



**HEBREWS: Week 3**

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## **HEBREWS**

### **WEEK 3: Our Better High Priest**

**BOTTOM LINE:** Jesus was the sacrifice to end all sacrifices.

### **SUMMARY OF WEEKS 1 AND 2**

So far, in this series, we've read and discussed the lessons in Hebrews 1-6.

We've learned that Jesus IS God, and that means that He has authority over all things.

We've also learned that Jesus' supremacy gives us hope.

He wasn't just any sacrifice.

Instead, He was the perfect lamb—the only one capable of covering ALL sin (past, present, and future).

Because Jesus paid for our sins, we can enter God's rest.

But what is our ticket in?

It isn't works, appearances, or behaviors that get us into His rest.

It's faith.

It's almost too simple to comprehend, but scripture tells us again and again that only faith will make us righteous.

And that righteousness does not come from what we do, but from Who God is.

We get Jesus' righteousness when we become Christians.

And this is our ticket into His rest and out of death.

### **LESSON**

#### **Read Hebrews 7.**

*1 This Melchizedek was king of the city of Salem and also a priest of God Most High. When Abraham was returning home after winning a great battle against the kings, Melchizedek met him and blessed him. 2 Then Abraham took a tenth of all he had captured in battle and gave it to Melchizedek. The name Melchizedek means "king of justice," and king of Salem means "king of peace." 3 There is no record of his father or mother or any of his ancestors—no beginning or end to his life. He remains a priest forever, resembling the Son of God.*

**4** Consider then how great this Melchizedek was. Even Abraham, the great patriarch of Israel, recognized this by giving him a tenth of what he had taken in battle. **5** Now the law of Moses required that the priests, who are descendants of Levi, must collect a tithe from the rest of the people of Israel, who are also descendants of Abraham. **6** But Melchizedek, who was not a descendant of Levi, collected a tenth from Abraham. And Melchizedek placed a blessing upon Abraham, the one who had already received the promises of God. **7** And without question, the person who has the power to give a blessing is greater than the one who is blessed.

**8** The priests who collect tithes are men who die, so Melchizedek is greater than they are, because we are told that he lives on. **9** In addition, we might even say that these Levites—the ones who collect the tithe—paid a tithe to Melchizedek when their ancestor Abraham paid a tithe to him. **10** For although Levi wasn't born yet, the seed from which he came was in Abraham's body when Melchizedek collected the tithe from him.

**11** So if the priesthood of Levi, on which the law was based, could have achieved the perfection God intended, why did God need to establish a different priesthood, with a priest in the order of Melchizedek instead of the order of Levi and Aaron?

**12** And if the priesthood is changed, the law must also be changed to permit it. **13** For the priest we are talking about belongs to a different tribe, whose members have never served at the altar as priests. **14** What I mean is, our Lord came from the tribe of Judah, and Moses never mentioned priests coming from that tribe.

**15** This change has been made very clear since a different priest, who is like Melchizedek, has appeared. **16** Jesus became a priest, not by meeting the physical requirement of belonging to the tribe of Levi, but by the power of a life that cannot be destroyed. **17** And the psalmist pointed this out when he prophesied,

*"You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek."*

**18** Yes, the old requirement about the priesthood was set aside because it was weak and useless. **19** For the law never made anything perfect. But now we have confidence in a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

**20** This new system was established with a solemn oath. Aaron's descendants became priests without such an oath, **21** but there was an oath regarding Jesus. For God said to him,

*"The Lord has taken an oath and will not break his vow: 'You are a priest forever.'"*

**22** *Because of this oath, Jesus is the one who guarantees this better covenant with God.*

**23** *There were many priests under the old system, for death prevented them from remaining in office. 24 But because Jesus lives forever, his priesthood lasts forever. 25 Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.*

**26** *He is the kind of high priest we need because he is holy and blameless, unstained by sin. He has been set apart from sinners and has been given the highest place of honor in heaven. 27 Unlike those other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices every day. They did this for their own sins first and then for the sins of the people. But Jesus did this once for all when he offered himself as the sacrifice for the people's sins. 28 The law appointed high priests who were limited by human weakness. But after the law was given, God appointed his Son with an oath, and his Son has been made the perfect High Priest forever.*

Back in Hebrews 2, we heard Jesus referred to as “Our High Priest.”

The job of a high priest was to atone for the sins on behalf of himself and the people by making sacrifices.

This job was given to those in the line of Levi.

Therefore, high priests were referred to as Levitical priests.

Since Jesus did not come from the Tribe of Levi, Israelites would have struggled with the idea that Jesus is the better High Priest.

That’s why the author of Hebrews refers to Melchizedek in these scriptures—to clarify that Jesus, like Melchizedek, is a different kind of High Priest and that there is scriptural precedent for this exception to the rule.

This would have been a comfort to Jews who wanted to follow Jesus but were concerned that His priest status went against the rules about priests in the Old Testament.

Melchizedek was a unique priest.

He is described as having no mother or father and having no beginning or end.

You might be thinking, *Wait a minute... that sounds like God.*

And about this point, there is much debate.

Many scholars believe that these scriptures mean that Melchizedek is a heavenly being of some sort—maybe even a pre-incarnation of Christ (which means that

he could have been Christ on Earth long BEFORE Christ came to Earth to save us).

Other scholars believe that these statements should not be taken literally—that his lack of a father or mother simply means that his genealogy wasn't recorded.

And that the reference to his life having had "no beginning" and "no end" simply means that his birth and death aren't recorded in scripture.

Either way, Melchizedek is discussed in this passage to show that, even in the Old Testament, there was a priesthood that was different—better—than the Levitical priesthood.

Jews would have been able to think back to their understanding of who Melchizedek is and see that Jesus could certainly be a high priest even though He didn't come from the tribe of Levi.

Of course, today, we know the entirety of scripture, and we know that Jesus made the sacrifice for ALL.

We get that He is God, and that only God could have covered every sin with a perfect sacrifice.

But the Jews of the time would have struggled with this concept, and the author of Hebrews teaches his audience about Melchizedek to bring them closer to an understanding of the Gospel.

Remember that everything they knew and every tradition they had seemed to be changing.

It would have been extremely difficult for Jewish converts to Christianity to accept these monumental changes without questions and concerns.

Through these scriptures, we learn that God appointed Jesus to be our perfect High Priest forever (verse 28).

### **Discussion questions:**

1. Have you ever had questions or concerns about your faith?  
How did you find the answers you needed?
2. What hope is there in knowing that Jesus is your high priest forever?
3. What words or concepts in this chapter bring your comfort, hope, and peace?

### **Read Hebrews 8.**

**1** Here is the main point: We have a High Priest who sat down in the place of honor beside the throne of the majestic God in heaven. **2** There he ministers in the heavenly Tabernacle, the true place of worship that was built by the Lord and not by human hands.

**3** And since every high priest is required to offer gifts and sacrifices, our High Priest must make an offering, too. **4** If he were here on Earth, he would not even be a priest, since there already are priests who offer the gifts required by the law. **5** They serve in a system of worship that is only a copy, a shadow of the real one in heaven. For when Moses was getting ready to build the Tabernacle, God gave him this warning: "Be sure that you make everything according to the pattern I have shown you here on the mountain."

**6** But now Jesus, our High Priest, has been given a ministry that is far superior to the old priesthood, for he is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises.

**7** If the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need for a second covenant to replace it. **8** But when God found fault with the people, he said:

*"The day is coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah.*

**9** This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt. They did not remain faithful to my covenant, so I turned my back on them, says the Lord.

**10** But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. **11** And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, 'You should know the Lord.' For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already. **12** And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins."

**13** When God speaks of a "new" covenant, it means he has made the first one obsolete. It is now out of date and will soon disappear.

Hebrews 8 emphasizes the point once again: Jesus is OUR High Priest, and the forgiveness of sins is all-encompassing, meaning that ALL our sin is forgiven in His sacrifice.

The work is finished, and this is evident in the first verse.

Take another look at it.

Where is Jesus, our High Priest, now?

He is seated at the right hand of God the Father.

This is significant because it implies that Jesus has *already* completed His work and is seated in rest.

High priests would never sit.

They would have had to continue to stain the altar with blood, day in and day out because this method was just not good enough to cover all sin.

Just when they thought they had caught up and covered it all, sin abounded even more.

What an exhausting job—to be constantly “behind the eight ball” when it comes to atoning for sin.

Luckily, we don’t have to worry about it anymore.

If we are in Christ, we are covered by His blood, which makes us righteous in the sight of God.

We can rest in this salvation, for it is the gift of God for those who believe.

### **Discussion questions:**

1. As a believer in God who lives AFTER the cross and resurrection of Jesus, what freedoms can you enjoy compared to those who lived before?

2. Is it hard to believe that God sent His Son to atone for your sin?

What is your response to this truth?

3. What promises can you lean on as a Christian living in the New Covenant?

### **Read Hebrews 9.**

*1 That first covenant between God and Israel had regulations for worship and a place of worship here on Earth. 2 There were two rooms in that Tabernacle. In the first room were a lampstand, a table, and sacred loaves of bread on the table. This room was called the Holy Place. 3 Then there was a curtain, and behind the curtain was the second room called the Most Holy Place. 4 In that room were a gold incense altar and a wooden chest called the Ark of the Covenant, which was covered with gold on all sides. Inside the Ark were a gold jar containing manna, Aaron’s staff that sprouted leaves, and the stone tablets of the covenant. 5 Above the Ark were the cherubim of divine glory, whose wings stretched out over the Ark’s cover, the place of atonement. But we cannot explain these things in detail now.*

**6** When these things were all in place, the priests regularly entered the first room as they performed their religious duties. **7** But only the high priest ever entered the Most Holy Place, and only once a year. And he always offered blood for his own sins and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. **8** By these regulations the Holy Spirit revealed that the entrance to the Most Holy Place was not freely open as long as the Tabernacle and the system it represented were still in use.

**9** This is an illustration pointing to the present time. For the gifts and sacrifices that the priests offer are not able to cleanse the consciences of the people who bring them. **10** For that old system deals only with food and drink and various cleansing ceremonies —physical regulations that were in effect only until a better system could be established.

**11** So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. **12** With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.

**13** Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer could cleanse people’s bodies from ceremonial impurity. **14** Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. **15** That is why he is the one who mediates a new covenant between God and people, so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under that first covenant.

**16** Now when someone leaves a will, it is necessary to prove that the person who made it is dead. **17** The will goes into effect only after the person’s death. While the person who made it is still alive, the will cannot be put into effect.

**18** That is why even the first covenant was put into effect with the blood of an animal. **19** For after Moses had read each of God’s commandments to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, along with water, and sprinkled both the book of God’s law and all the people, using hyssop branches and scarlet wool. **20** Then he said, “This blood confirms the covenant God has made with you.” **21** And in the same way, he sprinkled blood on the Tabernacle and on everything used for worship. **22** In fact, according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.

**23** That is why the Tabernacle and everything in it, which were copies of things in heaven, had to be purified by the blood of animals. But the real things in heaven had to be purified with far better sacrifices than the blood of animals.

**24** For Christ did not enter into a holy place made with human hands, which was only a copy of the true one in heaven. He entered into heaven itself to appear now before God on our behalf. **25** And he did not enter heaven to offer himself again and again, like the high priest here on Earth who enters the Most Holy Place year after year with the blood of an animal. **26** If that had been necessary, Christ would have had to die again and again, ever since the world began. But now, once for all time, he has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice.

**27** And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, **28** so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him.

The wages of sin is death.

This means that something or someone *must die* in order to pay for sin.

We all sin.

We are all born into it.

And we all need Jesus to save us out of this terrible consequence.

In the Old Testament, we see the Israelites trying desperately to pay the wages of sin with the death of animals.

As we discussed earlier, this just didn't cut it.

Christ's sacrifice of Himself is different from the sacrifice of animals.

The blood of a perfect sacrifice, God's Son, is a once-and-for-all payment.

This is a hard concept to grasp because we are constantly trying to work off our sins.

We feel that if we could just be better, be good enough, sinless, and do more good works; then surely, we'd be better people, good people, people worth saving.

This is the opposite of the Gospel, and these ideas—although well-intentioned—put us into chains.

The difference between Old Testament and New Testament atonement is this: there's nothing that you can do to atone for your sins.

All you need to do is put your faith in the One who atoned for ALL your sins ONCE-AND-FOR-ALL.

That's the Gospel message, and it's the greatest gift we could ever receive.

**Discussion questions:**

1. In what ways do you try to "work off" your sin?
2. Why is it hard to rest in Christ's atoning work on the cross?
3. Does your understanding of Christ as your High Priest help you trust in him?

Why or why not?