

# ***The Book of Hebrews***

## ***Part 20: The Order of Grace and Rest (Heb. 7:4-25)***

### **I. The Promise of a New Order**

Hebrews is a masterful example of teaching and pastoring. It teaches people how to read the Old Testament, and as a pastoral letter it seeks to shepherd people away from the cliff edge of legalism and apostasy, leading them back to the green pastures and quiet waters of grace.

Its primary purpose was in helping its readers navigate a seismic shift happening in their generation. It does this by focusing on Melchizedek who is at the heart of this shift, which is the change from the “order of Aaron” to the “order of Melchizedek.”

The entire nation of Israel was built around the order of Aaron. Aaron, the brother of Moses, was from the tribe of Levi. The “Levites” and the “order of Aaron” go hand in hand, Aaron being the first Levitical High Priest.

The Levites were in charge of connecting the community to God and to one another (the name Levi means—“connection/joining”). They made sure the people were under the blessing of God; and that their sins, acts of wrong done against God and each other, were being properly dealt with.

This was a work of reconciliation and connection and relationship between God and people and between one another—and it was all wrapped around a certain “order” of rules, rituals, festivals, and sacrifices. If the nation wanted to maintain a healthy, strong, and blessed connection with God and one another (i.e. following the Ten Commandments) they needed to make sure this “order of Aaron” was being followed.

For example, in certain seasons of the year there were holidays the whole nation needed to celebrate so they could receive forgiveness from heaven and blessing on their homes and crops (their economy). There were also certain sacrifices that needed to be made every week for the same purpose.

Forgiveness is key to connection. If there is unforgiveness because of wrongdoings, there is a disconnect in the relationship. If a person is disconnected from the most important relationship, their relationship with their Creator, then that leads to a lot of problems. If the Creator is the source of blessing and provision and joy, a disconnect with the source is like turning off the power button on a good life.

If the people followed this order (not only the holidays and sacrifices but also a strict code on what to eat, how to dress, and how to handle certain items), then they were living in a good connection—and blessing, provision, and joy followed.

This same concept of a priestly “order” to ensure a good connection plays itself out in every religious system (or so-called “spiritual” system) of the world. Whether it’s Sharia law in Islam, the noble laws of Buddhism, the tenets of Hinduism, the practices of meditation and mind over matter in New Age philosophies—these are all different “orders” for people to find connection within themselves, with others, and with God (and if they do not believe in God, there is still a desire for connection with a higher power or consciousness). Everywhere, people are looking for connection as well as the peace and blessing that comes with it.

The Hebrew people were chosen to be a spiritual representative of the nations. As a representative, they were given the highest and best spiritual order possible... But it failed. People could never do it perfectly—and the whole story of the Old Testament is of one failure after another. But as a chosen priesthood to the nations, Israel was really representing the failure of all humanity in all of our systems.

There may be cycles of blessing and moments of peace depending on the system you set up, but there is no sure-fire way out there to find the real connection the heart is looking for. Furthermore, all these systems depend on our work (even if it is just the mental work of thinking positively—i.e. the “power of positive thinking” movements). Our efforts do not go far enough.

Like every other order, the order of Aaron failed; hence the reason King David prophesied of something totally different coming. He spoke of a new order and the entire letter to the Hebrews has been centered around this small prophecy concealed in the Old Testament in Psalm 110 about the “order of Melchizedek.”

#### **The Writer to Hebrews—A Cherry-Picker!**

Jewish scholars in the time Hebrews was written would have certainly argued with its assumptions about this prophecy. They would have likely said it was “cherry-picked,” and highlighted the fact that way more Bible passages declare God’s commands to Levi being “permanent.” As an example, Leviticus 16:34 which comes after a thorough discussion on the Day of Atonement, a key part of Aaron’s order.”

**34 "Now you shall have this as a permanent statute, to make atonement for the sons of Israel for all their sins once every year." ...**

The word for “permanent” is *olam*, typically translated as “eternal.” Reading this literally, some could argue the Levitical priesthood is unchanging. But this shows that the Spirit who inspired the text may have a different meaning than what the literalistic reader is assuming.

Note: This is the same way people read the word “eternal” today without realizing this word can mean “an age” or “a very long time.” (This is something to consider when we see Greek versions of *olam* in the New Testament and discussions on “eternal” judgment.)

## II. Finding True Perfection

In verses 4 to 10, the writer makes a case about the greatness of Melchizedek. It's like he's saying, *Ok, I know this guy only shows up in three verses in the Bible and David mentions him only once, but just so you know I'm not cherry-picking some random text, consider the following...*

**4 Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils.  
(Hebrews 7:4)**

Abraham tithed to Melchizedek. The tithe was set up so that the entire order of Aaron would be able to function. All the festivals, sacrifices, and offerings took place because the people gave a tenth of their income and crops to the temple.

Abraham giving a tithe to this Priest-King was a big deal. The writer makes a strong case here that Melchizedek is pointing to something greater than the whole Levitical system that came after.

From here, the writer goes on to make one of his most important statements yet...

**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?  
(Hebrews 7:11)**

The whole point of any religious or spiritual "order" is the pursuit of perfection. There is something in the human heart that desires perfection. This is wrapped up in our pursuit of heaven, nirvana, etc.

If we evolved from a purely natural standpoint, we would have not developed an appetite for such things. We have an appetite for foods because there is physical food out there that corresponds to the desire. In the same way, we have an appetite for the realities perfection and heaven because it is truly out there.

The word "perfection" in this passage means complete. It can be compared to a masterpiece painting and when the artist looks at her work and says it's done; there is nothing to add and nothing to take away.

We have a deep desire within us to look at our lives and say the same thing—*it's complete!*

Some of the major inhibitors of that feeling are things like guilt, shame, or not measuring up. If there is any sense of these things, a person feels incomplete. Therefore, they go through a religious system (and in our modern world a religious system could just be diet, exercise, and

meditation) in order to cleanse their being so they can feel like a masterpiece and not an incomplete piece of garbage.

Religion is designed to deal with this feeling of being incomplete.

The writer is saying—if completion was found through the Levitical priesthood (the most spiritual system ever made, the order of Aaron), there would have been no need for another order to come forth. Yet within the Old Testament system itself was a prophecy of another order that had something to do with this Priest-King named Melchizedek.

*And the insinuation here is that this other “order” **does** bring perfection.*

In other words, perfection is attainable. A true sense of completion and peace is possible.

But it’s not found in religious systems based on our efforts.

This passage is hinting at something that what will be spoken clearly and boldly before we get to the end of Hebrews:

**14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.  
(Hebrews 10:14)**

We have been made perfect through the work of Christ, the one to whom Melchizedek pointed. This is the entire point of the letter, and it is the best news imaginable.

When God finished his masterpiece of creation, he took a Sabbath and rested. As we’ve seen before, this is not because he was tired. There was nothing more to be added or taken away. The seventh day was a celebration of a finished work of art.

This is why earlier in the letter to the Hebrews we were invited into an eternal Sabbath rest ourselves. We are invited to rest from religion, performance, and self-effort; and to realize/accept what was already been given as a free gift in Jesus.

### **III. How Can It Be?**

The writer does not end here. He goes on to give more understanding as to how this new “order” works.

The pursuit of perfection and connection are one in the same. A person cannot feel complete and at rest until they know they are at peace with their Creator. It’s like a person who has deep break in a relationship with a parent, child, or spouse. The break has an impact on them. They might get hardened and say they don’t care, but any counselor worth their salt will tell them, *This*

*is affecting you. You can make-believe it's not, but the disconnect in this relationship is having an impact on you.*

This is multiplied with our relationship with God. This is why the old order employed priests to work on people's behalf to get them consistently re-connected with their Creator through rituals and sacrifices. Once a ritual was complete, or a festival was finished, there was a moment of feeling forgiven and at peace with God.

Forgiveness is absolutely central to restore broken connection. Finding forgiveness from our own mistakes and failures leads to a sense of peace. (The same applies with our relationship with others—even when we can't physically reconcile with a person, forgiving them or asking forgiveness on our end, helps restore us on the inside.)

In the order of Aaron, people would also take an animal that would absorb their guilt as they laid a hand on the head of the sacrifice and transfer their deficiencies and mistakes onto it. The animal took this from them and bore their guilt. And when it died, they were released. As that release came, their conscience was at ease, and they felt “perfected” in a way.

We think of this as primitive and silly, but we still have our “scapegoats” today—a term that comes from the order of Aaron (see Leviticus 16). We hold up and demonize certain people on the news, in social media, and in dinner conversations where we talk about how evil certain politicians, celebrities, or criminals are. This is us laying our hands (from a distance) onto someone else's head to make us feel better. And when we get someone who was caught red-handed doing something horrible like abusing a child, they become an even better scapegoat.

Of course, animal sacrifices, scapegoating, and blame-shifting do not lead to the peace and perfection our conscience hungers for. They always need to be done again and again.

The whole point of Hebrews 7 and this thing on Melchizedek is how there is a better system now, found in Jesus who is our eternal priest who has done all the work for us.

Connecting verse 3 and 25 of Hebrews 7 will help tie the main message together:

**3 Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually.**

**25 Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.**

**(Hebrews 7:3 & 25)**

Melchizedek represented an unending life. While other priests would die and need to be replaced, Melchizedek pointed to an eternal priest—who also gave an eternal sacrifice. A sacrifice that took away the guilt, shame, and blame completely.

In Christ and his death on the cross, we have permanent forgiveness and therefore perfection connection with God. We can *draw near to him* now. If you feel disconnected from God, unworthy and shameful, those feelings have absolutely nothing to do with God. In other words, it's on your end, not God's (which means it is not rooted in reality).

The "old order" was about working for perfection and completion and rest. We had to do things—rituals, festivals, sacrifices, rules—in order to feel connected and at peace. But now there is a "new order" we are called to embrace where we draw near to God, meaning we embrace being connected and accepted by him, and live aware of his presence and favor in our lives. We then pray and act and make decisions from that peaceful foundation.

This leads us to one of the only other books in the New Testament that uses this word "order," but now in the context of Christ and what he's done.

**5 For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. 6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. (Colossians 2:5-7 NKJV)**

We received Christ by faith. In the same way, we are called to "walk in Him" by faith. In other words, we continue to rest/trust in this good news. We embrace the Father's love and stay aware of our continual access to him.

This new order leads a person to "thanksgiving," to a life that abounds with gratitude. We become grateful for being loved and accepted, and then live out of the place of gratitude. This leads to a life of love that cares for people around us. When we are freed from self-loathing and shame and feelings of not measuring up, we are freed up to focus outside of ourselves and help others find the blessing of God. In other words:

**6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything (*the order of Aaron*), but faith working through love. (Galatians 5:6)**

This is what the new order is all about... Faith "working" through love... The old order pointed to it, but didn't provide the way to get there. The writer of Hebrews will continue to build on this triumphant news.

### **Follow-up Encounter:**

*As you take communion, thank God for the eternal work of Christ. Ask for a deeper revelation of these things. Ask that he would show you what it would look like to live with a continual awareness of his friendship and grace. When you take communion, receive the grace to walk this out in a more abiding way.*