

Text: Heb 7.11-14

The first part of Heb 7 emphasizes the position of Melchizedek relative to the entire Jewish nation, as revealed in Genesis.

Now the author of Hebrews turns to another emphasis, focusing more on Ps 110.4 for his readers understanding.

The whole argument goes on for most of the rest of the chapter, and today we are just going to entertain the first point.

Read Heb 7.11-14

I am calling our message,

Why Must There Be a Change? (Part 1)

The whole passage, at least through v. 24, with a triumphant conclusion at the end of the chapter, is answering this question. Hence, today is merely “Part 1.”

Before we get into the passage, I want to call your attention once again to the dangerous spiritual position the Hebrew Christians were putting themselves in or were contemplating at least.

I’ve repeatedly said that the Hebrew Christians were under pressure to return to Judaism. It seemed to them that such a move could be safer. Perhaps some of their friends had made the decision and were calling them to follow.

F. F. Bruce makes what I think is a brilliant point from our passage:

“The words ‘Now if perfection were attainable through the Levitical priesthood’ have a bearing on the class of readers at whom our author’s argument was aimed. If they were Gentile converts, in danger of abandoning their Christian faith, their only response to these words would have been: ‘We never thought there *was* perfection through the Levitical priesthood’—they certainly never thought so in their pagan days and they would have received no encouragement to think so in their Christian days. But if they were Jews by birth, now in danger of giving up the distinctive features of their Christian confession and merging once more in their former Jewish environment, the situation was quite different. Before their conversion they had envisaged no priesthood beyond the Levitical priesthood; even if they looked for a new priest to arise in the age to come, he was still a Levitical priest. Their Christian teachers would have encouraged them to think of the

Levitical priesthood as something belonging to the age of preparation, which had now given way to the age of fulfilment; but they were in danger of concluding that, after all, the old order (including the Levitical priesthood and everything else that went with it) had still much to be said in its favor. To such people our author's assurance that the supersession of the Levitical priesthood by another had been decreed by God long before would have had practical relevance."¹

The point is this: if these believers were merely former Gentiles, what attraction would the Jewish priesthood have for them? What kind of familiarity? What kind of stop-gap would it represent?

The fact the argument is going in this direction speaks strongly for a Hebrew Christian audience, probably located in Palestine, if not in Jerusalem itself.

However, for us, the Jewish religion offers no comfort zone, an easier space for us to survive the pressures of our world.

Instead, we may look to the relative easy life of a person in the world. They have Sunday free, they don't have other Christians encouraging them to change their ways, to conform to Christ, to stand separate from the world.

It may look easier in the world. But just as the Hebrews were warned of disaster if we step back from faithful Christianity, so we are warned of the same.

Proposition: Our Lord Jesus is our only hope of perfection.

I. The impossibility of Levitical perfection (11)

(or any other kind of perfection)

A. Contrary to fact condition: "if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood"

1. But it is not: no perfection through Aaron

a. Perfection means: right with God

b. Perfection means: blameless before the Law

2. No works-based religious system can bring spiritual perfection

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 166.

Note: we are not suggesting that the OT law represents a works-based religion.

- Adherents were meant to look past the works to the promise (“the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin”)
- The Law as a school master, bringing us to Christ, showing much more than externals was necessary for perfection

B. The Levitical priesthood is the centerpiece of the OT Law

1. “On the basis of it” – the Law depended on the priesthood
2. The religion without the priesthood is worse than useless
 - a. It reduces the religion to mere tradition, rules for living
 - b. It provides no access to God whatever

In fact, that is what modern Judaism is: a priestless religion

C. Yet another priest was necessary

1. How we know: Psalm 110.4

Ps 110.4 The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, “You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.”

2. Some of the Rabbis thought the priesthood was perfect

“It was a common notion in rabbinic thought that the priesthood was ‘perfect’ and thus never-ending, probably deriving from such statements as Exod 40:15 and Num 25:13, where the Levitical priesthood is described as ‘a permanent/lasting priesthood’ (HCSB; cf. Jer 33:18), although nowhere is any individual priest described as an everlasting priest.”²

3. Yet God designated another, non-Aaronic priest in Ps 110.4

² David Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary 35 (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Publ. Group, 2010), 410.

Bottom line: no one gets back to God [perfection] without a perfect high priest, one better than Aaron.

II. The impact of priestly change (12)

A. Not just a new generation, a new kind of priest

1. The new priest is “another priest” (11 - ἕτερος, not ἄλλος)
2. The new priest belongs to “another tribe” (13 - ἕτερος, not ἄλλος)
3. The priesthood is *changed*: “to turn one thing into another”³

B. Changed priesthood = changed law

“The Law and the Priesthood were so inextricably united that the Priesthood could not be altered without disintegrating the whole complex structure of the Law.”⁴

C. How has the Law changed?

1. Fulfilled in Christ (Mt 5.17; Rm 10.4)
2. Cancellation of OT priesthood (Ps 110.4)
3. Led to Christ (Gal 3.24)

The change means there is no hope in any seemingly “easier” way. The Hebrew Christians had no good place to return to. Gentile Christians haven even less.

We have only Christ, nothing else.

III. The institution of a new priest (13-14)

A. No one from Judah has officiated at the altar (13)

B. Moses spoke nothing concerning priests from Judah (14)

³ μετατίθημι in Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (International Bible Translators (IBT), Inc., 1889).

⁴ F. W. Farrar, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, With Notes and Introduction.*, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), 99.

C. Yet Our Lord sprang from Judah (14)

1. First time “our lord” appears as an expression in the NT, standing alone as a title for Jesus
2. Translated descended, the word is used of a positive step forward
 - a. Sometimes used of the Sun rising (Mal. 4:2; Lk. 12:54; 2 Pet. 1:19)
 - b. Sometimes used of the springing up of new plants (Zech. 3:8, 6:12)
 - c. Used of the star springing from Jacob (Num 24.17)

Num 24.17 “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise from Israel, ...

- d. Used of raising for David a righteous Branch (Jer 23.5)

Jer 23.5 ¶ “Behold, *the* days are coming,” declares the LORD, “When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; And He will reign as king and act wisely And do justice and righteousness in the land.

D. Our Lord springs up to bring us life, perfection, heaven

Conclusion:

Proposition: Our Lord Jesus is our only hope of perfection.

As sons and daughters of Adam, we are far from perfection. Without perfection we will never see God.

The priest after the order of Melchizedek: he provides us with perfection.

There is no perfection outside of Him.