath in Psalm 110:4, promising an eternal high priest (vv.20-22). This word of the oath through David came after the Mosaic Law and sets aside the previous Mosaic priesthood by appointing the messianic Son of God as eternal high priest; refer to Hebrews 1:1-14 and 5:5-10.

Made perfect for ever was encountered earlier in this letter: <<*Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him*>> (Hebrews 5:8-9). Refer to comments made on Hebrews 5:9-10.

In Chapters 4-5 the writer speaks of Christ's humanity, tested like all mortals, yet not having the luxury to ever succumb as all others do, from time to time at least. His refusal to succumb to temptation wrought fury on himself because of his resistance.

In vv.26-28, the writer now states that the priesthood of Jesus is like that of the human priests in every respect it needs to be, and yet is also different in every respect that it needs to be, for Jesus is perfect; the human equivalents were and still are far from it!

The contrast between the two is clear. The human high priesthood was one of perpetual repetition; Jesus unique offer of himself was made once for all and made in perfection through his own perfect holiness and righteousness.

The writer highlighted just how central Jesus is to the whole process of life. It is not about what we know, think or which ministries we participate in. It is about living a Gospel-driven life with Jesus at the core of all things.