

“Out With the Old, In With the New”

Heb. 7:11-19

- INTRO. - One pastor was preaching through the Book of Hebrews and he saw the structure of the book illustrated when he took his son to the Memphis zoo. He observes that they were given a graphic map when they entered the zoo, and on the map were all the main exhibits. There was “Cat Country,” “Primate Canyon,” the Butterfly Pavilion, the Reptile House, etc.

But as they were going through the zoo (to each of these exhibits) he made the key observation that relates to the Book of Hebrews. Apparently, at each main exhibit, there were signs pointing to the other exhibits, and to the zoo as a whole.

- He then made the connection that this is exactly what the author of Hebrews does. In various passages, he majors on a dominant theme, but he always includes certain sub-themes he has already addressed or intends to address later.
- Because of this, many scholars have labeled this book transitional in nature. Every time he deals with a primary doctrine, he is also pointing to other doctrines as well. In fact, this is one of the reasons why people often get confused in trying to interpret this book.

- The key (for us) is that we make sure we understand the primary doctrines in each section, and that we *not* get bogged down in the sub-themes.
- I’ve heard preachers get caught up in some minor point and totally miss the main message of the passage. I’ve heard preachers hammer on certain things they are most passionate about and *not* give a balanced treatment of the text. We must guard against this in our approach to God’s Word.
- One author writes, “an important aspect of applying 7:11-28 might be to focus on the dominant themes, allowing subordinate themes to hold our focus where appropriate elsewhere in the book.”
- He explains, “This does *not* mean we neglect the subthemes—their relation to the dominant themes must be brought into the discussion at some point—but we must *not* miss the author’s main points for each section of the book.”
- This is especially helpful in Heb. 7. We need to understand, that in vv. 1-10 he has dealt with the superiority of Melchizedek over the Levitical priesthood. *Now* (in this middle section – 7:11-19) he is going to show the inadequacy of the Levitical system and its abrogation to give way to the new priesthood of the new covenant. Whatever else we

say about this passage, we must *not* lose sight of that main theme.

- But I also need to say something about the issue of relevance at this point. For most of us today, the temptation of holding the Levitical priesthood in too high a regard is *not* something we deal with on a regular basis.
- In fact, some of you may be thinking that this long, drawn-out explanation of the Jewish priesthood is boring and totally irrelevant. Some of you may be thinking, “Give us some practical help for Christian living. Don’t bore us with all this OT ceremonial ritual.”
- In fact, even for those who are really interested in theology, the issue of the inferior status of the Levitical priesthood may seem like a foregone conclusion. You may be thinking, “*Of course* Jesus’ priesthood is greater than that of old covenant – tell me something I *don’t* know.”
- But listen, what we have to understand is, the author of this book (inspired by the HS) has a very specific purpose in going to great lengths to lay out these important doctrines. And he does this in such a way that it becomes practical and relevant for all believers.
- For example, in our current text, we see that this is connected with what some theologians have

referred to as “relational theology.” The key phrase in our present passage is found in v. 19. It is the phrase, “...we draw near to God.” Why is this important? Because it has always been God’s desire for us to draw near to Him, but this was *not* very possible under the old system. Under the old covenant, there was always a veil between men and God. There was always a barrier.

- But now, under the new covenant, that barrier has been removed. So this aspect of “relational theology” is very relevant for us. In fact, John MacArthur says, “Drawing near to God is the essence of Christianity.” Sometimes we forget that.
- Some Christians only view the Bible as a source of devotional encouragement or as a way of helping them achieve some sort of personal fulfillment. They fail to understand that the Scripture is given to bring us to God.
- Some get so caught up in the details of theology that they miss the fact that it is all intended to bring us into an intimate relationship with God Himself.
- But it is one of the most important ways that the *new* covenant is superior to the *old*. One of the key ways in which the Levitical system was inadequate was in its inability to open up full access to God.
- And in our present passage we see this inadequacy of the old system, its abrogation, and its

replacement with the new. We see where the old system was *not* able to allow men to draw near to God, but the new was. It is that “bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.”

- Now, we’re going to divide this passage into three sections. We’re going to see the imperfect law, the indestructible life, and the indispensable lesson. That’s our main outline, and we begin with:

I. THE IMPERFECT LAW (vv. 11-12)

- Look with me at v. 11, “Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need *was there* for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron?”
- Now, this entire passage is based on Ps. 110:4, and what we need to understand is that this verse clearly indicates that God has determined to establish an eternal priesthood after the order of Melchizedek.
- Remember, this is what it says, “The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’”
- And Heb. 7:11 asks the question, “Why did God determine to do that if the Levitical priesthood was

sufficient?” Of course, the point is, that it is *not* sufficient. There is need for a different priesthood.

- In fact, the teaching of Scripture indicates that God never intended for the Levitical system (and the Law that was based on that system) to be adequate to bring us to God (fully).
- It was only the new priesthood (in which the Messiah would be the Priest) that would be able to do that. If the Aaronic priesthood could accomplish that, then God would *not* have firmly declared that He was going to bring about another priesthood.
- In fact, we would have to say from Scripture that it was no accident that the Aaronic priesthood would eventually be set aside. This was the way God planned it.
- We *know* that was pre-determined by God because all this goes all the way back to the time of Abraham. This was already determined, even before God established a covenant with Abraham (and the nation of Israel was born).
- Hundreds of years before there ever was a Levitical priesthood, God had already determined that it would ultimately be replaced by this superior priesthood.
- Notice the word “perfection” in v. 11. This word does *not* refer to quality but function. It does *not*

mean “without flaws” but (instead) refers to “arriving at a desired end” or “reaching a goal.” This is the primary way this word is used all through this book.

- Guthrie says, “That ‘desired end’ refers to the type of relationship established between God and his people under the new covenant.”
- The ultimate goal (or aim) of Christianity is to bring men to God. That was only possible to a limited extent under the old system, but it is possible in a complete sense under the new.
- Verse 11 tells us that this kind of “perfection” could *not* be attained by the Levitical priesthood. And notice that the Mosaic Law was closely tied to this Aaronic priesthood. In fact, these two are inextricably connected.
- *Not only* was it God’s predetermined plan to replace the imperfect priesthood, but it was also His predetermined plan to change His law as well.
- Look at v. 12, “For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also.” Some theologians describe this as the covenant of law being replaced by the covenant of grace, but we know that the Mosaic Law was imperfect in bringing men to God. It took the new covenant—the gospel of Christ to accomplish that.
- The Mosaic Law could never bring men near to God (in the sense of accomplishing eternal salvation) because men could never keep the Law. That’s why Paul wrote, “Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, that we may be justified by faith.” (That’s Gal. 3:24.)
- The Law was *not* given to save us – it was given to show us our sin so we would turn to Christ and be justified by faith in Him.
- Paul wrote in Gal. 2:16, “...by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified,” and even in *this* chapter (in Hebrews) we read, “for the Law made nothing perfect.” (That’s v. 19.) You can’t be saved by keeping the Law. You have to be saved by God’s grace.
- This is what v. 12 is referring to. God has made it clear that there has to be a change made in the priesthood, and if this is the case, there has to be a change in the law as well.
- Both the Aaronic priesthood and the Mosaic Law were given to serve a temporary purpose. We see this very clearly later on in this book.
- Turn with me to 10:1. Here’s what the author of Hebrews will say there, “For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never by the same

sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near.”

- Here is another reason why the Mosaic Law was imperfect. It was only the shadow, *not* the substance. As such, it could *not* “make perfect those who draw near” to God. The Mosaic Law was unable to do that because of the inadequacy of the ongoing sacrifices of that system.
- And the author of Hebrews is going to show how Christ made the ultimate sacrifice for sin in His atoning work on the cross. His sacrifice was once and for all – and was completely perfect and sufficient.
- Unlike the imperfect Law, He was able to provide a way for us to draw near to God through His atoning work. He was able to provide permanent forgiveness, and therefore permanent access to God.
- This is why the new covenant and the priesthood of Christ is superior to that of the old. Under the old covenant sins could be covered temporarily, but they could never be removed permanently.
- No one (under the old covenant) had complete and permanent access to God. And (in fact) the rhetorical question of v. 11 brings out this truth. If the old covenant system could accomplish that,

then why would God declare that there must be another priesthood?

- In 8:7 we will read, “For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second.” If the old covenant was sufficient, we would *not* need the new covenant. But the Bible is clear – the old covenant was never intended to be sufficient for these things.
- That means there has to be a change. Notice that word “changed” in v. 12. This is a very specific word that means “replaced.” It means to exchange one thing for another. The new priesthood was *not added to* the Aaronic priesthood – it was a total replacement of it.
- In fact, in v. 18 we will see an even stronger word, that means “to put away for good.” The old system has been done away with. There is no longer any reason to keep the Mosaic Law. It is the shadow, and there is no longer any reason for it because the real thing has come.
- John MacArthur says, “Aaron’s priesthood now has no validity at all, not even as a picture of salvation or as a temporary covering of sin. It is defunct, totally abrogated.”
- Now, of course, the moral aspects of the Law are still in effect because they are tied to the nature of God and are re-affirmed in the NT. But the

ceremonial aspects of the Law are no longer in force. The sacrificial system of the Levitical priesthood is no longer necessary. The Law pertaining to that old priesthood is done away with.

- Well, *not only* do we see the imperfect law, but we also see:

II. THE INDESTRUCTIBLE LIFE (vv. 13-17)

- After explaining that a change in the priesthood means a change in the Law, he moves to clarifying how the new priesthood in Ps. 110:4 differs from the Levitical priesthood.
- He is going to start with the *negative* side – that Christ is *not* like Aaron. We see that in vv. 13-14. Then he will go on to the *positive* side – that He is like Melchizedek. We see that in vv. 15-17. So we'll take these one at a time, beginning with:

A. The Contrast (vv. 13-14)

- Christ is *not* like Aaron. Look with me at v. 13, “For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.”

- This is a clear reference to Jesus, and it serves as proof that the priesthood has changed (and the law related to it). The fact that Jesus did not come from the tribe of Levi, but from the tribe of Judah, establishes that there has been a change in the priesthood.

- No one from the tribe of Judah ever served at the altar as a priest. The priests in Israel had to come from the tribe of Levi (and had to be descendants from Aaron).

- No one (from any of the other tribes) could ever serve at the altar as a priest. That means, that if Jesus is a priest, He must be of a different order. His qualifications are (obviously) *not* hereditary.

- And the point (here) is that His priesthood is totally distinct from the Levitical priesthood. The Aaronic priesthood was replaced by the Melchizedekan priesthood.

- So that is the contrast. Christ is not like Aaron. His priesthood is unique. But in vv. 15-17 we move to:

B. The Comparison (vv. 15-17)

- Christ *is* like Melchizedek. Look at v. 15, “And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become *such* not on the basis of a law of physical

requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life.”

- And then he comes back to his key verse (here) in v. 17, “For it is witnessed *of Him*, ‘Thou art a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.’” Right back to the truth of Ps. 110:4.
- But notice some important details. First of all, the phrase “this is clearer still” indicates a new stage in the argument. He is going to take it to a deeper level in showing how Christ is like Melchizedek.
- Secondly, the word “another” (in v. 15) is the Greek word “heteros.” It is *not* “allos,” which means another of the same kind. This word means “another of a *different* kind.”
- In Christ we do *not* have just another Levitical priest. We have a totally unique priest. He is a priest of an entirely different order.
- And notice the word “arises” (in v. 15). Now, the interesting thing here is, that even though both v. 11 and v. 15 speaks of another priest arising, the word in v. 15 is different from the word in v. 11.
- Here in v. 15 the word is in the Greek middle voice, which makes it reflexive. In other words, this means “another priest arises by Himself.” What is the significance of this?

- Well, there are several possible applications. First, this could be pointing to His virgin birth. Through the virgin birth, God raised Him up in a unique way that no Levitical priest could ever claim.
- All other priests “arose” through natural human birth, but Jesus Christ “arose” through a supernatural birth. Yes, He had a human mother, but he had no human father. He was conceived of the HS. This made His “arising” unique.
- Another uniqueness of His “arising” is that His genealogy is *not* from the priestly tribe. His genealogy is very important in showing His right to rule on the throne of David as king, but it did *not* give Him the right to serve as a Levitical priest.
- Then what gave Him the right to serve as Priest? His eternity and His Person. He claimed that right simply because of Who He is. He is the eternal Son of God.
- Notice what it says in v. 16, “who has become *such* not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life.”
- It’s *not* about His genealogy, it is about His eternity. His priesthood has nothing to do with physical heredity. It has to do with His eternal power.

- He has become (and continues to be) our superior priest because of His eternal power – which is a power that can accomplish what no Levitical priest can ever accomplish: to give us full and complete access to God.
- And (by the way) there is an interesting reference in Acts 2:32 to another connection to this word “arises,” and that is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
- Acts 2:32 simply says, “This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.” But the word “raised” (there) is the very same Greek word as we find in Heb. 7:16. So (biblically) I think we can make this connection as well.
- For all these reasons, Jesus Christ is a unique priest that has “arisen” of a new order. He is *not* like Aaron, instead he is like Melchizedek. He is a priest forever, which is something that could never be said of any Aaronic priest. Only the eternal Son of God could say this.
- He has risen from the dead and He ever lives to make intercession for us. He is eternal God and He sits at the right hand of the Father as priest forever. This is the power of His indestructible life.
- By the way, go back to v. 16 and notice the phrase, “on the basis of a law of physical requirement.”

The KJV has “after the law of a carnal commandment.”

- We read that word “carnal” and think “sinful,” but that is *not* what this is talking about. The NEB has (perhaps) the essence of this. It reads, “a system of earth-bound rules.”
- In other words, this has to do with that which is tied to the externalities of religion. In this case, it is the physical descent of the priests (primarily), but also the temporary, imperfect religious system that is attached to the Levitical priesthood.
- And as F. F. Bruce has written, “Like everything in the Levitical regime, the Aaronic order of priesthood was marked by transience; it stands in contrast to the permanence and effectiveness of the priestly office of Christ.”
- So we see the imperfect law and the indestructible life, but finally (in this passage) we get to:

III. THE INDISPENSABLE LESSON (vv. 18-19)

- The final two verses of this text bring us to the main point of his argument. Here we see what he is getting at. Look at it with me, “For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect),

and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.”

- Here is the indispensable lesson: God is setting aside the old and imperfect, and is replacing it with the new and perfect. Because God gave the Mosaic Law, He has the right to replace it.
- Again, that word for “setting aside” is a word that means “to do away with.” This word was often used to refer to the annulling of treaties. It was used of the cancelling of a debt or the abrogation of a will.
- What is it that is done away with? It is the “former commandment.” It is the Mosaic Law upon which the Levitical priesthood was based. MacArthur says, “The whole paraphernalia of the sacrificial system, the whole ceremonial system, was canceled, annulled, done away with entirely.”
- And (of course) the physical finality of this took place in 70 A.D. with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. By that time, the new covenant, and the hope of the gospel, had become firmly established.
- But notice *why* the old system was replaced: “...because of its weakness and uselessness...” Both of these terms are used to point to ineffectiveness.

- The old system was weak and useless because it could never bring us near to God. It could never cleanse the conscience in such a way as to allow us to draw near to God.
- It was merely a type and a shadow – it was *not* the real thing. It was good in pointing ahead to the new covenant, but it could never bring God’s salvation hope.
- Jay Adams says, “No one hugs and kisses the picture of her loved one any longer when he, himself, appears on the scene. The picture was fine in its place; it served its purpose so long as he was not there in person. But now it is useless as a reminder of the one who has actually appeared...”
- The author of Hebrews declares, “the Law made nothing perfect.” The Law can never save. It can never truly bring us near to God. Only the “better hope” of the gospel can do that.
- CONCL. – So what conclusions should we reach from all this? How do we apply these truths to our lives today? There are many important applications for today.
- First of all, there is the eternal hope and security we have in Christ. Because our Lord is a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek, we can know that our eternal salvation is secure. This is the greatest truth of the new covenant.

- As we're going to see later (in chapter 10), "Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith..."
- That applies to every born-again believer in Jesus Christ. You can draw near to God with confidence, knowing that your eternal life is absolutely secure in Him.
- But if you don't have that assurance today, I want to plead with you to receive Him in saving faith. Put your full trust in Him to save you eternally. (Pause)
- But beyond that, there is the admonition and plea to draw near to God. I'm sure you've all heard the old saying, "If God seems far away, guess who moved?" If God seems distant, the problem is on our end.
- So there is the admonition in this passage to draw near to Him. This is relational theology. God's desire for us is that we have a close, intimate relationship with Him. This requires dealing with sin in our lives and diligently seeking Him. Christ has made full access to God possible, but we must draw near to Him. (Pause)
- There is a third application for *some* who may be clinging to the trappings of the old system. There are Seventh-Day Adventists (and others) who do *not* understand that the Mosaic Law has been abrogated by God.
- As I said earlier, the moral law of God is still intact, but everything related to the old covenant is gone. It has been completely replaced by the new covenant. What a tragedy it is, for some to hold on to the shadow despite the fact that the light has come!
- As Jimmy Draper put it, "What a tragedy it is *not* to understand the difference between a shadow and the real thing." This has been the overall theme of this book. Why hang on to the picture when the real has come?
- MAKE APPEAL
- PRAYER