

LESSON 7 – A NEEDED PRIESTHOOD



Reading Assignment:

Bible Reading: Hebrews, 1 & 2 Peter
Text Reading: Benware Chapters 24-27

My grandfather was militantly Protestant and my grandmother was militantly Roman Catholic, quite a combination. Thus, my grandmother did everything in her power to make my father a Roman Catholic and to influence me in the same way. As a small boy, I remember my father telling me about different things of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly about the priests. At my grandmother's funeral as a 7 year old, I was quite impressed with the ceremony and the Latin liturgy conducted by the Priest.

The Priesthood

Typically man looks upon priests as some level above the average religious person. He sees these men as distinct and in some way carrying on a tradition of the past. It is not only the Roman church that has priests; most ancient religions of the world used a priesthood to enable their worship of their pagan gods.

Have you ever thought of the doctrine of the priesthood? Have you ever wondered if it is Biblical to have priests today? In this lesson, I would like to examine the doctrine of the priesthood in light of a very unique book of the Bible, the Book of Hebrews.

When we studied *God's Plan as Revealed in the Old Testament*, we demonstrated that Adam was the initial king-priest of the Garden and we noted others that followed him, such as Job and Noah. With the formation of Israel, Moses established a unique priesthood, following the line of Aaron, called, the Aaronic Priesthood. For centuries, the Hebrew people followed God's design of worship established in Leviticus and the tribe of Levi supplied the priesthood.

With Israel's rejection of the kingdom offered by the Messiah and then re-offered by the Apostles in the Book of Acts, the days of Israel as a nation became limited. Upon Mount Olivet, Jesus Christ proclaimed

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent to thee, how often I would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Belssed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. . . . And Jesus

said unto them, "See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

Matthew 23:37-39; 24:2

This prophecy was literally fulfilled in 70 AD with the Roman destruction of the Temple. Three years later, the nation of Israel ceased to exist. As a result, the interim period, we call the Church Age, began.

The Early Church

For a moment, picture yourself in Israel, sometime between 33 AD and 70 AD. You faithfully attend Temple worship and your entire religious life centres about this Temple and its priesthood. It is here that you receive your spiritual comfort. In a few years, all this will come to an end! Would it not shake your very foundation? Would it not leave you drifting?

Now think about the early church. It was composed of both Jewish and Gentile believers and unbelievers. Among this group would be an element that still liked the formal Temple worship and looked favourably upon its heritage. Some of these merely "attached" the church's teaching to Judaism. For them, all would crumble with the destruction of the Temple and its priesthood!

Through the writer of the book of Hebrews, God spoke to these to help them to understand why the priesthood would end and to warn those, who were merely professors of Christianity, that their "foundation" of faith, the priesthood, would cease during the interim age. To the true Jewish believers, God explains why He created the Aaronic priesthood and why it must come to an end during the Church Age.

THE LESSER IS BLESSED BY THE GREATER

Uniquely, the Book of Hebrews develops the doctrine of the priesthood and raises it to the heights. All that went before was to point to a single Great High Priest, Jesus the Messiah. Since this was a startling doctrine to the Jewish people of the early



Church, the author of Hebrews must build a legal case to show that all that preceded Jesus Christ served as road signs pointing to Jesus Christ.

Specifically those Old Testament pictures or beings, which God used, were:

1. Angels
2. Mosses
3. The "Rest" of the Promised Land

4. The Prophets
5. The Priesthood

A proper understanding of God's use of Old Testament pictures enabled those about to face the destruction of Israel [70 AD], to accept it and to understand it. Additionally, any reader of the letter will understand why these pictures could never fully succeed to bring God's plan to fulfilment.

Chapter 1 of Hebrews

God begins in Chapter 1 of Hebrews to explain that Jesus Christ is higher than the first created beings, the angels.

STOP AND WRITE

Hebrews 1:13

☛ **Argument #1**— Wasn't Jesus a man like us and thus under the angels?

Yes, for a time the Son was made a little lower than the angels in order that He might suffer, die, and rise to honour and glory [2:9]. This was necessary, if man was to be offered salvation by God. Jesus limited Himself to the level of mankind in order to be an acceptable mediator between God and man. Further, He had to be a man in order to shed human blood for our salvation.

⇒ Can you think of a verse to support the need for shedding blood?

STOP AND WRITE

Hebrews 9:22

☛ **Argument #2**— Since the entire concept of Judaism came from the prophets* of God, they must be superior to Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, their writings and teaching

must be sufficient for man's salvation. Specifically, the legal and worship system was given to Israel by Moses, God's spokesman, thus the "author" must be superior to the man Jesus of Nazareth.

Hebrews 3

Once again God answers this in Hebrews 3. The writer of Hebrews agrees that Moses is one of the most important prophets³⁷ in Old Testament history. Yes, through Moses, the Law was delivered to the nation of Israel. But even with the greatness of Moses and the Law, salvation did not come to the people. One still greater was needed. Thus Hebrews 3 places Moses in correct relationship to Jesus. What was that relationship?

QUESTION?

Read Chapter 3 and find a specific verse that answers this. Write the verse here.

The relationship is quite simple, Moses built the house, the worship system, but Jesus Christ, the architect designed it thus, the lesser is succeeded by the greater.

☛ **Argument #3**— Obviously Moses did not "finish" the job of salvation. But surely Joshua did when he brought the people into the Land of Promise. If they were in the land and had "rest" than why would Jesus of Nazareth be needed? The nation would then have the Law and the Land, why should the Judaic system come to an end?

Again, the answer is no, salvation was not yet accomplished. The "rest" was merely a physical picture of the eternal future rest promised by God to His people. The final and complete "rest" is yet future. This "rest" or being in the Land, was the lesser and the greater was the eternal rest with God in Heaven. In theological terms, it was a prefiguration of spiritual rest.

³⁷ The use of prophets in this lesson will refer to the spokesman role of the prophet and does not necessarily mean the foretelling portion of the office of prophet.

Art thou [Jesus] greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself? John 8:53

In answering this important question, the author moves on to the third group, the priesthood. In this answer lies the “why” of God’s prescribed worship in the Temple using the priesthood. The Law, including the people and the intermediary of the priesthood, was to be followed explicitly in their worship. Through Aaron, God began this administration. But Aaron was a descendant of Levi, who was a descendant of Abraham, the father of the Chosen People. Thus the foundation of the priesthood lay with Abraham. If it had come through Abraham, it must be one of the foundation stones of the blessing and salvation. How could God do away with it?

God would do away with it because it was incomplete and insufficient. In summary,

STOP AND WRITE

Hebrews 7:11

Further,

For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made e nothing perfect; . . .
Hebrews 7:18, 19a

Remember, the priest was the intermediary or mediator between the people and God. Because of his contact with both sinful people and a righteous God, he required a meeting place that was properly separated from the everyday or “profane” things of the world, thus the Temple.

Certainly the people saw the priest’s imperfections and sensed the seemingly futility of the system. It would leave a certain sense of not quite fulfilling the release from sin and its uncleanness. It seemed to be pointing to the need for a perfect priest. Thus, the priesthood of the Old Testament became a prefigurement of the perfect priesthood in the Temple in Heaven.

The Old Testament taught that God’s Anointed, the Messiah would be that perfect priest. And would in fact fulfil perfectly all three functions of prophet, priest, and king. Israel would recognize Him when He fulfilled all three offices and functions.

Recalling that Moses and Joshua served as prophets and governmental leaders, i.e., “prophet-kings” in Israel, yet neither were priests. Moses’ brother Aaron was selected to be the first High Priest of the nation and with him would begin a succession of priests. All would be his physical descendants and gain the office by this descendency.

The Messiah

Throughout the entire Aaronic priesthood, no single High Priest ever served in the role of king or prophet. Thus, we have several individuals serving in the Old Testament who served in one, two, but never three of the Messianic functions. The One who would fulfil all three offices would be the Messiah.

In the first four chapters of Hebrews the writer demonstrates that God’s people are still waiting for fulfilment of this Promised One. With the nearness of the collapse of the nation, God wanted to help His Jewish believers understand that all the rituals and priesthood of Israel were merely pictures or signposts pointing to the ultimate solution, Jesus the Messiah, and that when He came, the signposts could be removed. The author proclaims that now is the time to remove the signposts, for the Messiah has come. This would be shocking to anyone unprepared for the removal. I should note that it has been estimated that 1/3 to 1/2 of the priesthood accepted Jesus as Messiah during the First Century. The Book of Hebrews is God’s preparation for 70 AD.



To a faithful Jewish person, the priesthood seemed supreme. Thus, the final step in the “ladder” was to show that Jesus of Nazareth was the rightful High Priest and thus superior to the entire priesthood of Israel. In His argument, God first defines the role of the priest.

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness.

Hebrews 5:1,2

Having established the hierarchy and place of Jesus Christ, the author then pauses to show how Christ’s priesthood is unique, yet was foreseen and prefigured in Jewish history. Through this we see the continuity and plan of God throughout the ages.

Israel was not an “attempt” by God that failed. Rather it was God’s painting to prepare us to recognize Him. The Church is not a “course correction” by God. He

never fails; rather the Church is Step 2. God will have two more “steps” in order to fulfil the complete revelation of His personality to man and to the nation of Israel. Further, He will deal with the world and finally judge it righteously.

Notice, at this point in history, Jesus Christ is not serving as prophet, priest, and king. To be a prophet you must be in the land. To be a priest you must be mediating in the Temple, and to be king you must be ruling over your people in your kingdom. It will be shown in our study of the Book of Revelation how this will be accomplished in a future day.

Finally, He will demonstrate that under a perfect system, with the Messiah as prophet-priest-king, man’s heart rebellion is still the ultimate problem. The remaining books of the Scriptures explain how God will accomplish this.

Hebrews 5 - 7

A good Jewish man would never accept the Messiah-Priest to be from any other ancestry than that of Aaron and the Tribe of Levi.

☛ **Argument #6**— Jesus could not be a priest for His human ancestry was of the Tribe of Judah. This would violate God’s plan for the priesthood as established in Leviticus by Moses’ writing.

An answer was required which would satisfy these people before they could accept the end of the Aaronic priesthood. That answer begins in Hebrews 5 and reaches its culmination in Chapter 7.

First of all, note

*And no man takes this honor to himself, **but he who is called by God**, just as Aaron was. So also Messiah did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him, “You are My Son, Today I have begotten you.” As He also says in another place, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”*

Hebrews 5:4-6

Here was Jesus’ authority to become the fulfilment of the picture of the High Priest of Israel. In order to understand this authority we must understand two important aspects of this argument. First is the word “*begotten*” and the second is “*Melchizedek*.” When was Jesus Christ begotten?

BEGOTTEN

The author quotes from Psalm 2, a Messianic Psalm.

Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me “You are My Son, today I have begotten you. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance and the ends of the earth for Your possession.”

Psalm 2:6-8

Upon first reading, this would sound like He is speaking of a birth of a son, who when born inherits all that the Father planned for Him. Many false cults have jumped upon this word “begotten [dl y yalad]” and use it to show that Christ came into being at His birth or as the first of creation.

While it is true the Hebrew word yalad [dl y] “In its narrowest sense . . . describes the act of woman giving birth to a child, it sometimes is used of the father’s part in becoming a parent.”³⁹ Further, it is often used in a figurative sense, thus, a city or a nation can give birth to its inhabitants [Isaiah 23:4; 51:18; Ezekiel 16:20]. God speaks of giving birth to Israel in Deuteronomy 32:18.⁴⁰

DEFINITION

The prime definition of this word is that of a new life or **new relationship**.

The ancient rabbis adapted the term to describe the relationship of a teacher to his student, that is, the idea of them having the same relationship as father to his son, with no connotation of literal begetting.⁴¹

QUESTION?

What did God “begat” in Psalm 2 and 110? _____

What did God “begat” in Proverbs 8:25? _____

Many ancient concepts equate new belief, for instance, conversion to Judaism, as a begetting.

Perhaps the best explanation of both references in Hebrews 5 and Psalm 2, is that by looking at Acts 13:33, where the Old Testament passage is quoted.

God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: “You are My Son today I have begotten You.”

³⁹ TWOT 867.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ TNDT, 114.

And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus, "I will give you the sure mercies of David."

Acts 13:33,34

QUESTION?

What is the context of Acts 13:28-39?

MELCHIZEDEK

• **Argument #7**— But what about being of the house of Judah instead of Levi?

The answer lies in a mysterious personage of the Old Testament, Melchizedek. We begin by considering the fact that the Old Testament references to Melchizedek consist of three short verses [18-20] in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110:4. This is very little material for us.

Interestingly, here in Hebrews, three chapters centre upon this man. In them, God demonstrates His inspiration of the Scriptures, for the human writer could not possibly know these facts about Melchizedek.

In Genesis 14:18-20 we learn the following brief facts:

- Melchizedek is _____ of Salem
- He brought bread and wine
- He is a _____ of God Most High

Salem is of course, Jerusalem, and Melchizedek is the earthly ruler of this city.⁴²

Following Abraham's great victory and rescue of Lot, Melchizedek journeys to meet Abraham. As a priest representing the Most High God, he blesses Abraham. In his declaration he credits the victory to God rather than men. Abraham, in recognition of

⁴² One of the Amarna tablets is from Ebed-Tob, king of Jerusalem, the successor of Melchizedek, in which he claims the very attributes and dignity given to Melchizedek in the Epistle to the Hebrews. [Online Bible – Easton's Bible Dictionary, "Melchizedek."]

this, offers tithes to Melchizedek, who receives them in his role as priest of the Most High God.

The Greek word for “tithe” means the “top of the stack,” i.e., the choicest spoils.⁴³ In doing this Abraham recognizes Melchizedek’s authority over him and we cannot escape a certain foreshadowing of the Lord’s institution of the bread and cup, in Melchizedek’s gift of wine and bread to Abraham. While we can extensively debate the symbolism, without resolution, we have here certainly a prefigurement of the future.

We now turn to Hebrews for more information. The first thing we note is that God makes the linkage between Messiah and Melchizedek,

So also Messiah . . . but it was He who said to Him, You are My Son, today I have begotten You.” As He also says in another place: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”*

Hebrews 5:5-6

Remember, Melchizedek existed before Aaron’s birth and before the Aaronic priesthood was instituted. Here was a God-instituted order of priests, of which Melchizedek was one. Clearly, we are now entering the real “meat” of the Word of God, [Hebrews 5:12-14]. First, we learn more of Melchizedek’s background.

- He is without father
- without mother
- without genealogy
- having neither beginning of days
- nor end of life
- made like the Son of God
- remains a priest continually

Hebrews 7:3

Many would say that Melchizedek was a theophany, a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord. However, notice carefully that Melchizedek was “. . . *made like the Son of God* . . .” [Hebrews 7:3].

The word “*made like*” is *aphomoioo* [afomoioiw] in the Greek and means, “to make a facsimile.” Melchizedek was a real person, with a unique identity. God allowed the

⁴³ Thomas Rogers, *Hebrews* [Impact Press: Newburgh, Indiana, 1990]. Tape 8, page 2.

knowledge of his personal history to be such, that under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we are told that he had no genealogy of record. This does not mean he was created without parents. Rather, God is negating the importance of his genealogy.

Remember the most important thing to a Jewish person of the day was the genealogical proof of the priesthood. Without such proof, a man could not be a priest. When the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, all records were destroyed, thus, no man today can prove he is a descendent of Aaron and thus, a priest. With God allowing the destruction of all records, He effectively ended anyone from being a legally appointed priest, and as such they “have no genealogy” either.

We all have seen a fax. I get them often from the United States. I can always make out the necessary information, but it is far from a clear, exact copy of the original. It is and always will be an imperfect copy of the original. The facts understood from the first 10 verses of Hebrews 7 give us two important points.

1. Melchizedek was King of Salem and Priest of the Most High God and was a priest forever.
2. He is greater than Abraham, and thus, greater than Aaron and the Aaronic Priesthood.

In the next 14 verses, the author will compare the fax to the original and demonstrate beyond any argument that Jesus of Nazareth is superior to all created beings and thus, fulfils the office of priest, completing the tri-office of prophet, priest, and king. Let us look at this comparison and thereby understand the argument.

Aaronic Priesthood	Hebrews 7	Melchisedecan Priesthood
<p>Provisional “priesthood being changed . . .” v. 12</p>	<p>verses 11-14</p>	<p>Permanent another priest after the order of Melchizedek – v. 3</p>
<p>Official and Hereditary “according to the law of a fleshly commandment [legal requirement].” v. 16</p>	<p>verses 15-19</p>	<p>Personal and Eternal by the “power of an endless life” v. 16</p>
<p>Without an Oath “for they have become priests without an oath;” v. 20</p>	<p>verses 20-22</p>	<p>With an Oath “He with an oath by Him who said to Him, The Lord has sworn . . . you are a priest forever” v. 21</p>
<p>Plural and Successional “also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing.” v. 23</p>	<p>verses 23-25</p>	<p>Singular and Enduring “But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.” v. 24</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">The Superior High Priest verses 26-28</p> <p>For such a High Priest . . .</p> <p style="text-align: center;">_____</p> <p style="text-align: center;">harmless</p> <p style="text-align: center;">_____</p> <p style="text-align: center;">separate from sinners higher than the heavens;</p> <p style="text-align: center;">_____</p> <p style="text-align: center;">offered up Himself Son Who has been perfected forever.</p>		



Homework Questions

Briefly write a paragraph on each of the following based upon your text reading, the Bible, and Lesson 7. Note: some of the questions are to prepare you for the next lesson by preparing you to think about the subjects. Your answer to these is based upon your discussion rather than a right or wrong answer.

LEVEL 2 & 3 – HC-104/204 COURSE*

1. List the Old Testament pictures or beings that God used as “signposts” or road signs pointing to Jesus Christ. [15 points]
2. List at least 3 common characteristics of physical deliverance, along with their spiritual counterpart. [15 points]
3. Discuss the foundation and futility of the priesthood. [25 points]
4. Explain the Biblical meaning of “Begotten.” [20 points]
5. Discuss Melchizedek – his ancestry, his role, his background, and why or why not was he a theophany. [25 points]

LEVEL 3 ONLY

There is no additional assignment for Level 3 with this lesson

LEVEL 2 AND 3

On your answer sheet indicate the

_____ % of the reading assignment completed:

_____ % of the Bible reading completed.

You may submit your homework answers either by mail or email. Email submissions may be sent either as an attachment or within the email. If sent as an attachment, they must be in Word, Word Perfect, or text format. If in doubt as to format contact us for further information. Send your homework answers to:

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