

Session 18 Another Priest And A Necessary Change

Before the Silence: A Study of Hebrews

Session 18 | Hebrews 7:11-17

The Priesthood God Himself Changed (Hebrews 7:11-17)

Session 17 established that the priesthood represented by Melchisedec is greater than Levi's priesthood. Abraham gave Melchisedec a tenth, received his blessing, and included Levi in that acknowledgment "so to speak." Hebrews now moves from **superiority to necessity**: if Levi's order could bring the worshipper to the intended goal, why did God later promise a different priest after Melchisedec's order?

The answer is not that Jesus somehow qualifies as a priest under Aaron's rules. Hebrews openly acknowledges that He comes from Judah, a tribe to which Moses gave no priestly authorization. His priesthood therefore requires a different divine appointment and a corresponding change in the law governing priesthood.

The Logic At A Glance

1. **The Levitical priesthood did not bring perfection (v. 11).**

Its repeated ministry could not provide final cleansing and complete access to God.

2. **Psalm 110:4 promises another priestly order (v. 11).** If Aaron's order were the final provision, another order would not be needed.
3. **A change of priesthood requires a change of governing law (v. 12).** A non-Aaronic priest cannot serve under unchanged Aaronic qualifications.
4. **Jesus comes from Judah, not Levi (vv. 13-14).** That fact is not hidden or explained away; it proves that His authority comes from another source.
5. **The new Priest is established by endless life (vv. 15-16),** not by the bodily requirement of hereditary descent.
6. **God's own testimony supplies the authorization (v. 17):** "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."

Hebrews 7:11 - Why Promise Another Priest?

If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?

Exegesis

- **"If therefore"** draws a conclusion from verses 1-10. Melchisedec's superiority raises a larger question about the adequacy and finality of Levi's order.
- **"Perfection"** means reaching the intended goal: effective cleansing, access to God, and a priestly provision not defeated by sin and death. Hebrews 7:19 and 9:9 explain the limitation more fully.
- The parenthesis connects Israel's law and priesthood. The people received a covenantal order in which priests administered sacrifices and sanctuary access. Priesthood was not an optional addition to the Mosaic system.
- **"What further need"** expects a serious answer. If Aaron's order supplied the final priestly solution, God's later promise in Psalm 110:4 would be unnecessary.
- **"Another priest"** means more than the next Aaronic priest in a succession. The promised Priest belongs to Melchisedec's order and is specifically distinguished from Aaron's.
- The argument does not begin with Christianity inventing an office for Jesus. It begins with Israel's own Scriptures announcing a different order after the Law had already established Aaron's.

Closely Relevant Cross-References

- **Psalm 110:1-4** - The enthroned Lord is also appointed by God's oath as a priest for ever after Melchisedec's order.
- **Leviticus 16:29-34** - The Day of Atonement is repeated every year, showing that the Mosaic provision required continuing priestly service.
- **Hebrews 7:19** - The Law made nothing perfect, but a better hope provides the drawing near that the chapter has in view.
- **Hebrews 9:9; 10:1-4** - Earlier sacrifices could not perfect the conscience or finally remove sins; their repetition exposed their limitation.

Text And Translation Notes

- **"Perfection"** does not mean that every worshipper becomes incapable of committing a sinful act. It concerns completion or attainment of the goal in Hebrews' priestly argument.
- **"Order"** identifies a prescribed kind or arrangement of priesthood. It does not require an unbroken list of earthly Melchisedec officeholders.

What The Passage Does Not Say

- It does not say the Levitical priesthood was fraudulent or contrary to God. It accomplished the preparatory and regulatory purpose for which God gave it.
- It does not say no Israelite ever received forgiveness under the former provision. The question is whether its sacrifices and mortal priests could supply final perfection.

Hebrews 7:12 - A Necessary Change Of Law

For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.

Exegesis

- **“For”** explains the legal consequence of another order. The Mosaic priesthood was governed by definite rules concerning ancestry, service, sacrifice, and sanctuary.
- **“The priesthood being changed”** is not merely the replacement of one dying Aaronic priest by another. Psalm 110 announces a priest belonging to a different order.
- **“Of necessity”** makes the conclusion unavoidable. A priest outside Aaron’s line cannot simply assume Aaron’s altar while all the former qualifications remain unchanged.
- The immediate subject is the law governing priesthood. Because priesthood was woven into the covenantal administration, the change reaches beyond one job title. Hebrews 7:22 and chapter 8 will develop the better testament and new covenant.
- The authority for the change comes from God. The same God who appointed Aaron later swore that another Priest would serve for ever after Melchisedec’s order.

Closely Relevant Cross-References

- **Exodus 28:1** - God appoints Aaron and his sons to minister in the priest’s office; descent from another tribe does not meet that appointment.
- **Numbers 18:7** - Unauthorized service at the altar was forbidden, showing that priestly qualifications could not be ignored.

- **2 Chronicles 26:16-21** - King Uzziah’s royal authority did not authorize him to perform Aaronic priestly service.
- **Hebrews 8:4-6** - Jesus would not be an earthly priest under the existing law, but He possesses a more excellent ministry connected with a better covenant.

Text And Translation Notes

- **“Changed”** and **“change”** express transfer or alteration. The verse describes more than a minor adjustment within the Aaronic system.
- **“The law”** should first be read in its priestly context. This is not a free-standing declaration that every divine moral distinction has disappeared.

Theological Insights

- Progressive revelation does not make God inconsistent. A later word from God can announce the completion and surpassing of an earlier provision without making the earlier revelation false.
- Rules belonging to one divinely established order cannot automatically be imposed upon a succeeding order while ignoring God’s new authorization.

What The Passage Does Not Say

- It does not permit human religious leaders to invent new priesthoods or change God’s law by their own authority.
- It does not erase God’s promises to Abraham, David, Israel, or Judah. The chapter changes the legal basis of Messiah’s priesthood; it does not transfer every covenant promise to an unnamed people.

Hebrews 7:13-14 - Jesus Comes From Judah

*For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar.
For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.*

Exegesis

- **“He of whom these things are spoken”** is identified plainly in verse 14 as **“our Lord.”** The promised Melchisedec priesthood is now applied directly to Jesus.
- **“Another tribe”** means a tribe other than Levi. Jesus’ ancestry is a legal disqualification for Aaron’s office, not a moral deficiency in Jesus.
- **“Gave attendance at the altar”** means recognized priestly service. Unauthorized people sometimes approached sacred service, but Scripture did not thereby approve them.
- **“It is evident”** treats Jesus’ Judahite origin as known. Hebrews does not hide His genealogy or construct a secret Levitical ancestry.
- Moses gave Judah no priestly authorization. Silence matters here because the priestly office was expressly restricted to another family.

other family.

- Jesus has the proper royal ancestry promised through Judah and David, but His priestly authority must come from somewhere other than Aaron. Psalm 110 supplies that authority.

Closely Relevant Cross-References

- **Genesis 49:10** - Judah receives the expectation of the sceptre and coming ruler, not the Aaronic altar.
- **Numbers 3:10; 16:39-40** - Aaron’s sons are appointed, and the censers become a memorial that outsiders may not offer incense.
- **Matthew 1:1-3** - Jesus’ genealogy openly locates Him through David, Abraham, and Judah.
- **Hebrews 8:4** - If Christ were serving under the earthly legal arrangement, He would not be a priest.

Text And Translation Notes

- **“Pertaineth”** means belongs to or shares in. Jesus truly belongs to another tribe.
- **“Attendance”** means service rather than passive observation.
- **“Sprang out of Juda”** means descended from Judah. The an-

cestry statement does not deny the virgin birth; Luke 1:32-35 affirms both Davidic identity and miraculous conception.

A Jewish Objection Answered

Objection: The Torah confines priestly service to Aaron's line. Since Jesus comes from Judah, He cannot be a legitimate priest.

Answer: Hebrews agrees that Jesus does not qualify as an Aaronic priest. Its claim is not that the Law secretly permitted a Judahite to enter Aaron's order. Its claim is that God later swore in Psalm 110:4 to appoint a priest after **another order**. The question is therefore not whether Jesus satisfies Aaron's genealogy, but whether Israel's Scriptures authorize a different priesthood. Hebrews answers yes.

Both promises can stand. God can fulfill His everlasting promises concerning Aaron's line in their appointed sphere while also establishing Messiah's priesthood under a different

covenant. Jeremiah promises a new covenant with Israel and Judah in which the Law is written in their hearts rather than discarded (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**). Hebrews explains that its priestly mediation is vastly different: one enduring High Priest mediates the covenant rather than an endless succession of dying priests (**Hebrews 7:23-28; 8:6-13**).

What The Passage Does Not Say

- It does not say Jesus is an Aaronic priest or that Judah quietly became Levi.
- It does not make every scriptural silence a universal prohibition. This reasoning concerns an office whose authorized family had been expressly named.
- It does not portray God as breaking His word. The authority for the new order comes from God's own later promise and oath.

Hebrews 7:15-17 - A Priest Established By Endless Life

*And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest,
Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.
For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.*

Exegesis

- **"Yet far more evident"** advances the argument. Jesus' tribe proves that another authorization is necessary; the nature of His life shows why the new priesthood is superior.
- **"After the similitude of Melchisedec"** recalls Hebrews 7:3. The comparison concerns a continuing priesthood not dependent upon Aaronic genealogy or mortal succession.
- **"There ariseth another priest"** describes the appearance of a Priest outside Aaron's succession, not merely the arrival of the next officeholder when his father dies.
- **"A carnal commandment"** concerns bodily or fleshly qualifications, especially hereditary descent and service carried out by mortal men. It does not call God's Law sinful or corrupt.
- **"The power of an endless life"** gives Jesus a qualification death cannot terminate. He truly died and rose; death can never again remove Him from office or require a successor.
- Verse 17 grounds the claim in Scripture. Jesus' priesthood rests upon God's testimony in Psalm 110:4, not upon recognition by an earthly council.
- **"A priest for ever"** is not an honorary title or a temporary appointment. The Priest's endless life matches the permanence of God's sworn declaration.

Closely Relevant Cross-References

- **Psalm 110:1-4** - The Lord seated at God's right hand is also the Priest appointed for ever by divine oath.
- **Hebrews 5:5-6** - Christ did not glorify Himself into the office; God addressed and appointed Him.

- **Romans 6:9; Revelation 1:18** - The risen Christ dies no more and lives for evermore.
- **Hebrews 7:23-25** - Many Levitical priests were necessary because death removed them; Jesus continues ever and has an unchangeable priesthood.

Text And Translation Notes

- **"Similitude"** means likeness or resemblance. Verses 16-17 define the important likeness as continuing priesthood grounded in life and divine testimony.
- **"Carnal"** here means bodily or fleshly. It contrasts physical descent and mortal tenure with the power of indestructible life.
- **"Endless"** translates a word carrying the sense of indissoluble or indestructible. It describes life that cannot be dissolved by death.
- The KJV reads **"he testifieth"**; translations following another Greek form may read **"it is testified."** Both introduce the same authoritative declaration from Psalm 110.

Theological Insights

- Aaron's priests possessed a valid office, but every priest eventually died. Jesus possesses the kind of life that sustains His office permanently.
- The hearers' confidence therefore rests upon the living Priest before God, not upon the survival of an institution whose officeholders must continually be replaced.

What The Passage Does Not Say

- It does not call the Mosaic Law morally evil when it calls the former qualification **"carnal."**
- It does not imply that Jesus only appeared to die. His resurrection is the demonstration that death cannot hold or remove Him.
- It does not authorize a modern organization to claim Christ's unique office merely by using the name Melchisedec.

Teaching Summary

The Central Movement

- **Verse 11 asks the question:** If Levi's priesthood completed the work, why did God promise another order?
- **Verse 12 states the necessity:** another order requires a corresponding legal change.
- **Verses 13-14 identify the apparent problem:** Jesus comes from Judah, a tribe with no Mosaic authorization for priestly service.
- **Verses 15-16 turn the problem into proof:** Jesus is not another Aaronic priest; His priesthood rests upon endless life rather than hereditary descent.
- **Verse 17 gives the authority:** God Himself testifies in Psalm 110 that the Priest serves for ever after Melchisedec's order.

Put It In Plain Language

Hebrews does not search the Law for a loophole that would let a Judahite become an Aaronic priest. It says the opposite: under the unchanged rules governing Aaron's order, Jesus would not qualify. But Israel's Scriptures do not end with those rules. After establishing Aaron's priesthood, God spoke again and swore that another Priest would arise after a different order.

The same God stands behind both arrangements. Aaron's priesthood was not a human mistake, and Christ's priesthood is not a Christian invention. The earlier order served its assigned purpose; the later promise reveals the enduring Priest through whom the intended goal is reached.

Two Bases Of Priesthood

- **Aaron's order:** tribal descent, bodily qualification, earthly service, mortal priests, and repeated succession.
- **Melchisedec's order as fulfilled in Jesus:** God's oath, a different tribe, heavenly ministry, endless life, and no successor required.

The contrast is not between a sinful priesthood and a righteous priesthood. It is between a temporary, hereditary administration and the permanent Priest whom God later promised.

Why This Mattered To The Hebrew Hearers

- **The visible order favored Aaron.** The Temple, altar, priests, sacrifices, and genealogical claims could all be seen. Jesus' priesthood had to be recognized from Scripture, resurrection, and heavenly ministry rather than from service at Jerusalem's altar.
- **The apparent objection becomes evidence.** Jesus' Judahite ancestry initially seems to count against His priesthood. Once Psalm 110 is taken seriously, however, that ancestry confirms that He belongs to another order rather than representing an

irregular Aaronic appointment.

- **Fidelity required following later revelation.** The hearers could not defend rejection of Messiah merely by appealing to the earlier priestly rule. The God who spoke through Moses also spoke through David concerning the Priest for ever.
- **Endless life answers the weakness of succession.** An earthly priest could serve faithfully and still die. The risen Jesus cannot be removed by death, so His priesthood provides an assurance no succession of mortal officeholders could supply.

A Christian-Audience Guardrail

- The passage is not a warrant for Christian ministers to claim Aaronic or Melchisedec titles. Its subject is Christ's unique appointment.
- The passage is not a general attack upon God's Law. It identifies the limitation of one priestly administration when measured against the goal of final cleansing and access.
- The new covenant remains promised to **Israel and Judah** in Jeremiah 31. Recognizing Christ's superior mediation does not permit the named covenant parties or Israel's promises to be erased.
- The proper present lesson is confidence in Christ's sufficiency and permanence. His priesthood rests upon God's oath and a life that death cannot end.

Review The Reasoning

- **What proves that Levi's order was not the final provision?** God later promised another Priest after another order.
- **Why must the governing law change?** Aaron's rules authorize Aaron's descendants, while Jesus comes from Judah.
- **Does Hebrews try to make Jesus an Aaronic priest?** No. His Judahite ancestry is acknowledged and used as evidence for a different order.
- **What qualifies Jesus for His priesthood?** God's appointment, His endless life, and the testimony of Psalm 110:4.
- **Does the new covenant discard God's Law?** No. Jeremiah says the Law will be written in Israel's heart, while Hebrews explains the new covenant's superior priestly mediation.
- **Why is this better than mortal succession?** Jesus lives continually, so death can never end His office or require another priest to replace Him.

One-sentence summary: Because God promised another order, Jesus' Judahite ancestry does not disqualify Him; it confirms a changed priesthood established by divine oath and the power of endless life.