

HEBREWS – LEVITICUS
“Perfect Priest”
Hebrews 7:23-28
July 16, 2023

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²⁶ For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever. ¹

“This is the Word of God” – “Thanks be to God.”

I know it seems that we are stuck in a long, detailed, history lesson of a discussion about the role of the priest in the Old Testament from a New Testament perspective, but that which is expressed here is so vital for us as Christians, even if we struggle to understand why. My role, as pastor, is to follow the Lord’s lead as we move verse-by-verse through his Word and explain what the teaching meant then, what the underlying and timeless principles of truth are, and how that impacts, influences, and drives how we live and worship today.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Heb 7:23–28). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Therefore, rather than skimming passages of Scripture looking for verses that simply affirm an already chosen topic of the day, we open our copies of the Bible to where we stopped last Sunday and continue together on this journey of learning, inspiration, instruction, affirmation, conviction, and worship.

Thanks be to God.

One of the biggest challenges I believe we face when reading this portion of Hebrews is thinking like a Hebrew. Guess what? We cannot. Why? Because we cannot be who we are not. Yet, we can read the Word, understand the context, and grasp the reality of those struggling in their faith and wondering if they are believing correctly and if that which they are sold out to is actually real.

To the one who never has questioned...you're blessed.

For the rest of us...know that our questions do not threaten our holy God and therefore, his answers remain solid, trustworthy, timeless, and ... well ... real.

Today's Scripture centers around pronouns.

Not in the sense that many are hijacking language today for one's personal search for identity (nothing new under the sun, by the way) but in the sense that clarity in who we speak of is needed.

So, three points today regarding God, his priests, and us.

1. The priests who are NOT him.
2. The priest who is him.
3. The priest's hymn.

THE PRIESTS WHO ARE NOT HIM

The Hebrews of the New Testament were steeped in biblical history, with emphasis on the men and women revealed in the Old Testament narrative. Therefore, people such as Adam, Eve, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, David, Esther, and more were just as known to them as they are to us and many of our children today. Their understanding of the law, for those who had ears to hear, was founded in the teachings in the synagogues and the reading of Torah. All good. Yet, when the persecution grew focused on their claim to be Christians, viewed by most as simply a sect within Judaism at the time, the questions that rose were causing confusion at a minimum and leading many to consider abandoning their faith...if at all possible.

Thus, our God of grace and love gave words to his ambassador and under the Holy Spirit's inspiration penned this letter to the troubled Hebrew believers.

One who knew the Word, who also had been educated in Torah and the law the prophets, presented truth that may have fallen on the deaf ears of the non-Jewish church members, but for the Jewish people who had surrendered to Christ, these were like finding the missing puzzle pieces in the 5,000-piece jigsaw puzzle. Suddenly, the questions were answered. The history was relevant. The childhood teachings were fulfilled in their minds and the one who saved them was glorified.

The Old Testament teachings of the law and the narrative regarding the institution of the Levitical priesthood were known. But, for those who still may file this under "I don't get it...nor do I know why I should care" let me briefly explain.

God called a man named Aaron (the brother of Moses) to be his priest for his nation. This man would be the intercessor – the advocate – the one who would stand in the place of the people before God. He would offer sacrifices of animals for the sins of the people. The Aaronic

priesthood was established. Aaronic because his name was Aaron. Levitical priesthood because the name of their Israelite tribe was the Tribe of Levi (named after one of the sons of Jacob.) Thus, genealogy mattered for the Jews and names and lineages were important.

We have looked at the book of Leviticus over the months as well and there you have a book named after this tribe of Levi as well.

So, to the Jew. This is a big deal.

But...as we look at the lineage of high priests of the Jews up until the time of Christ, we notice something. There was a lineage.

These priests had term limits. When we speak of term limits today, we think of elected officials. In some offices, there are limits. For instance, the President is limited to a specific number of terms. Other offices are as laws have stated those. Thus, in many positions, there are boundaries on how many years an individual may serve.

The priests of God had term limits as well.

It's stated in verse 23...

Hebrews 7:23

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office,²

They were limited in how long they could serve as priests because eventually they died. The inferiority of the Levitical priesthood is evident because death was the master of every Levitical priest.³

So...Aaron was a priest. In Numbers 20:28 we have this story of Moses and Aaron going to the top of Mount Hor and Moses removing the

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Heb 7:23). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

³ Schriener, Thomas R. *Hebrews: Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 233.

priestly garments from this brother and placing them on his brother's son Eleazar. Aaron died on the mountain and Eleazar is now the priest. Eventually Eleazar died and his son Phinehas became priest. And so on.

The historian Josephus says there were over 80 priests from Aaron's day until AD 70 when the Temple was destroyed. The Talmud says there were more, so the numbers are confusing a bit.⁴

Suffice to say, there were many priests and while there were some great men of God in the position, some were not. Regardless, the humanity shown greatly in the persons holding the position. Since these were priests of God, it should be understood they were not priests who were God.

These priests were limited. They were not him.

THE PRIEST WHO IS HIM

I think of the passages in Matthew's gospel as Jesus was entering into his public ministry and the truth of who he truly is was being revealed.

Let it be known that Jesus did not become the Son of God. He always has been the Son of God. Jesus did not wake up realizing he was divine. He always has been and always will be.

Yet, Jesus the Son of God, God the Son, clothed himself in the flesh of humanity, the flesh created for the image-bearers of God and so the one who is borne is bearing his own image and this one who is fully human is fully God and the questions come...

Matthew 11:1-3

When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.

⁴ Hughes, R. Kent. *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 208.

²Now when John (*the Baptizer*) heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” ⁴⁵

It was clear in this portion of Scripture and the Hebrew believers needed reminding as well. Jesus is the ONE. Jesus is him.

In Matthew, the passage continues with Christ’s response:

Matthew 11:4-6

⁴And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” ⁶

No question. Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy of old. He is the eternal Son of God. He has come to do that which only he can do.

And...he is the ultimate high priest. He is the one. It is him.

And what does this priest, in the order of Melchizedek as it states...not of the tribe of Aaron...not limited by term limits of humanity...not simply just another man...do?

Hebrews 7:24-25

²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. ²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.⁷

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mt 11:1–4). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mt 11:4–6). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Heb 7:23–25). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

The great priest is singular because he continues.⁸ He is the priest forevermore. He is not bound by death, for he died and rose again – therefore doing what the priest must do in offering the sacrifice for the people (himself) to the One who is holy and righteous and true – the Father. And, by rising again and defeating death, he remains our priest.

What now? Look again at verse 25 – “he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him.”

He can save the worst of the worst if they would but surrender to him, repent and receive. To the person here today wondering if they’re too far gone? By hearing this right now, it is clear the answer is no. God is at work and providing a way.

And for the redeemed – for the Christians, he intercedes continually.

Any of you struggle in your prayers? Are there any who would be a bit nervous if I asked you to pray aloud right now for the church, into a microphone? Sure. Not all, but some. It may be because we all struggle at some sense in praying. It may be because we have been taught certain ways to pray that seem formal, using King James English perhaps, and full of prayer terms like “lead, guide, and direct” and other such approved phrases. But here’s the reality...none of us pray well. Seriously. Even the most eloquent speaker finds words unavailable, unpronounceable, and when sin is evident and repentance is needed...we often stumble over how to say “I’m so sorry” again.

Yet, we have one who prays for us.

I read where a fourth-century preacher gave an analogy. He tells of a young boy whose father was away on a trip wanting to present a gift to him upon his return that would please him. So, his mother sends him outside to the garden to pick some flowers to make a beautiful bouquet

⁸ Mohler, R. Albert. *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews: Christ-Centered Exposition* (Nashville, TN: Holman, 2017), 113.

for the father. The little boy did his best and really tried, and came back in with the flowers. They were pretty, but he also picked a pretty sorry bouquet of weeds as well. He tried...but the gift was lacking. Yet, when the father returned, he was presented with a beautifully arranged bouquet of flowers. What happened? The mother intervened. She kept what the son had picked, but removed the weeds, and arranged the flowers well. The father was overjoyed and the son was pleased.⁹

That's what Jesus does with our messed up prayers. He removed the weeds, arranges them nicely and presents them as the gift they are intended to be to the Father.

What a priest we have! What an intercessor we have! What a Savior! Jesus is HIM!

THE PRIEST'S HYMN

It was Teodorico, an ancient Italian commentaror who first recognized the language and the layout of verses 26-28 to be a hymn. Thus, this is the priest's hymn.

In our age of overly simplified praise choruses, the meat of a gospel-centered hymn is filling. I know not the tune, but I reread the lyrics for us:

Hebrews 7:26-28

²⁶ For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

²⁸ For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever. ¹⁰

⁹ Hughes, R. Kent. *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 210.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Heb 7:26–28). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

This Jesus whom the Hebrews were initially drawn to and to whom they had surrendered was exactly who he said he was. He was who he had been declared to be since the beginning of human history.

And for those steeped in religiosity, the beauty of discovering that he was brought great relief. For us today, the eternal Son who is God is thankfully our great priest and his death, burial, resurrection gives great relief to us today. Clarity is good. Have you responded yet?