

The Book of Hebrews, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 7: Melchizedek and a Better Priesthood

Hebrews 7:1–28

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This chapter is the doctrinal hinge of the letter, and the teacher should grasp its central argument before teaching it. Using the mysterious figure of Melchizedek from Genesis 14 and the divine oath of Psalm 110, the writer proves that God always intended a priesthood greater than the Levitical one. The logic runs in clear steps: Melchizedek was greater than Abraham and Levi; God promised a priest after the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron; a change of priesthood necessarily means a change of the law that established it; and therefore the entire old priestly system, with its sacrifices and regulations, has been fulfilled and set aside in Christ. This is the heart of the matter for a study in a heritage that holds the Old Law fulfilled in Christ and Christians now under the new covenant. The old system was good, God-given, and purposeful, but it was temporary and could not make anyone perfect.

The contrast between the old priests and Christ is sharp and should be drawn clearly. The Levitical priests were many, because death kept removing them; Christ holds His priesthood permanently because He lives forever. They offered sacrifices repeatedly; He offered Himself once for all. They were sinful men who first had to offer for their own sins; He is holy, innocent, and unstained. Their work could never finally cleanse; His saves to the uttermost. The point against any notion of an ongoing earthly sacrificing priesthood is decisive: Christ's priesthood is unique, permanent, and sufficient, and it has no successors and needs no repetition.

Yet the chapter is not merely an argument; it ends in glorious comfort. Because Christ always lives, He always intercedes for those who draw near to God through Him. So aim to teach both the doctrine and the comfort. Help students see that the old shadow has given way to the substance, that they now draw near to God through Christ alone, and that their ever-living high priest is praying for them at this very moment. The result should be both clarity about the finished old system and confidence to draw near to the living Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

In verses 1 through 10 the writer shows that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham and Levi, since Abraham paid him a tithe and received his blessing. What does this argument establish about the priesthood of Melchizedek compared to the Levitical priesthood?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Walk the class through the writer's careful reasoning. In Genesis 14, Abraham, the father of the nation and of Levi, paid a tithe to Melchizedek and received his blessing. The writer observes a principle: the lesser is blessed by the greater, and the one who receives the tithe is greater than the one who pays it. Therefore Melchizedek was greater than Abraham.

Follow the argument to Levi. Since Levi, and the whole Levitical priesthood descended from him, was still in the body of his ancestor Abraham, Levi himself, in a sense, paid the tithe to Melchizedek. The priesthood that would later collect tithes from Israel here acknowledged a greater priesthood. The Levitical order is thus shown to be inferior to the order of Melchizedek.

State the conclusion plainly. By this argument the writer establishes that the Melchizedek priesthood, which Christ holds, is greater than the Levitical one. This is the foundation for everything that follows. If Christ's priesthood is of a higher order, then it is not subordinate to the old system but superior to it, and the old must give way to the greater.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The principle that the greater blesses the lesser and receives the tithe.
- Melchizedek shown to be greater than Abraham and the Levitical line.
- The superiority of Christ's priesthood over the Levitical order.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek establish Melchizedek's greatness?
- In what sense did Levi pay tithes through Abraham?
- Why does the superiority of Melchizedek matter for understanding Christ?

Question 2

Student Question:

The writer treats a brief, half-forgotten passage in Genesis as rich with meaning about Christ. What does this teach you about the way you read your Bible, and is there a part of Scripture you have dismissed as unimportant that God may want to open up to you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this question to deepen the class's appreciation for Scripture. The writer of Hebrews builds a major argument on three verses in Genesis that most readers would pass over. He saw Christ foreshadowed where others saw only an obscure ancient king. This models a way of reading that expects all of Scripture to point to Christ.

Encourage students to reconsider parts of the Bible they have written off as dull or irrelevant, the genealogies, the ceremonial laws, the minor characters, the difficult prophecies. The same God who hid a portrait of Christ in Melchizedek has woven meaning throughout His word.

Apply this practically. Invite students to approach their Bible reading with humility and expectation, trusting that even the passages they find tedious may open up under patient attention. Ask if there is a section of Scripture they would be willing to revisit with fresh eyes this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The unity of Scripture in pointing to Christ.
- Reading the whole Bible with expectation and humility.

- Reconsidering passages we have dismissed as unimportant.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it teach you that the writer found Christ in three obscure verses?
- Which parts of Scripture have you tended to skip or dismiss?
- How might you approach those passages with fresh expectation?

Question 3

Student Question:

Verses 11 and 12 argue that if perfection could have come through the Levitical priesthood, there would have been no need for another priest, and that a change of priesthood requires a change of the law. What does this teach about why the old priestly system, and the law bound to it, had to be replaced?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Clarify the writer's key premise. The very fact that God promised another priest, after the order of Melchizedek, proves that the Levitical priesthood could not bring perfection. If it could have, no new priest would have been needed. The promise of Psalm 110 itself testifies to the insufficiency of the old order.

Explain the link between priesthood and law in verse 12. The priesthood and the law of Moses were bound together; the whole system of sacrifice, temple, and regulation depended on the Levitical priesthood. So when God changes the priesthood, the law connected to it must change as well. You cannot replace the priest and leave the old system standing.

Draw the conclusion for the larger argument. This is the writer's way of saying that the old covenant law, as a system, has been replaced in Christ. The change is not a minor reform but a fundamental transition from one priesthood and covenant to another. The old was provisional from the start, designed to give way to the better priest God always intended.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The promise of another priest as proof of the old system's insufficiency.
- The inseparable link between the priesthood and the law.
- The replacement of the old covenant system in Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the promise of a new priest prove the old one was insufficient?
- Why must a change of priesthood bring a change of the law?
- What does this teach about the old covenant as a whole?

Question 4

Student Question:

The old system, with all its rituals and requirements, could not make anyone perfect. Where in your spiritual life are you still trying to reach God through rule-keeping or religious performance rather than through Christ, and what would it look like to rest in Him instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question applies the limits of the old law to the heart's tendency toward performance religion. The Levitical system, for all its detail, could never make the worshiper perfect or truly cleanse the conscience. Many believers unconsciously recreate that system, trying to earn God's acceptance through their own religious effort.

Help students recognize the symptoms: measuring their standing with God by how well they performed, feeling secure only when they have done enough, treating spiritual disciplines as a way to earn favor rather than to enjoy fellowship. This is to seek through performance what only Christ can give.

Point to the better way. We draw near to God not through our rule-keeping but through Christ our priest. Resting in Him does not abolish obedience, but it changes its motive from earning to loving response. Encourage students to identify one area where they will trade performance for trust this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The inability of religious performance to make us perfect.
- The tendency to recreate a system of earning God's favor.
- Resting in Christ rather than self-justifying effort.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you trying to reach God through performance rather than Christ?
- How does that differ from drawing near through Christ alone?
- What would resting in Him look like in that area this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Verses 18 and 19 say the former commandment was set aside because of its weakness and uselessness, for the law made nothing perfect, but a better hope is introduced through which we draw near to God. What does this teach about the purpose and the limits of the old law, and the better hope that replaces it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Handle the strong language carefully. The writer says the former commandment was set aside because of its weakness and uselessness. This is not a criticism of God's wisdom in giving the law, but a statement of what the law was never designed to do. It could expose sin and point forward, but it could not make anyone perfect or bring them all the way to God.

Define the purpose and the limit together. The old law had a real and good purpose for its time, regulating worship, marking out God's people, and teaching the seriousness of sin. But it had a built-in limit: it made nothing perfect. It was a shadow, not the substance, a tutor pointing to the Christ who would come.

Lift up the better hope. In place of the weak and provisional law, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. That better hope is Christ Himself and the new covenant in His blood. Where the law kept worshipers at a distance, the better hope brings us near. This is the great gain of the new covenant, real access to God through Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The good but limited purpose of the old law.
- The law's inability to make anyone perfect.
- The better hope in Christ that brings us near to God.

Discussion Prompts

- What was the old law able to do, and what could it never do?
- Why does the writer call the former commandment weak and useless?
- How does the better hope bring us near in a way the law could not?

Question 6

Student Question:

This passage says the better hope lets us draw near to God in a way the old law never could. What is one specific barrier that has kept you at a distance from God, and how does the better hope in Christ invite you to come close?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the gift of access into personal experience. The whole movement of the chapter is from distance to nearness. Under the old system, ordinary worshipers could not enter God's presence; through Christ, we draw near. Yet many believers still live at a felt distance from God.

Help students name the specific barrier. For some it is guilt over past sin; for some it is shame or a sense of unworthiness; for some it is a season of spiritual coldness or unanswered prayer that has made God feel far away. Naming the barrier honestly is the first step toward coming close.

Apply the better hope directly. The hope introduced in Christ is precisely designed to remove these barriers and bring us near. Our priest has opened the way; we no longer stand at a distance. Encourage students to bring their specific barrier to Christ and to take one step toward drawing near this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The movement from distance to nearness in the new covenant.
- The specific barriers that keep believers feeling far from God.

- Drawing near through Christ as the answer to those barriers.

Discussion Prompts

- What barrier has most kept you at a distance from God?
- How does the better hope in Christ address that barrier?
- What is one step toward drawing near you can take this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Verses 20 through 25 emphasize that Jesus, unlike the many Levitical priests who died, holds His priesthood permanently because He continues forever, and therefore can save to the uttermost. What does the permanence of Christ's priesthood teach about the completeness of the salvation He offers?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Highlight the contrast of permanence. The Levitical priests were many in number because death prevented them from continuing in office. Each one served and died, and the work passed to a successor. There was never a final, permanent priest. Christ, by contrast, holds His priesthood permanently because He lives forever.

Connect permanence to completeness. Because Christ never dies and never leaves His office, His saving work is never interrupted or handed off. The writer draws the conclusion in verse 25: He is able to save to the uttermost, completely and forever, those who draw near to God through Him. There is no gap in His care, no end to His ministry.

Add the ground of certainty in the oath. God swore with an oath, citing Psalm 110, that Christ is a priest forever, and the Lord will not change His mind. The permanence of Christ's priesthood rests on God's unchangeable word. This makes the salvation He offers as secure as the eternal life of the priest who provides it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The permanence of Christ's priesthood versus the dying Levitical priests.
- Salvation to the uttermost, complete and uninterrupted.
- God's oath as the unchangeable ground of Christ's eternal priesthood.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the permanence of Christ's priesthood differ from the old priests?
- What does it mean that He can save to the uttermost?
- How does God's oath strengthen your confidence in Christ's priesthood?

Question 8

Student Question:

Verse 25 says Jesus always lives to make intercession for those who draw near to God through Him. How does the truth that Christ is praying for you right now speak to a specific area where you feel weak, tempted, or alone?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Dwell on the stunning present-tense reality. At this very moment, the risen Christ is interceding for His people. He does not merely remember us or wish us well; He actively, continually prays for us before the Father. This is not a past act but a present, ongoing ministry.

Help students apply this to their felt experience. Many believers feel weak, tempted, or alone, as though they are facing their struggles by themselves. The truth of Christ's intercession answers that loneliness directly. We are never praying alone, because our high priest is always praying for us.

Encourage specific application. Ask students to bring to mind one area of weakness, temptation, or isolation, and to consider what it means that Christ is interceding for them in that very place. This is a source of profound comfort and courage. The One who always lives is, right now, praying them through.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The present, ongoing intercession of Christ for His people.
- Comfort for the weak, tempted, and lonely believer.
- The active ministry of Christ on our behalf at every moment.

Discussion Prompts

- How does it change your day to know Christ is interceding for you right now?
- In what specific area do you most need His intercession?
- How does His prayer for you answer your sense of being alone?

Question 9

Student Question:

Verses 11 through 28 build the central argument that the entire Levitical priesthood and its law were temporary and have now been fulfilled and set aside in Christ, our perfect and permanent high priest who offered Himself once for all. Some have looked for an ongoing earthly priesthood that keeps offering sacrifices. Using this passage, how would you show that the old priestly system is finished, and that Christ alone is now our priest, having made one final sacrifice?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, so develop the argument fully and clearly. Begin by gathering the writer's chain of reasoning. God promised a priest after the order of Melchizedek, which proved the Levitical priesthood insufficient. A change of priesthood requires a change of the law, so the old legal system was set aside. The former commandment was abolished because of its weakness, and a better hope was introduced. Step by step, the writer shows that the old priestly system was always temporary and has now reached its end in Christ.

Emphasize the uniqueness and finality of Christ's priesthood. Unlike the many priests who served and died, Christ holds His priesthood permanently because He lives forever. Unlike the priests who first had to offer sacrifices for their own sins, He is holy, innocent, unstained, and separated from sinners. And here is the decisive point in verse 27: He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, because He did this once for all when He offered up Himself. The repetition of the old sacrifices has been replaced by one final, sufficient sacrifice.

Now address the idea of an ongoing earthly sacrificing priesthood. This passage closes the door on it. If Christ offered Himself once for all, then no further sacrifice for sins remains to be offered, and no earthly priest is needed to keep offering one. The very logic of Hebrews is that the many, repeated sacrifices of the old order proved their own insufficiency, while the one sacrifice of Christ proves its complete sufficiency by never needing to be repeated. To set up a continuing priesthood that offers sacrifices again is to return to the shadow after the substance has come, and to imply that Christ's one offering was not enough.

Show how Scripture reinforces this elsewhere. Paul writes that the legal demands against us were nailed to the cross and set aside, and that the old ceremonies were a shadow, while the substance belongs to Christ. There is now one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. The New Testament knows only one priest who offers sacrifice for sin under the new covenant, and that is Christ Himself, who has finished the work.

Close with the positive truth and its comfort. We do not need an earthly priesthood endlessly repeating sacrifices, because we have a perfect, permanent, ever-living high priest who has made one perfect sacrifice and now intercedes for us. This is not a loss but an immense gain. The old system, with all its priests and offerings, was always pointing to Him. Now that He has come and finished the work, we draw near to God directly through Him, resting in a sacrifice that never needs to be offered again.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Levitical priesthood and its law shown to be temporary and now set aside.
- Christ's priesthood as unique, permanent, and without successors.
- The once-for-all sacrifice of Christ that needs no repetition.
- A clear answer to the idea of an ongoing earthly sacrificing priesthood.
- Christ as the one mediator under the new covenant, the substance the old shadow foretold.
- The completeness of Christ's finished work as the ground of drawing near to God.

Discussion Prompts

- What steps in the writer's argument show the old priesthood is finished?
- Why does Christ's once-for-all sacrifice rule out an ongoing sacrificing priesthood?
- How is the end of the old system a gain rather than a loss for us?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter. The writer wants you to see that Jesus is a greater, permanent, ever-living high priest who has replaced the old system entirely. Name one specific

way this truth gives you confidence to draw near to God this week, and how it changes the way you live before Him.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the doctrine of the chapter into personal confidence. The whole argument moves toward one practical end: because we have such a high priest, we draw near to God through Him with assurance. Resist letting the answers remain abstract.

Help students translate the doctrine into confidence. Perhaps it means coming to God boldly despite past failure, trusting in Christ's finished work rather than their own performance, or resting in the knowledge that He always lives to intercede for them. The greatness of the priest is meant to produce the boldness of the worshiper.

Close by returning to the chapter's vision of Christ: holy, innocent, exalted, ever-living, always interceding. Send students home confident to draw near to God through such a priest, and changed in how they live before the One who is, at this very moment, praying for them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Confidence to draw near to God through our great high priest.
- Resting in Christ's finished work rather than personal performance.
- Living daily in light of Christ's permanent intercession.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the greatness of Christ's priesthood give you confidence this week?
- What changes when you live before a priest who always intercedes for you?
- Where do you most need to draw near to God through Christ right now?