

Jesus: Our Great High Priest

Hebrews 4:14–10:18

May 8, 2022

This morning we are continuing our study in the book of Hebrews. Last week we looked at chapter 1 and 2 and saw that Jesus was the Son of God and Son of Man. Today we will look at Jesus as our great High Priest, which is the central theme of the book.

The concept of Jesus as our High Priest, while certainly alluded to in the rest of the New Testament, is unique to the book of Hebrews. Jesus is never explicitly called our High Priest outside of this book. This is not to say that the concept is unique to Hebrews. [1 Timothy 2:5](#), “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” A priest is an intermediary or a mediator between two parties. Jesus is the only mediator between God and men.

This is so important to the writer of Hebrews that the theme of the high priesthood of Jesus spans from 4:14 all the way to 10:18, and you will find the topic even outside of that section, such as we did last week in 1:3 and 2:17.

Jesus is the superior high priest. We will see this morning is that **He is a perfect High Priest who comes from a better lineage, ministers under a better covenant, and offers a better sacrifice. Only through His priestly work can we draw near to God.**

- I. Jesus Comes from a Better Lineage – chapter 7**
- II. Jesus Ministers under a Better Covenant – chapter 8**
- III. Jesus Offers a Better Sacrifice – chapter 9–10**
- IV. Jesus Brings Us to Near to God – 4:14–16**

I. Jesus Comes from a Better Lineage

First, we need to answer the question, “What is a priest?” I don’t want to assume that we all know what a priest really is. Some have no experience with the idea of a priest; others

grew up in a religious environment, like Catholicism, where priests are a central figure. Simply put, a priest is an *intermediary*. A priest stands between two parties and intercedes on behalf of them. As we just read in 1 Timothy 2:5, a priest is a mediator. Under the Old Covenant, there were priests and there were high priests. What's a high priest? The high priests came from the house of Aaron and has the special job of being the only one who was allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies, the inner most part of the tabernacle and temple to offer sacrifices on the alter where the presence of God would dwell. So a priest is one who intercedes between God and man. As we shall see, not all priests are equal.

Jesus is our great High Priest because He comes from a better lineage. I understand that we may not have the same interest in lineage and genealogies that God has, I can tell you one thing—God likes genealogies! Why? Because we need to understand is that genealogies are *theological*. They are the fulfillment of God's eternal plan! When God says He's going to do something, and He's going to do it *through* someone, the genealogies demonstrates that God is a promise keeper! So if you're wondering why Jesus lineage as it relates to His priesthood even matters, I hope to demonstrate the importance of it in our time together.

Open your Bibles to Hebrews 7 and I'd like to introduce, or reintroduce you, to a person by the name of Melchizedek. Some of you have never heard that name, some of you are afraid to pronounce that name, and some of you are secretly excited because you think I'm finally going to answer the question, "Who is this mysterious Melchizedek?". Well for the sake of time, we're going to focus on the importance of Melchizedek, and all I'll say is that I believe Melchizedek was just a man. A very important man, but a man nonetheless.

The author of Hebrews first mentions Melchizedek in 5:10. It says Jesus was "[designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.](#)" Then he takes a detour

talking about him until chapter 7 where he talks about him for an entire chapter. Outside of Hebrews, Melchizedek is mentioned only two times. He first appears in Genesis 14:17–20, and then one more time in Psalm 110:4. That’s it. But the writer of Hebrews makes a big deal about Him. Why?

Let’s start with [Hebrews 7:11](#), “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?” Under the Mosaic Covenant, God appointed a group of priests for the people. The priests come from the tribe of? Levi. The High priest came from the line of? Aaron. The Levites functioned as the priests. Their job was to *intercede* for the people. Could anyone be a priest? No, only the Levites. Could any Levite be a high priest? No, only those of the house of Aaron.

Let’s continue reading in [Hebrews 7](#) picking up in [verse 12](#). “For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. 13 For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.” So priests come from the tribe of Levi. What tribe did Jesus descend from? Judah. Do we have a problem? Yes. How can Jesus be a priest if He’s not from the tribe of Levi? *That* is the issue! That is why the writer of Hebrews is bringing all of this up. He is writing to a group of Christians with a Jewish background. They knew very well that only the children of Aaron could serve as a high priest.

Again, if this does not strike you as very important, let me read you something from [Numbers 3:10](#), God said, “So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons that they may keep their priesthood, but the layman [or outsider] who comes near shall be put to death.”

When God says only the sons of Aaron can be the high priest, He means it. God does not contradict Himself. So how can Jesus be a priest? Enter Melchizedek.

Pick up with me again in [Hebrews 7:15](#), “And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, 16 who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. 17 For it is attested of Him, ‘YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.’” How can Jesus be our great high priest if He is not descended from Levi? Because there is another priesthood! There is a superior priesthood. And what’s even more amazing, His priesthood precedes that of the Levitical priesthood by over 600 years! Not only does it precede the Levitical priesthood, which indicates its superiority, look at what [7:6–7](#) says, “But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. 7 But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater.” Abraham is the father of the Jews. Without Him there would be no Israelites. So he’s kinda at the top when it comes to importance. But think about this, who blessed who? Melchizedek blessed Abraham. This again indicates that the line of priests that comes from Melchizedek is superior to the line that comes from Levi, who was a descendant of Abraham.

The priesthood after the order of Melchizedek is also better because it is based on an oath, not on physical descent. [Hebrews 7:21](#), “(for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, ‘THE LORD HAS SWORN AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND, ‘YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER’).” The Genesis account gives no record of Melchizedek’s lineage precisely because it is not relevant for the priesthood that follows after him.

Jesus never attempted to function as a priest in the earthly temple. Why? Because He’s not a priest according to the Old Covenant system and only the Levites could be priests

under that system. So the answer to how Jesus can be our great High Priest is found in the fact that He is a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Do we need any more priests after the order of Levi? No! Adrian read from Hebrews 7:23–28. Look at that again with me. In verse 23 it says, “The former priests [that is the Levitical] existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing.” Is that a problem? Yes! If a priest is supposed to intercede on your behalf and he dies, you’ve got a problem. Verse 27 shows Christ is better than the Levitical priests because He “does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people.” Is it a problem that the Levitical priests were sinners? Yes! How can one sinner stand as a mediator between God and man when that sinner needs a mediator himself? Verse 28 says, “For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak.” Is that a problem? Yes it is! Jesus has none of these problems. He, as verse 26 says is, “holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens.”

What a High Priest we have in Jesus. How could we ever turn to anything or anyone else to intercede for us? This applies to much more than just the Mosaic Covenant. The question is, what, or who, are you trusting in to stand in the gap between you as a sinner and the infinitely holy God? The Old priesthood? Yourself? You will never find another priest like Jesus. Just like 1 Timothy 2:5 said, “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” This is our great High Priest who comes from a better lineage.

II. Jesus Ministers under a Better Covenant

Just as we defined what a priest is, I want to make sure we understand the terminology surrounding covenant. A covenant is an agreement, commitment, or arrangement between two parties. The word “testament” is a synonym for covenant. Our Bibles are divided into the Old Testament, or covenant, and the New Testament, or covenant.

However, I don't want you to think the Old Testament in its entirety is the same thing as the Old Covenant.

When we say that Jesus ministers under a better covenant, we're talking about the New Covenant. When we say the New Covenant is better than the Old, we are talking specifically about the Mosaic Covenant—the covenant given by God, through Moses on Mount Sinai after the Exodus from Egypt. We can use three terms interchangeably to refer to this Covenant, 1) The Old Covenant, 2) The Mosaic Covenant, 3) the Law, or the Mosaic Law. But I want to be clear that when we talk about the New Covenant replacing the Old, we are only talking about the Mosaic Covenant, not the whole Old Testament, not the Abrahamic Covenant, Davidic Covenant, or even the covenant made with Noah after the flood. Those covenants are still operational. It is only the Mosaic Covenant that has been set aside.

Chapter 8 is all about the New Covenant. Remember that we already noted how priests are tied to the covenant in which they minister. [Hebrews 7:12](#) said, “For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also.” If Jesus is from the line of another priesthood that means there's a change in law, or Covenant. Levitical priests operate under the Mosaic Covenant. But a priest after the order of Melchizedek operates under the New Covenant. You can't have a New Covenant priest function in the Old Covenant. Jesus is not fit to be a Levitical priest. And you can't have an Old Covenant priest, the Levites, function in the New Covenant. Levitical priests are not fit to be a Melchizedekian priest.

Let's pick up in [Hebrews 8:6–8](#), “But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. 8 For finding fault with them, He says...” and then He quotes the New Covenant from Jeremiah 31:31–34. Verse 6 is where I got the title for this point. Jesus ministers under a better Covenant. Now before we read about this better Covenant

founded on better promises, let's try and understand the argument the author of Hebrews is making. It's actually quite simple, but it is profound.

He says in verse 8:7, "For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second." In Jeremiah 31:31 God said He would make a *New* Covenant. What is the implication of that? If God makes something *new* what does that say about the previous covenant? There's a problem with it! Something is wrong. If the first Covenant, that is, the Mosaic Covenant, was "faultless," why would there be a need for a new one? There wouldn't! Therefore, the Mosaic Covenant was? Not good enough. It was not designed to last. The writer of Hebrews makes this point very clear in 8:13, "When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear." The fact that there is a New Covenant means that the Old will go away. Think of it this way, the Old Covenant was created with "planned obsolescence." When did the Mosaic Covenant end? Well, naturally it ended when the New was inaugurated. It was promised in Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36, and other places but wasn't inaugurated for hundreds of years after that. When was the New Covenant inaugurated? The cross. Jesus said in Luke 22:20, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood." The cross is the inauguration of the New Covenant. Just like the Old Covenant was inaugurated with blood, so was the New. But the New Covenant was inaugurated by the blood of Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man.

So what makes the New Covenant so much better? Let's read about it in Hebrews 8:8–12, "8 For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; 9 NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS

THE LORD. 10 FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. 11 AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. 12 FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.”

Do you think it's better? You bet it is! Did the Old Covenant do these things? No! That's exactly the point. God says I will make a New Covenant *not like* the Old. It's different. It's better. Just note what God says about the New Covenant:

- God will put the law into their minds and write it on their hearts
- He *will* be their God
- They *will* be His people
- Everyone will know the Lord [this is fulfilled in the book of Revelation]
- God will be merciful to their iniquities
- He will remember their sin no more

How will God accomplish these things? Through the Levitical priests? Through the Old Covenant? Through the blood of bulls and goats? No! Only through Jesus Christ can God be merciful to us, remember our sins no more, and make us His people.

Why did God do it this way? Why make the Mosaic Covenant only to have it replaced by the New Covenant? Well now I get to share a quote with you that those who have been in the Hebrews study have heard many times. You can say it with me if you remember it.

“*God perfectly created an imperfect system in order to create a perfect hope.*” I did not come up with this quote. I heard it from a man named Walt Henrichsen. It is so helpful for the book of Hebrews. *God perfectly created an imperfect system in order to create a perfect hope.* God planned it this way because in His infinite wisdom, He wanted to spend a long time pointing to the need for something better.

The Old Covenant isn't sinful, it's just imperfect. The Old Covenant did everything God designed it to do. The problem is when you try to make the Old Covenant do something that it was never intended to do! That was (and is to this day) the fundamental problem with the Jews. They took the system that was supposed to point them to Jesus and made it a means of earning a relationship with God.

You may have heard it said, and I agree, that there are only two religions in the world. The first is the religious of human achievement. Or to put it another way, works righteousness. I can earn my way to God by my behavior. This is exactly the error the Jews ran into. The Mosaic Covenant was NOT a works righteousness system. As we will see next week, the righteous shall live by faith, Habakkuk 2:4. God has always saved by grace alone, through faith alone, on the basis of Christ alone. The Jews tried to turn the Law into a means of justification by works. [Romans 10:3–4](#) says, “For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” The Jews tried to establish their own righteousness through keeping the law. But as verse 4 says, the end of the law, or the purpose of the law was to point to *Christ for righteousness*.

You may not be trying to go back to the Mosaic Covenant this morning. But many, many people are trying to establish their own righteousness as opposed to resting in the New Covenant ministry of our great High Priest Jesus. Where are you? Are you trusting in your own efforts, your own works, your own righteousness? Or are you trusting in Christ’s work through the New Covenant.

Did you notice as we read the New Covenant who is doing the work? God! God says *I will put my law in their minds. I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God. They will be my people.* This is all the work of God. Our response is to trust Him. Our response is

to our faith in Him. Our response is to look to our great High Priest—Jesus, the Son of God, and the Son of Man, who ministers under a better covenant.

III. Jesus Offers a Better Sacrifice

Jesus is our great High priest because offers a better sacrifice. Jesus offers a better sacrifice than what? Than the sacrifices of the Old Covenant. This is where God’s infinite wisdom really takes an unexpected turn. Under the Old Covenant, sinful human priests offered sacrifices. Those sacrifices were primarily animal sacrifices. But under the New Covenant, the perfect Son of Man offers a better sacrifice. The sacrifice He offers is *Himself*. Under the New Covenant Jesus is both the priest *and* the sacrifice. Who would have ever imagined that?

So what was the problem with the animal sacrifices? Well thankfully the writer of Hebrews is very clear on this issue. Read with me [Hebrews 10:1–4](#), “For the Law [remember this is synonymous with the Old, or Mosaic Covenant], 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 which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? 3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Impossible. Not unlikely, not really hard, impossible.

Why? Well just think about it. I sin, and a bull or a goat dies. How does that make sense? How can an animal take my place? This is why our time in chapter 2 last week was so important. [2:17](#) says, “Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make *propitiation* for the sins of the people.” Jesus took on human nature in order to be a fitting sacrifice for His people. The better sacrifice of Jesus provides *propitiation* for the

sins of His people. His death satisfies the wrath of God, which is what propitiation means. The blood of bulls and goats did *not* take away sin in the Old Covenant. They simply covered it. They made *atonement*. They allowed God to temporarily “[pass over the sins previously committed](#)” under the Old Covenant as [Romans 3:25](#) says.

Additionally, [10:1–4](#) says we should have known the blood of bulls and goats didn’t take away sin because they were offered continually year by year. That’s a problem. If the sacrifices worked to take away sins, why did they have to keep sacrificing animals every single year? Far from taking away sins, what did the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant do? Look at [verse 3](#). “[But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year.](#)” A reminder. They didn’t *remove* sin; they *reminded* the people of their sin. That’s not good. But under the New Covenant priestly work of Jesus, His sacrifice does what? Look at [10:17](#) where the author repeats the New Covenant again. “[And their sins and their lawless deeds, I will remember no more.](#)” The better sacrifice of Jesus means God will remember our sins no more, forever and finally dealt with. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Never, ever, ever again will your sin stand between you and your God. Why? Because Jesus, your great High priest stands between you and God! That’s why [Hebrews 7:25](#) says, “[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.](#)” His blood has paid for our sins, forever! He will remember our sins no more!

What then did the Old Covenant animals sacrifices do? Look at [9:13–15](#) with me, “[For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been](#)

called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.” This passage is so important. This is why the sacrifice of Jesus is better. The blood of bulls and goats only provided *external* cleansing and served as a picture, or symbol of the coming *internal* cleansing from the better sacrifice of Jesus.

Notice again what he said in [verse 15](#). The death of Christ provides “[redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the *first* covenant.](#)” Didn’t the animal sacrifices take care of the sins committed under the Mosaic Covenant? No they didn’t! They were only a temporary covering. They still needed to be dealt with. They were dealt with in Christ.

Now let’s look at how the blood of Jesus is so much better. Pick up with me in [10:10](#), “[By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; 12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. 14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.](#)” Jesus sacrifice has the power to sanctify us, to set us apart, to make us holy. And it happened *once for all*. This of course stands in contrast to [verse 11](#) where the Levitical priests *stood, daily, offering sacrifices time after time*. But Christ having offered *one* sacrifice for sin *for all time* sat down at the right hand of God.

Jesus offered Himself as a better sacrifice once for all, and his blood paid for every sin of every one of His children of all time. How? How could one sacrifice pay for all the sins of His people when all the animal sacrifices didn’t pay for one sin of the people under the Old Covenant? Because the sacrifice of the New Covenant is nothing less than the blood of Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man. Only the infinite Son of God could bear the infinite wrath of God to give those who put their faith in Him eternal life.

Because of His superior sacrifice, look again at [10:14](#) to see what Christ accomplishes by His blood, “[For by one offering, He has perfected for all time...](#)” stop right there. If you are in Christ, His one sacrifice has perfected you for all time. It is done. Nothing can change that. That is how powerful the blood of Jesus is. This is positional and legal perfection. When God looks at you, He sees you as perfect because of that one offering.

Continuing on in [verse 14](#), “[...He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified](#)” or more accurately, “[are being sanctified](#)” as the ESV says. The word sanctified is a present participle which means the writer of Hebrews is bringing out the ongoing aspect of this verb. We have been perfected and we are being sanctified. This is practical holiness. The blood of Jesus perfects you *and* ensures that you will continually be perfected. We don’t reach perfection in this life, but we can be sure that the author of our faith is also the perfecter, or finisher of our faith as [12:12](#) says. This is the power of the blood of Christ.

What can wash away your sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make you whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. O precious is the flow, that makes me white as snow. No other fount I know. Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Don’t look to anything else. Don’t look to the Mosaic Covenant. Don’t look to your own efforts. Don’t look any other so-called mediator. Look to Jesus, our great High Priest because He offers a better sacrifice.

IV. Jesus Brings us Near to God

This brings us to one of the sweetest passages in the book of Hebrews and the whole Bible. Turn with me to [Hebrews 4:14–16](#). Listen carefully and think of all we have learned so far as we read this. “[14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near](#)

with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” What amazing truths! This is our High Priest, and He alone allows us to draw near to God. Drawing near is a repeated theme throughout the book. The author mentions how Christ allows us to draw near 6 times. The Mosaic system, on the other hand, consistently demonstrated that you could *not* draw near to God. [Hebrews 9:8](#) says, “The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing.” But what happened when Christ, our Great High Priest, who comes from a better lineage and ministers under a better Covenant offered Himself as a better sacrifice on the cross? The curtain tore. From top to bottom. Finally, we can draw near to God. Jesus provides redemption. He is the mediator between God and man.

Notice what else we have in Christ. We have a High Priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses—One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. We have a priest who knows us because He became like us! In every way except the most important—He was without sin. Jesus, your priest, loves you. He knows you. He understands you. He was tempted beyond anything you or I could imagine. He suffered on the cross more than you or I could ever imagine. He is right there with you in the temptation. He is right there with you in the suffering. He is your mediator. He brings you near to God.

And that nearness begins at the moment of salvation for all His children. Yes, we will be with Him for all eternity. But here and now, He has put His Spirit in every child of God. He dwells with you now! You can draw near now to the throne of grace, with confidence! Confidence in who? Yourself? No. Your Savior! Your Priest. The Son of God and Son of Man, Jesus—our Superior Savior! He sits at the throne of grace, ready to give you the mercy and grace to help in time of need. Draw near in Jesus.

One with Himself I cannot die

My soul is purchased by His blood
My life is hid with Christ on High
With Christ my Savior and my God