

Hebrews 7:20-22: *“And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath,²¹ but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever.’”²² This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.”*

Difference Between the Priesthood of Christ and the Levitical Priesthood:

No Levitical priest was ever established and ordained on the basis of God’s personal oath. Priests had to belong to the right tribe and meet the right physical and ceremonial requirements (Leviticus 21:16-24).

In contrast, the heavenly priesthood of our Lord Jesus was established (1.) on the basis of His salvation work on the cross, (2.) His character (Hebrews 2:10; 5:5-10), and (3.) the personal oath of God. Not only did God establish Christ’s priesthood, but He did it with an oath guaranteeing its continued functioning forever. The old priesthood was transitory; Christ’s new priesthood is permanent. Christ is the guarantor of a better covenant, a covenant in His own blood.

The author has given the following three reasons why God changed the order of priesthood for Jesus from that of Aaron to that of Melchizedek. (1.) The priesthood and the Law were imperfect. (2.) Being imperfect, they were transitory and could not endure indefinitely. (3.) God had sworn by His oath that a new order would be established. In verses 23-25 he gives a fourth reason.

Hebrews 7:23-25: *“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 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.”*

Levitical Priests Time in Office was Limited: Mortality and Mosaic Law limited the Levitical priests time of office. They could only begin to serve at age 30. They could serve for a maximum of 30 years, but most served only to age 50. Mortality

imposed a further constraint. There were many priests, one generation succeeding another, but Christ lives forever. His priesthood is unending. It is both unnecessary and impossible to replace Him. Because Jesus' work is unhindered by death, He is able *“to save to the uttermost.”* By its very nature, the salvation Jesus offers is eternal. Those who receive salvation from Jesus are sustained by the continual intercession of Christ on their behalf (Romans 8:34).

Hebrews 7:26-28: *“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.”*

Summary of the Superiority of Christ's Priesthood: The author summarizes the superiority of Christ's priesthood. Levitical priests were not innocent but sinners like everyone else. They had to sacrifice for their own sins before sacrificing for the people. Their spiritual, mental, and moral nature was not considered in their selection as priests. But Christ our great high priest is holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He made a one-time sacrifice of Himself, which once and for all provided everything needed for the permanent salvation of those He came to save. Under the Law men were appointed High Priests in their weakness, but God with the word of His personal oath appointed His Son as High Priest forever of the order of Melchizedek, a High Priest perfect in every way.

- As the Son of God, Christ is the original holder of the Royal Priesthood.
- Having fulfilled His incarnate mission, He was resurrected and glorified in heaven. He has been reestablished to the dignity which was rightfully His from all eternity. From His incarnate experience as a man, He is able to fully understand and emotionally identify with the redeemed. As our Great High Priest in heaven, He represents us before the Father.

- His appointment direct from God the Father is superior to the appointment of Aaron especially since it was confirmed by the Father's oath (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 7:20-22).
 - Christ's office as High Priest is exercised in heaven at the right hand of the Father.
 - Christ's office as High Priest will never end. Unlike Levitical High Priests, there are no time limits. His human nature died on the cross. But in His resurrection, His human nature was restored forever. He lives forever in heaven with both human and divine natures.
 - Christ's High Priesthood is unchangeable. It will never be necessary that it be surrendered to another. He is a constant friend to the redeemed, always forever available.
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An Aside: Samuel was a priest who sacrificed to God. Some say Samuel was not a Levite. From 1Samuel 1:1 one might infer Samuel is from the tribe of Ephraim, because his father is in a chain of ancestors described as Ephrathite. However, the genealogies of 1Chronicles 6 (particularly verses 16, 27, 28) show Samuel was indeed a Levite. The confusion arises in that Ephraim is both a tribal and a place name. To say some one is an Ephrathite is like saying someone is a Virginian. It tells where they are from but does not identify their family. Samuel lived in Shiloh in the territory allotted to Ephraim. Samuel's father, Elkanah, lived in the hill country of Ephraim. Levites were scattered in the territories of all the tribes. Perhaps Elkanah, the Levite, was referred to as an Ephrathite to distinguish him from other people of the same name living in other tribal areas. Samuel was a Levite.

Fulfillment of the Mosaic Law: Chapter 7 points out the Mosaic Law and Levitical priesthood were so tightly linked together that if one changed the other must change. When Christ ascended to heaven, He fulfilled the Mosaic Law, and became our Heavenly High Priest of the order of Melchizedek, a significant change.

The Mosaic system, while holy, righteous, and good (Romans 7:12) was temporary and imperfect. It was unable to create in sinful men pure hearts or to enable lives of righteousness as demanded by the Law. Its inability to accomplish making sinful men acceptable to God was not a failure of the Law but was due to the weak sinful nature of people (Romans 8:3).

Animal sacrifices and the rituals of Mosaic Law provided temporary relief from the guilt of sin plus limited access to God through the High Priest. Combined with God's Covenant promise to Abraham, the Law provided a system to deal with transgressions until the Offspring (Christ), to whom the promise referred, had come (Galatians 3:19).

The temporary relief provided from guilt was important, but the Mosaic system's most important function was to be a guardian and tutor, limiting sin and pointing the way to the perfect sacrifice and priesthood of Christ (Galatians 3:13-26).

Christians and the Law: Christians are not under the Law in the sense of being required to achieve merit before God by keeping the Law. Christ satisfied the righteous demands of the Law (Romans 9:30-33), and Christians participate in His fulfillment of the Law when they receive the gift of righteousness by faith in Christ apart from the Law. In Him we become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ is truly holy, innocent of sin, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. God, through the word of His personal oath, appointed His Son as High Priest forever, a High Priest perfect in every way.

Since the Mosaic system was unable to create pure hearts and enable righteous lives, how did any Old Testament person obtain salvation? What was impossible for the Law and its Levitical priesthood was possible for God. The path to salvation has always been Atonement through grace. Old Testament people received salvation the same basic way as New Testament people. Old Testament people were saved looking forward to the work of Christ on their behalf, while New Testament people are saved looking back at the work of Christ. In each case people are regenerated by God and given faith to trust and obey.

The benefits of Christ's life, death, and resurrection apply both backward and forward in time. Old Testament and New Testament believers are both beneficiaries.

Christ is the perfect priest, the one mediator between His people and God the Father. In the next three chapters the author argues that Christ ministers on the basis of a superior covenant, in a superior sanctuary, and provides a superior sacrifice.

Hebrews 8:1-5: *“Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ² a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. ³ For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. ⁴ Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. ⁵ They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.”*

The Crucial Point of the Author’s Argument: Everything said so far has been directed toward one point – “everyone needs a priest who is able to deal with the root cause of sin, able to cleanse past sin, and giving new hearts capable of living righteous lives.” From chapter 1 to the final verse of chapter 7, the author has extolled the virtue and glory of Christ. His point being that in Christ we have just exactly the right High Priest, one able to do everything needed to enable sinners to become acceptable to the Father. Christ is not a priest ordained by earthly (Levitical) standards. He is a heavenly priest certified by the oath of God the Father. He now sits at the right hand of the Father and ministers in the most holy place. The old priesthood could not provide a full solution for the sin problem. To deal with that issue, the Father sent Messiah, who is sufficient to our every need, who could and did solve the sin problem. Christ’s position at the right hand of God the Father signifies honor, exaltation and power.

Christ Ministers in Heavenly Places on Believers’ Behalf: As Christ completed the sacrificial work of atonement on the cross, He declared, “it is finished.” But His work of intercession, mediation, and care for His people continues today. He ministers in heavenly places on our behalf. The word “true” in verse 2 means “genuine” in contrast to the shadowy existence of the earthly copy. Under the

Levitical system every person bringing a gift offering had to present it to a priest who then offered it to God. Christians bring offerings of adoration and thanksgiving to Christ, our High Priest, and He presents them to the Father. Christ is the only mediator between God and people. Once for all time Christ sacrificed Himself on our behalf.

While on earth Jesus, not being a Levite, could not and did not function as a priest. Jesus from the tribe of Judah could not be a priest under the Levitical system. God made Him a priest of the order of Melchizedek when He ascended to heaven. When the veil across the entrance to the Holy of Holies split in two at Jesus' death, it was a signal the Mosaic system was changing. The way to the presence of God was opened. God by His oath appointed Jesus as a priest of the order of Melchizedek, a priest different in kind from Levitical priests.

In receiving the Law and instructions for worship on the mountain, Moses was told to carefully follow the pattern for the Tabernacle and its furnishings shown to him. Thus, the Levitical priesthood served a copy and a shadow of heavenly things. A shadow has no substance of its own. The real thing casts a shadow when light shines on it. A copy of a legal document is useful for information, but in a court of law only a genuine document is considered. The true Tabernacle is where Jesus is – at the right hand of the Father, and there Christ serves as High Priest.

Hebrews 8:6-13: “*But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. ⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. ⁸ For he finds fault with them when he says: ‘Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah ⁹ not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. ¹⁰ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ¹¹ And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord, for they shall all know*

me, from the least of them to the greatest ¹² *For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”* ¹³ *In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”*

The New Covenant Administered by Christ: Contracts specify rules to be followed in transactions. Covenants establish relationships. The most common covenant is a marriage covenant establishing a lifelong relationship between the man and woman being married.

In Scripture all covenants are solemn agreements binding the covenant parties in defined relationships with specific promises, claims, and obligations on both sides. Covenants may be negotiated or unilaterally imposed. When God makes a covenant, He alone establishes the terms. The covenant between God and Israel made at Sinai is referred to as the “first” or “old” covenant. It is a covenant between God and the nation Israel corporately. The Sinai covenant established a curse on everyone who failed to continuously keep all its demands.

It is a principle of law that should one party to a covenant willfully and persistently disregard their obligations, the other party can regard the covenant as null and void and denounce it. That is the basis on which divorce is permitted.

In the verses quoted from Jeremiah, God says Israel and Judah have consistently disregarded their obligations under the covenant. The Sinai Covenant had lasted some 700 years but now God, through Jeremiah, denounced it saying, ***“For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.”***

One stipulation of the Sinai Covenant was that if the people of the nation consistently obeyed the laws imposed under the covenant, the nation would have permanent possession of Canaan and material prosperity. Persistent disobedience would result in severe chastisement while still in the land. Continued disobedience would result in the removal of the people from the land and their dispersion to other lands. That happened first to the northern kingdom of Israel and then later to the southern kingdom of Judah.

The Old Covenant was flawed by dependance on works, ceremonies, and the Sinai law. It wasn't that the Law's requirements were flawed – for the Law was good

(Romans. 7:12). The flaw was that the covenant could not be fully implemented due to the sinful nature of people (Romans. 8:3). The sinful mind is hostile to God and will not submit to God's law, nor can it do so (Romans. 8:7-8). Because of the sinful nature of the people, the Old Covenant was unable to fulfill its promises. Perfect obedience was required, but that the people could not do. Morally imperfect works can never enable righteousness before God. The true hope of the godly was based on God's promises to Abraham. God promised a New Covenant that would fix the flaws of the old. The Old Covenant dealt with people's "external" behavior. The New Covenant would be "internal."

Christ established the New Covenant. It was sealed by His blood shed on the cross. Christ guarantees the New Covenant will accomplish its intended purpose. Promises of the New Covenant are better because they are available, not only to Israel, but to all people and because the way the covenant is implemented includes the ability to bring its promises to fulfillment in the lives of sinful humanity. The very fact that a New Covenant was promised long before it came to pass indicated the Old Covenant, while good, was insufficient. Incidentally, the Greek word translated "new" means new in quality. The old was being replaced by something better.

The New Covenant Deals with the Inner Person: Except for the first few words, verses 8-12 exactly quote Jeremiah 31:31-34. The New Covenant differs in vital ways from the Sinai Covenant. The New Covenant provides an inside out fix for the sin nature problem rather than being focused on externals. The Sinai covenant constrained external behavior and provided precise details on how to worship God and how to deal with people. The laws God established at Sinai were written on stone and transmitted by external means. The New Covenant emphasizes what God will do internally.

God promised that with the New Covenant He would write His laws not on stone but into the minds and hearts of His people. God's people must still battle their old sinful nature, but they do so with regenerated hearts. God's laws are perfectly suited to their new spiritual inclinations (John 14:15-17; 16:12-13; 1 Corinthians 12:13). God's laws are no longer external and foreign to a believers' nature. They are internal and a natural part of their new nature. 2 Corinthians 5:17, ***Therefore, if***

anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

The New Covenant Provides a Better Relationship: The Sinai Covenant established a standard of rules for life which applied to everyone in the nation. The standard was perfect and sufficient to regulate the heart and conduct of people in every relationship. But it was external with no capability to change a person to be or do what the covenant demanded. People’s sin nature led to their failure to be obedient.

In contrast with Sinai, the New Covenant is established between God and individuals, one by one. Partakers of the New Covenant become God’s possession, members of His family. They have direct access to God. They are regenerated, given faith, justified, have the indwelling Holy Spirit, and are being sanctified. These God-enabled changes make it possible for people to satisfy New Covenant requirements.

The New Covenant Provides Better Knowledge: The Sinai Covenant was a corporate agreement of the entire nation, including both godly and ungodly people. The New Covenant is with believers only. In the New Covenant believers come one by one, born of the Spirit into a new relationship with God. They have eternal life in the New Covenant.

Jesus defined eternal life in John 17:3 by saying *“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”* Partakers of the New Covenant all know God. The New Covenant provides **better forgiveness to all who believe**. There is forgiveness for past, present, and future sins to all included in the New Covenant by regeneration. God “wills” to remember their sins no more, not holding their sins against them, and refusing to bring them to mind.

The Old Covenant Became Obsolete: Verse 8:13, *“In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”*

Jeremiah was active from about 614 to 586 B.C. Even earlier, it was recognized the Sinai Covenant could not accomplish its purpose. When Hebrews was written in about 63 AD, the Old Covenant sacrificial system was still in operation in Jerusalem.

In 70 A.D. the Romans would destroy Jerusalem and the Temple. With no Temple there could be no sacrifices. The Levitical priesthood could not function. The old passed away. In this great change, not every aspect of the Sinai Covenant was eliminated. Christ fulfilled the Law, and certain aspects disappeared. The moral law remains. A believer's ability to obey the moral law steadily improves as they are progressively transformed into a moral likeness of Christ.

What is Next? The Sinai Covenant and the New Covenant.