

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: HEBREWS 7:20-28**

To better understand why Jesus is the superior high priest.

Read the Text:

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 7:20-28, ESV)

Study the Text:**The Oath**

The final part of chapter 7 reminds us that the former Levitical priests were made "without an oath" (Heb. 7:20), but that "this one was made a priest with an oath (Heb. 7:21). Again, we are reminded of the "promise" and the "oath" (Heb. 6:16-17), "two unchangeable things" (Heb. 6:18) that guarantee the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Below is a breakdown of key details regarding this oath.

THE LORD HAS SWORN

The oath referred to both in chapter 6 and here in chapter 7 comes from 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 is frequently referenced throughout the Book of Hebrews, and for good reason: it is rich in prophetic passages that point to the Son's deity. Here, in verse 4, the LORD swears an oath to guarantee the legitimacy of his promise that one day the LORD would send one who is both king and priest to rule over Jerusalem much like Melchizedek did

(Gen. 14). This means, then, that even in the time of David, there was a Messianic expectation of a king who would also serve as a priest before God.

A MIGHTY SCEPTER FROM ZION

Psalm 110 contains other details that contextually shape verse 4. For example, this priest-king would rule with the “mighty scepter” from “Zion.” The term “scepter” or “rod” in the Old Testament refers to authority and power given to a ruler. In other words, this priest-king would have the authority from Zion, meaning the very authority of God Himself.

THE LORD SAYS TO MY LORD

Most striking about Psalm 110 is the first verse. David says: “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” David, the king, references both “the LORD” as well as “my Lord,” indicating that David was under the authority of both YHWH and “the Lord” to whom YHWH was speaking (taken to mean, “Christ”). In other words, there is in this Psalm a real distinction between the divine Persons of the Father and the Son. The Son will be sent by the Father with divine authority to rule the nations, and he will be a priest-king, according to the order of Melchizedek.

The “oath” mentioned in verse 20 doesn’t just refer to Psalm 110:4 but to all of Psalm 110. The oath confirms for the people of God that Jesus is the one of whom Psalm 110 spoke. He is “the Lord,” who is given “the mighty scepter” from “Zion,” who is a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. As such, he is not merely a high priest, but a divine being, “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb. 1:3), and the one to whom all praise and glory should be given.

The Differences

There are practical differences between Jesus and the former priests, as well. Below is a breakdown of the main differences presented in this passage.

THE FORMER PRIESTS CONTINUALLY DIED

Verse 23 lays out the first major difference that made the former priests inferior to Jesus Christ: “The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office.” There were numerous priests under the Levitical priesthood for no other reason than they didn’t live forever. Every time they died, a new one was required. But Jesus is different: “he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever” (Heb. 7:24). Because Jesus is eternal, he can subsequently save eternally (Heb. 7:25). The term “uttermost” (sometimes translated “completely”) is the Greek term παντελής (pantelēs), and it means “perfect or complete.” In other words, the eternality of Jesus Christ enables him to save to the fullest extent, that is, eternally.

THE FORMER PRIESTS WERE IMPERFECT

Jesus is further separated from the former priests in verse 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.” As a priest who is holy, unstained, and separated from sinners, he is not required to offer “sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people” (Heb. 7:27). Jesus’ offering “of himself” was sufficient “once for all” because he was the perfect sacrifice, fully able to pay the debt of sin. There is no more need for sacrifice following the Son’s sacrifice.

These differences highlight why the new covenant is greater than the old covenant and why the priesthood of Jesus Christ is greater than the priesthood of Levi. The old law appointed fallen, sinful “men in their

weakness” to serve as priests, in which they had to make offerings for themselves first. But the oath of God, as expressed in Psalm 110, came after the time of Moses and thus “came later than the law” (Heb. 7:28). As such, it succeeds the law and the Levitical priesthood.

What About Now?

The central theme of this passage is undoubtedly the eternal security we have as recipients of the offering of our high priest, Jesus Christ. Jesus, as the eternal high priest, is able to save us to the uttermost because he is a priest forever, that is, for eternity. Thus, his work is eternal. He is perfect in every way and more superior in every way than the previous priests. His work can do what the work of the former priests could not. This reality enables the apostle Paul to say, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). There is no condemnation because it has been paid in full by the high priest of our covenant.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Hebrews 7:20-21. What is the first difference mentioned in these verses between the former priests and Jesus Christ? What verse is quoted here, and why is it significant?

2. Read Hebrews 7:22. What does this difference mean for us?

Day Two

1. Read Hebrews 7:23. Why were the former priests “many in number?” What weakness does this highlight?

2. Read Hebrews 7:24. How is Jesus different?

Day Three

1. Read Hebrews 7:25. How does this difference impact his work as the high priest of the new covenant?

2. Read Hebrews 7:26. How is Jesus described here?

Day Four

1. Read Hebrews 7:27. What is the second major difference between the former priests and Jesus Christ mentioned in this verse?
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2. Read Hebrews 7:28. What is the difference between the “law” and the “oath?”
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Discuss the Text!

Session 18 Discussion: Eternally Secure

One of the main points this passage makes is that Christ's eternity means he can serve as a high priest eternally. As such, his saving work extends into eternity as well. This provides believers with real security. There is no question that our salvation is fully secure. Jesus, the eternal high priest of the order of Melchizedek, has eternally acted on our behalf. Talk as a group about the relief this brings you as believers.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever purchased something big (e.g., a house, land, investment) that took several days to “finalize?” What was it like waiting to see if the deal was going to actually go through?
2. How does it feel to know that Jesus' sacrifice is one that lasts for an eternity? In other words, there is no “waiting period to see if it sticks” - it is paid, done, and secure eternally.
3. Do you ever doubt your salvation? What makes you have such doubts?
4. Do you ever doubt the faithfulness of God? Why or why not?
5. Is Jesus Christ, the eternal high priest, able to save whoever he desires to save? If so, does that mean that doubting your salvation is in some sense doubting Jesus Himself?
6. Kid Talk: Have your kids clean their room. Talk to them about how long they think it will take for their room to get messy again. Now, have them imagine someone cleaning their room so thoroughly that it can never get dirty again, and ask them if they'd like that to happen to them. Now, make the connection: Jesus “cleans our lives” as the eternal high priest in a way that can never be messed up again. There is no wondering if things will go back to how they were, concerning salvation. It is utterly and completely finished.

Takeaways:

1. Jesus is greater than the former priests because his priesthood is established with an oath from God.
2. Jesus is greater than the former priests because he is perfect, without sin, and therefore does not have to offer sacrifices for himself.
3. Jesus is greater than the former priests because, unlike them, he never dies; he lives forever.