

“The Supremacy of Christ’s Priesthood (Part 2)” – Hebrews 7:11-28

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com]

Take a Bible and meet me in Hebrews 7...

So last week we finished considering the first ten verses of this chapter. We focused especially on...

The Inferiority of the Levitical Priesthood Was Anticipated Before Its Existence

By “Levitical priesthood” I mean the Jewish priesthood, prescribed in the Law of Moses, involving the descendants of Levi (one of Israel’s tribes). We saw how this priesthood was never intended to be a permanent fixture for God’s people, but was actually employed by God to help us see our need for Christ. In order to help us see how Christ is the High Priest we need, the author of Hebrews demonstrates that the Levitical priesthood is inferior to Christ’s priesthood, which is said to be “*after the order of Melchizedek.*” We looked at how the story of Abraham’s encounter with a mysterious priest-king named Melchizedek, which happened long before the Levitical priesthood even existed, shows that Christ’s priesthood is superior. The point is that the Scriptures demonstrate that the Jewish priesthood was meant to be temporary and has now been supplanted by Christ’s priestly ministry.

So far the author has made his case from Genesis 14, a story that takes place before Levi and any of his descendants even existed. The rest of the text makes the case primarily through a psalm of king David, which was written after the Levitical priesthood had been inaugurated. So let’s look at the rest of chapter 7. We will pick things up in verse 11. Please follow along in your Bible or on the screen. The most important thing I’ll say today I’m about to say to you. This is God’s Word...

“Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? ¹² For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. ¹³ For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. ¹⁵ This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, ¹⁶ who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is witnessed of him, ‘You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.’ ¹⁸ For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. ²⁰ 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. ²³ 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. 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.”* (Hebrews 7:11-28)

Having seen the inferiority of the Levitical priesthood from a story that takes place before it existed, let’s now consider what our author is teaching us about how...

The Inferiority of the Levitical Priesthood Was Demonstrated After Its Existence

The author builds this point on one Old Testament text from Psalm 110 and some observations that are universally agreed upon among the Jews. It seems to me that the central idea concerning why all this matters (the “so what?”, if you will) is found in verse 25. That key verse is surrounded by sections that could be boiled down to two major ideas. We could represent the section like this:

- Permanence of Christ’s Priesthood (7:11-24)
 - *Pertinence of Christ’s Priesthood (7:25)*
- Performance of Christ’s Priesthood (7:26-28)

So let’s consider what the author has said in each of these sections, finishing up with that central verse...

Before he introduces the reality of Christ’s permanence, he says a bit about the impermanence of the Levitical priesthood. Remember that the Israelite tribe of Levi was the only tribe authorized for office of priesthood in the Jewish Law.¹ With that in mind, look again at the question he asks in verse 11. *“Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?”*

What does he mean by “*perfection*”?² It seems to me the word should be understood not in terms of moral perfection but in terms of right standing with God. As F. F. Bruce explains, the “*perfection*” the author has in mind refers to “unimpeded access to God and unbroken communion with him.”³ So in asking the question in verse 11 the author is making a point, namely, if the priesthood that employed the descendants of Aaron (Israel’s first Levitical priest) could have attained the “*perfection*” that sinners needed to access and fellowship with God, then there would be no need for a new priesthood. But the Levites could not perfect anyone by virtue of their personal limitations and by consequence of the fact that their ministry arose out of the Old Testament Law, which, according to verse 19, “*made nothing perfect*.”⁴ The Law and the Levitical priesthood are inseparable. If the Law can’t make us perfect, then the priesthood prescribed in the Law was never going to rise to occasion. Both have to give way to something that can “perfect” us.⁵

So, we read in verse 12, “*when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.*”⁶ And if there is a change, then it opens the door for someone to serve as priest who was not from the tribe of Levi. That’s the point of verses 13 and 14, which remind us that Jesus’ family was from the tribe of Judah (not Levi). By God’s design, the tribe of Judah produced the kings, not the priests.⁷ Acknowledging this, verses 15 and 16 explain that Jesus is priest not by virtue of the Law’s requirement. He instead “*arises in the likeness of Melchizedek*”⁸ and thus the Law’s “*bodily descent*” qualification is not the determinative factor. Something else is. And that brings us to the centerpiece of the author’s argument—Psalm 110:4.

“The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.’” (Psalm 110:4)

What the psalmist, king David, demonstrates with these words is that there was another priesthood that would arise that would supplant that of the Levites. The people of God don't need two priesthoods. They need one. So when the psalmist says that the Lord has sworn to bring a new priesthood, it implies that the old priesthood will go out of commission. "Therefore, long before the coming of Christ, the old order was recognized as transitional, temporary, and insufficient."⁹ By contrast, this new priesthood "*after the order of Melchizedek*" would endure "*forever*" and, thus, never go out of commission since, as the psalmist says, "*The LORD...will not change his mind*".

Building on this verse, the writer of Hebrews argues that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this hope. He possesses a permanent priesthood by virtue of his "*indestructible life*" (Heb. 7:16) and God's unchangeable "*oath*" (7:21). An indestructible life and an unchangeable oath. These two ideas speak to the permanence of Christ's priesthood. Let's consider both of these ideas.

The Permanence of Christ's Priesthood

The "*indestructible life*" is the life that Jesus possesses in His resurrection. Jesus died a heinous death on the cross, was buried in a tomb, sat there rotting until the third day when He was resurrected from the dead. He was seen with a gloriously resurrected body like none that had ever been witnessed before. He ascended to heaven with this body, which he retains to this day and forevermore. His bodily life will never expire. He is "*indestructible*." Therefore, His ministry, unlike every other Levitical priest in human history, can continue "*forever*". He has an eternal tenure as priest. This contrast is highlighted in verses 23 and 24—"*The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.*" Formerly a *plurality* of priests ministered imperfectly; now a *single* priest ministers perfectly!¹⁰ And the problem of their impermanence was solved in Christ's permanence.

This makes Jesus demonstrably and definitively superior to all the Levitical priests. As verse 19 explains, He brings His people a "*better hope...through which we draw near to God*." In other words, He makes possible the "*perfection*" that the Law proved unable to produce through no fault of its own. "The law is perfect in the sense that it does all that God designed it to do, but it does not lead to salvation. Only Christ can do that."¹¹ As one writer explains,

"This is the heart of the law's weakness [v. 18]...On the one hand, the law is so strong that it is stamped into the hearts and minds of every single human being in such a way that none are left untouched (Rom 2:15). That's how powerful the law of God is. Yet on the other hand, it is not able to save. The law is weak in this regard. The law is weak and unprofitable where salvation is needed because God did not design it to save sinners...Christ, however, does precisely what the law could never do. Christ saves."¹²

And why does He save? Because Christ is risen! The permanence of His "*indestructible life*" assures us of our indestructible salvation.

But the permanence of His priesthood is not just demonstrated by His resurrection. It also rests on God's unchangeable "*oath*" (7:21). Psalm 110:4 has been quoted a number of times in Hebrews to this point, but it is not until Hebrews 7:21 that the author draws on the preamble. "*The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, you are a priest forever.*" God has given sworn testimony to the forever priesthood of His Son. No divine oath was taken on behalf of the Levitical priests. Only on behalf of Christ. The Levitical priests ascended to their office by "*divine instruction*," but not by "*divine oath*." Only Christ was appointed in that manner.

This is not the first time the writer of Hebrews has referred back to an oath of God. You might remember from pastor Derek’s sermon that Abraham’s promise of blessing was secured by a divine oath. This is highlighted in Hebrews 6:13-14—“*For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, ‘Surely I will bless you and multiply you.’*” This is a reference to something that happened back in Genesis. Both of these oaths are on the author’s mind—the Abrahamic Covenant and the forever priesthood of Jesus.

But, in each case, please note: “God did not give the oath because *he* needed it, but in order to give *us* every surety that he will do what he has promised.”¹³ It was for our benefit, not His. Indeed, we were told “*We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul*” (6:19). It’s “*sure and steadfast*” because it is God who has sworn. No oath was needed. His Word is always enough. But for our peace of mind God gave the oath so that we might have a double-assurance. As William Barclay put it, whatever “God confirms by an oath becomes something so utterly unchangeable that it is woven into the very fibre of the universe and must remain forever.”¹⁴

And what is the result of the Lord’s “self-imposed eternally binding oath”?¹⁵ The answer is found in verse 22. “*This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.*” This is the only place in the New Testament where that word “*guarantor*” or “*surety*” occurs. The language is drawn from ancient legal documents to refer to the “one who stands security.” The “*guarantor*” was the one who “offered his goods or even himself as security to ensure what was promised.”¹⁶ So the idea in this context is that as long as Jesus lives, we can rest in knowing that all the New Covenant promises are secure. As one writer put it, “God’s covenant promise cannot fail because God’s priest, Jesus Christ, cannot fail.”¹⁷ In short, Jesus is “*the guarantor of a better covenant*” (7:22).

The author is going to have a lot to say about this New Covenant in chapters 8, 9, and 10.¹⁸ Those are basically one long interpretation of Jeremiah 31 and 33, where the New Covenant was promised. We will table that discussion today and save it for the weeks ahead. Suffice it to say, “The ‘new covenant’ that God promised through Jeremiah is ‘better’ than that inaugurated through Moses because the new covenant ‘is enacted on better promises’ (8:6), including the prospect of intimate access to God for all God’s people, ‘from the least of them to the greatest,’ and the complete, once-for-all forgiveness of sins (8:11-12).”¹⁹ Amen! I can’t wait to explore that with you. But for now, we simply should celebrate the permanence of Christ’s priesthood, ensured by His indestructible life and God’s unbreakable oath. Christ is the Great High priest for us forever. And this is really good news!

Now, before we explore the significance of verse 25, let’s consider for a moment what verses 26 to 28 say about...

The Performance of Christ’s Priesthood

It’s not just the permanence of Christ’s priesthood that shows it is superior to Levi’s. It’s also the perfect way Christ performs the office. Now we are not going to spend much time on this because the author will elaborate soon, but look at verse 26 and following again...

“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.” (Hebrews 7:26-28)²⁰

In other words, Jesus is a superior priest who offers a superior performance of His priestly duties because He is a superior Person. He is “*holy*.”²¹ He is “*innocent*.” He is “*unstained*.” He is “*separated from sinners and exalted about the heavens*.”²² He is absolutely pure. He is undefiled by sin and, therefore, needs no sacrifice offered on His behalf. While He shares the weakness of the humanity of other high priests, He shares none of the weakness of their sin nature. He is absolutely qualified to serve as our high priest before God because He is “*perfect forever*.” He has proven character and credentials. And so His priestly duties were and are administered flawlessly on our behalf.²³ And the result? “*Such a high priest truly meets our need*” (7:26 NIV). And what is our need? Salvation!

“A better translation [of verse 26] would be, ‘Such a high priest was fitted to us.’ The point is that Jesus as high priest is perfectly fitted for the predicament in which we find ourselves; he is appropriate in every way to be the Savior of sinful humankind.”²⁴

And this brings us to verse 25 and...

The Pertinence of Christ’s Priesthood

Why does all of this matter? Verse 25 explains,

“*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.*” (Hebrews 7:25)

This is one of my absolute favorite verses in the Bible! He saves “*to the uttermost*”! He comprehensively accomplishes all that was needed for our salvation. Nothing needed has been left undone. His work is utterly sufficient. There is nothing needed to supplement Christ’s work. Our salvation is all of Christ, from beginning to end, apart from our effort. Glory to God!

What I want you to see in verse 25 though is threefold. It reminds us of that our complete salvation is *from* something, *through* something, and *for* something.

What do we need *from*? Answer: God. The wrath of God. John Piper explains,

“If, to be saved forever, we need Christ to intercede for us forever with God [and that is what this verse claims], then what is the implication about what we need saving from? The implication is that we need to be saved from God. Specifically we need to be saved from the wrath of God that burns against ungodliness and unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). Christ can save us forever from the wrath of God because he intercedes forever with God. He continually puts himself between the Father and us as an asbestos shield against his white-hot anger against sin.”²⁵

That’s exactly right. Church, listen to these words from Hebrews 10...

“*For we know him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’*”³¹ *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*” (Hebrews 10:30-31)

Those are terrifying claims! If they are not, something is wrong with you and your soul is in peril.

“Until we get this firmly and clearly fixed in our minds, hardly anything in the book of Hebrews will make sense. The major problem of the world and in our lives is *not* our troubled marriages or our wayward children or our financial pressures or our failing health or our cultural degeneration. The main problem in the world—everybody’s problem—is how to be reconciled to God so that we escape

his terrifying wrath at the judgment. That's the problem. And the biblical answer is priesthood. And specifically the superior priesthood of Christ... This is not ours to figure out or solve. God has to do it for us. And he has done it. He ordains a Priest, his Son."²⁶

Now don't get it twisted. It's not that the Father has no love for us, but fortunately Jesus loves us. No. That's not it at all. Who ordained Christ as priest? The Father. Who swore the oath? The Father. Who sent the Great High Priest to save us? The Father. And who did He send specifically? His own Son. What does that say about the Father's love for us? "All this is the *love* of God rescuing us from the *wrath* of God, in such a way that the *justice* of God is vindicated and the *glory* of God is exalted."²⁷

With that in mind, what does verse 25 say that we are saved *through*? Jesus' intercession. He saves "*since*" He lives to intercede for us. What does intercession mean? Basically, it refers to intervening prayer.²⁸ I agree with Richard Phillips who laments our tendency "to underappreciate the present high-priestly ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ and its significance for our lives", but not without consequence. "How impoverishing it is to our spiritual vibrancy that we think of his ministry as past tense only, little recognizing the great resources available to us now through our everlasting union with him by faith."²⁹ His intercession matters for us. And it matters for our salvation. We are saved through His intercession. That's not the total answer, of course, for Christ's intercession presupposes His perfect life, death, resurrection, and ascension. But the writer of Hebrews is reminding us that our salvation doesn't rest *merely* on those acts in the past. It also rests on the ongoing and present work of Christ for His people, namely, His intercession.

Don't minimize the importance of Christ's intercessory work. Don't you dare! Listen to what Paul told the Romans:

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus... Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." (Romans 8:1, 33-34; cf. 8:26-27)

Similarly, John writes,

"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." (1 John 2:1)

Believers, listen. Christ did save you. But He also lives to keep you. He is our Intercessor and Advocate before the Father. "It is because of His continuing work of intercession that we are sustained through every pressure, kept through every temptation, encouraged through every persecution, and will eventually be brought triumphantly into glory."³⁰ He is the true "Prayer Warrior."

Have you ever had someone who prayed for you daily? If you have, there's a pretty good chance it was your mother. But in truth, even she has not. And even if she did, her prayers would eventually be interrupted by death. Not so with the Lord Jesus. He does not forget to pray for us. He always lives to intercede for us. And not in some general way. In a personal way. He intercedes for us by name. He knows His own. Isaiah 49 gives a beautiful picture of this:

"Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. ¹⁶ Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me." (Isaiah 49:15-16)

Those words were written centuries before Christ hung on a cross in our place, but His crucifixion gives them vibrant meaning. Nails pierced His hands when He died for you. Even in His glorious resurrection, He

bears those scars in His flesh. How could He ever forget to intercede for us?³¹ I love the way Charles Wesley captures this in an old hymn called, “Arise, My Soul, Arise”:

Arise, my soul, arise,
shake off your guilty fears;
the bleeding Sacrifice
in my behalf appears:
before the throne my Surety stands,
before the throne my Surety stands,
my name is written on his hands.

He ever lives above,
for me to intercede,
his all-redeeming love,
his precious blood to plead;
his blood atoned for every race,
his blood atoned for every race,
and sprinkles now the throne of grace.

Five bleeding wounds he bears,
received on Calvary;
they pour effectual prayers,
they strongly plead for me.
‘Forgive him, O forgive,’ they cry,
‘forgive him, O forgive,’ they cry,
‘nor let that ransomed sinner die!’³²

Isn’t that beautiful? The truth of it certainly is. Every prayer He prays for us is prayed with omniscience and sympathy (cf. Heb. 4:15). “Every prayer hits the mark and graces our lives.”³³ He’s not just passively sitting there disinterested at the Father’s right hand. He is actively praying for His people. For us.³⁴ And without this activity none would be saved. Not one. Period. And, as Philip Hughes cautions, it’s worth adding, “To rely upon angels or saints [or Mary] or any other finite beings for [our] intercessions is not only futile; it also betrays a failure of confidence in the adequacy of Christ as our intercessor, and it is to honor the creature rather than him who is our Creator and Redeemer.”³⁵ Turning to saints to do what Christ offers to do, would be like turning to Levitical priests to do for you what only Christ can do perfectly.³⁶ It’s foolishness. It’s blasphemous.

Christ saves us *from* God’s wrath. He saves us in part *through* His intercession. But what, according to verse 25, does are we saved *for*? Put another way, what is it that Christ intercedes for? Probably many things, but let’s just stay with this verse. We are saved because Christ intercedes for us always and forever. But this verse highlights that we need to draw near to God. It stands to reason then that Christ’s intercession addresses that need.³⁷ Here again Piper has some helpful words...

“This verb here, ‘draw near to God,’ is in a tense that indicates present continuous action, not a single action in the past. It is not saying: God is able to save those forever who once drew near to him, but who go on drawing near to him. If we do not go on drawing near to God we have no warrant for thinking that we are being saved by the Lord Jesus.

But if this is true, then is not this drawing near one of the things that Jesus intercedes for with the Father? If not, then his intercession leaves out the main thing required of us for our salvation. Which leaves us very precarious. But there are many reasons for thinking he does not leave this out. One is that Hebrews 13:21 says that God is ‘working in us what is pleasing in his sight through Jesus

Christ.’ One of the things pleasing in his sight is that his people keep on drawing near to him forever and ever. And so he is working in us this very thing.

And verse 21 says he is doing this ‘*through Jesus Christ*’ which means, at least, that Christ has purchased this grace for us by his death and that Christ prays and asks the Father for it on the basis of that death. In other words, when the writer tells us that drawing near to God is what qualifies us for the eternal saving work of our high priest, he doesn’t mean to say that our high priest leaves us alone in our bent and sinful nature to draw near to God on our own. Rather our High Priest intercedes for us and asks the Father to do just what Hebrews 13:21 says he will do—‘*through Jesus Christ.*’³⁸

One really interesting illustration of this can be found in Luke 22. Jesus told Simon Peter,

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:31-32; cf. John 17:11ff)

What is that? That’s Christ’s ministry of intercession in action. And what was He praying for on Peter’s behalf? His faith! *“I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.”* What good news for Peter! And don’t miss the confidence of Jesus—*“And when [not “if”] you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”* So when Peter stumbled in denial, why did he not fall away fully and finally? Because Christ Jesus prayed for his faith. And, brothers and sisters, Christ prays for our faith too! Let that be a warm blanket for your soul. We persevere in faith because Jesus prays that our *“faith may not fail.”* Without His intercession, we would not *“draw near to God”* (Heb. 7:25).

Yes, as we have seen again and again in Hebrews, we must persevere in faith. But we will do so to the end because (and only because) Jesus Christ *“always lives to make intercession for [us].”* He deserves the glory even for our perseverance! Whether you recognize this yet or not, our perseverance in faith, our drawing near to God, is the fruit of His ongoing intercession. *“What matters most for Christians, therefore, is not what we are doing, not the spiritual power we are supposedly working up, but the wholly effective and powerful ministry of Jesus Christ, who lives and ministers forever as our great high priest.”³⁹* Indeed, as the writer of Hebrews celebrates, *“Such a high priest truly meets our need”* (7:26).

So what should we do in light of this? We should draw near! What a privilege it is for us to draw near to God in grateful worship and humble prayer. Indeed the entire discussion of Christ’s priesthood in Hebrews is bookended by a call to *“draw near to God”* (4:14-16; 10:19-25) and we have seen this application mentioned twice in our text this morning (7:19, 25). *“What more fitting response could we offer to the arrival, the arising, of the priest in the order of Melchizedek than to avail ourselves of this access to our Father’s throne of grace?”⁴⁰* So let’s pray and let’s worship...

¹ As Kent Hughes explains, “The qualifications for the Levitical priesthood were patently *external*. A priestly candidate had to be: 1) legitimate, 2) a Levite (meaning that his mother had to be an Israelite and his father a priest before him), and 3) having no physical defects. There were 142 physical blemishes listed that could disqualify him, some of which are recorded in Leviticus 21:16–23. His ordination ceremony was painstakingly external regarding how he was to be bathed, clothed, anointed with oil, and marked with blood. After his ordination he had to observe specified washings, anointings, and hair-cutting. The focus was external throughout.” R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* (PW; Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), 198.

² Dennis Johnson reminds us, “We have seen ‘perfection’ to be a prominent idea in Hebrews (2:10; 5:8-10; 7:19, 28; 9:9, 11; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:23). In general, ‘perfection’ (*teleiōsis, teleioō*) describes completeness. In Hebrews, however, ‘perfection’ often carries a special connotation it acquired through usage in the LXX to refer to priestly consecration (Ex. 29:9, 29, 33, 35; Lev. 4:5; 8:33; 16:32; 21:10; Num. 3:3; etc.). As priests needed to be ‘perfected’ to enter God’s sanctuary and intercede on others’ behalf, so ordinary worshipers needed to be ‘perfected’—that is, cleansed—in order to draw near to God.” Dennis E. Johnson, “Hebrews” in *Hebrews-Revelation* (ESVEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 102.

³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 80. In this context, the term “perfection” is a specialized term dealing with what makes access to God possible. It means “to put someone in the position in which he can come, or stand, before God.” Gerhard Friedrich, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 8, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 82-83.

⁴ Similarly, Johnson notes, “It is in this sense that ‘perfection’ could not be attained through the Levitical priesthood associated with the law. Verse 19 confirms that our author has this sort of ‘perfection’ in view. There he reasserts (formats an inclusio with v. 11) the law’s inability to ‘perfect’ anything, contrasting its impotence with the better hope introduced by Christ, ‘through which *we draw near to God.*’ The law’s sacrifices cannot ‘perfect’ worshipers’ consciences, but Christ’s blood can (9:9, 14; 10:14), so in him we may draw near (10:19-22).” Johnson, 102.

⁵ “The word translated as ‘perfection’ (Greek, *teleiōsis*) could equally be rendered as ‘completion.’ It is used here to refer to salvation, for perfection or completion is the condition in which people are made acceptable to God. The point is that the need for a new priesthood indicates that the old priesthood could not itself accomplish the salvation to which it pointed. The very fact that there was another priesthood testifies that the old priesthood was imperfect and transitory.” Richard D. Phillips, *Hebrews* (REC; Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2006), 232.

⁶ “In other words, the Levitical priesthood was the foundation on which the law of Moses rested. When the priesthood changes, the law must change as well. The cause-and-effect order is significant: it is not that a change in the law necessitates a change in the priesthood, but vice versa. Here the specific ‘law’ is the genealogical requirement that high priests be descendants of Levi and Aaron. When the king-priest promised in Psalm 110 appears, the genealogical method of appointing priests must be replaced... As subsequent discussion will show, the arrival of the Melchizedek-like high priest has also produced other changes to the law delivered at Sinai: changes in sanctuary (8:2-6; 9:11-12, 24; 10:19-22), sacrifice (9:13-14, 25-26; 10:1-14; 13:15-16), sanctions (10:26-31) and more... the setting aside of that specific regulation is symptomatic of a far-reaching removal of the covenantal system mediated through Moses (8:8-13)...” Johnson, 103-104.

⁷ Al Mohler observes, “The work of Christ in his threefold office—prophet, priest, and king—demonstrates a very different kind of perfection, one completely absent in the old covenant. No category for such a thing in the old covenant exists. In that covenant, different tribes performed the different societal responsibilities, and no tribe performed them eternally. Christ, on the other hand, performs all of these roles and does so singularly, continually, and eternally.” R. Albert Mohler, *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews* (CCE; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 108.

⁸ “The word ‘descended’ is literally, ‘has arisen,’ a term that has Messianic significance in Scripture. Malachi 4:2 prophesies of the rising of one who is the ‘sun of righteousness.’ Numbers 24:17 promises the appearance of ‘a star... out of Jacob.’ Luke 1:78 speaks of Christ as ‘the rising sun... from heaven’ (cf. Revelation 2:28). Second Peter 1:19 tells of the rising of ‘the morning star’ in our hearts. The prophets also predict the raising up of a righteous Branch for David (Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5ff.; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12; Revelation 22:16).” K. Hughes, 197.

⁹ Phillips, 233.

¹⁰ “The principle of plurality characterizing the OT order revealed its imperfection and incompleteness, whereas the *singularity* of Christ’s authority and ministry demonstrates that God’s full and final provision for his people’s needs has arrived. In the past God spoke through prophets ‘at many times and in many ways’ (Heb. 1:1), but the plural installments and media of his self-revelation meant that his last, best word had not yet been spoken. Now, ‘in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,’ whose divine glory (1:2-3) and saving message (2:3) have brought God’s special revelation to climax and completion.” Johnson, 106.

¹¹ Mohler, 109.

¹² Ibid., 109-110.

¹³ Phillips, 245.

¹⁴ William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), 85.

¹⁵ K. Hughes, 205.

¹⁶ Phillips, 246. Similarly, “Neither this term nor its cognates appear elsewhere in the NT. In the LXX this word group describes a third party who accepts responsibility to secure another person’s contractual or covenantal commitment, even at the risk of his own property or life (Prov. 6:1; 17:18; 22:26). Later Christ will be described as ‘mediator’ (*mesitēs*) of the new covenant (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). But Moses also was a covenant mediator (Gal. 3:19-20), and his experience sadly showed that a mere mediator of even so solemn a bond as a divine-human covenant could not *guarantee* that both parties would fulfill their commitments (Heb. 8:7-9). Jesus is the new covenant’s mediator, but he is more: through his perpetual priesthood, secured by God’s oath, he *guarantees* that the new covenant’s blessings will reach their intended recipients.” Johnson, 105.

¹⁷ Mohler, 111.

¹⁸ “‘Covenant’ appears more often in Hebrews (17x) than in the rest of the NT combined (16x).” Johnson, 105.

¹⁹ Ibid., 105.

²⁰ The Italian commentator first identified these verses as a hymn. He called it “a hymn of the High Priest.” In his words, “Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever. (vv. 26–28).” See Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 80.

²¹ “Sculptors need artistic ability; scientists need mathematical prowess; athletes need speed and strength and grace. Priests need holiness. The reason is the nature of their work, namely, to bring pure offerings before a holy God.” Phillips, 260.

²² What does it mean for Jesus to be “*separated from sinners*”? John Owens answers: “He was not set apart from them in his nature, for God sent his own Son ‘in the likeness of sinful men’ (Rom. 8:3). He was not set apart from men during his ministry on earth. He did not live apart from everyone in a desert. He spoke with tax collectors and prostitutes, and the hypocritical Pharisees rebuked him for this. Being set apart from sinners declares what Christ is, his state and condition. He is holy and undefiled.... He was separate from sin, in its nature, causes, and effects. He had to be like this for our benefit. He became the middle person between God and sinners and had to be separate from those sinners in the thing he stood in their place for.” John Owen, *Hebrews* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1988), 179.

²³ “The Levitical High Priest was a sinful man offering animal sacrifices for a sinful people; Jesus was the sinless Son of God offering himself for the sin of all men.... Because he was what he was, the sinless Son of God, he was equipped for his office as no human High Priest could ever be.” Barclay, 85.

²⁴ Phillips, 255. He continues, “Perhaps an ideal way of entry into this discussion is that provided by the medieval scholar Herveus. He pointed out that when you are discussing a sacrifice, there are four things you must take into account: ‘Namely, what is offered, to whom it is offered, by whom it is offered, and for whom it is offered.’ Our passage starts with two of these already understood, namely, those *for whom* the sacrifice is offered—sinful man under condemnation of the law—as well as the One *to whom* it is offered—the holy God who must do right as judge of the universe. Those two points clearly describe our predicament, our unworthiness and condemnation in the presence of God. What remains is *what* is offered and *by whom*. It is in this respect that Jesus Christ is perfectly fitted to be our high priest in terms of the sacrifice he offers and of the high priest he is in offering it. John Owen explains: ‘Unholy sinners stand in need of a holy priest and a holy sacrifice. What we do not have in ourselves we must have in him, or we will not be accepted by the holy God, who has such pure eyes that he cannot look on sin. Such a high priest is the Lord Christ.’” Ibid. Cf. Owen, 178.

²⁵ John Piper, “Jesus: From Melchizedek to Eternal Savior,” a sermon preached on December 1, 1996, to Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN, and accessed online at the following website: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/jesus-from-melchizedek-to-eternal-savior>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ John Owen explains it like this: “The safest conception... that we can have of the intercession of Christ... is his continual appearance for us in the presence of God by virtue of his office as the ‘high priest over the house of God,’ representing the efficacy of his oblation [outpouring of blood], accompanied with tender care, love, and desires for the

welfare, supply, deliverance and salvation of the church. Three things, therefore, [are involved]: (1) The presentation of his person before the throne of God on our behalf, Heb. ix. 24... (2) The representation of his death, oblation, and sacrifice for us; which gives power, life, and efficacy unto his intercession... Rev. v.6 ... (3) Both these do not render it prayer or intercession; for intercession is prayer... Wherefore there is in it... a requesting and offering unto God, of his desires and will for the church, attended with care, love, and compassion.” John Owen, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, Vol. 5 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 541.

²⁹ Phillips, 239.

³⁰ Michael P. Andrus, “From Pablum to Porterhouse,” a sermon preached on January 10, 2010, and accessed at the following web address: <http://firstfreewichita.org/sermons/sermon/2010-01-17/-from-pablum-to-porterhouse>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Charles Wesley, “Arise, My Soul Arise,” 1742.

³³ K. Hughes, 208.

³⁴ Andrew Murray celebrated this fact: “Without ceasing there streams forth from Him to the Father the prayer of His love for every one and every need of those that belong to Him; His very person and presence is that prayer, so closely and inseparably is He identified with those He calls His brethren.” Andrew Murray, *The Holiest of All: An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1993), 272.

³⁵ P. Hughes, 270.

³⁶ “It seems that one of the main purposes of the letter is to assure believers that their sins are forgiven. We have no need to go anywhere else to secure a clean conscience. The author reminds the readers and us that we have a perfect and sinless priest and one who reigns at God’s right hand. His once-for-all sacrifice atoned for our sins forever. Why would the readers think of trusting in priests who were sinful and mortal when they are beneficiaries of the work of God’s Son, who have been perfected and offers complete and final cleansing from sin?” Thomas Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (BTC; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 240.

³⁷ F. F. Bruce points out, “The whole apparatus of worship associated with sacrifice and ritual and priesthood [of the old covenant] was calculated rather to keep men at a distance from God than to bring them near” (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984], 149). Thanks be to God that Christ’s priesthood is marked by access!

³⁸ Piper, “Jesus: From Melchizedek to Eternal Savior.”

³⁹ Phillips, 251.

⁴⁰ Johnson, 108.