

School of the Word
Hebrews
Kieran J. O'Mahony
www.tarsus.ie
kamahony1@me.com.

HEBREWS 7:11-28

Sequence

- Hebrews 7:11-28
- Reading and reactions
- The place in the letter
- Assumptions
- Commentary
- Conversation

Reading and reactions

Heb 7:11 So if perfection had in fact been possible through the Levitical priesthood—for on that basis the people received the law—what further need would there have been for another priest to arise, said to be in the order of Melchizedek and not in Aaron's order? **12** For when the priesthood changes, a change in the law must come as well. **13** Yet the one these things are spoken about belongs to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever officiated at the altar. **14** For it is clear that our Lord is descended from Judah, yet Moses said nothing about priests in connection with that tribe.

15 And this is even clearer if another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, **16** who has become a priest not by a legal regulation about physical descent but by the power of an indestructible life. **17** For here is the testimony about him: "***You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.***" **18** On the one hand a former command is set aside because it is weak and useless, **19** for the law made nothing perfect. On the other hand a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

20 And since this was not done without a sworn affirmation—for the others have become priests without a sworn affirmation, **21** but Jesus did so with a sworn affirmation by the one who said to him, "***The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever'***"— **22** accordingly Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

23 And the others who became priests were numerous, because death prevented them from continuing in office, **24** but he holds his priesthood permanently since he lives forever. **25** So he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

26 For it is indeed fitting for us to have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, separate from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. **27** He has no need to do every day what those priests do, to offer sacrifices first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people, since he did this in offering himself once for all.

28 For the law appoints as high priests men subject to weakness, but the word of solemn affirmation that came after the law appoints a son made perfect forever.

Place in the letter

- The priesthood of Melchizedek as the anchor of the soul (7:1–28)
- Melchizedek and Abraham (7:1–10)
- A new order of priesthood (7:11–28)
 - Imperfection of the Aaronic priesthood (11-14)
 - Superiority of the new priesthood (15-19)
 - Superior because of the divine oath (20-22)
 - Superior on account of its permanence (23-25)
 - Superior because of the character of Jesus (26-28)

Assumptions

- And those of the sons of Levi who receive the priestly office have authorisation **according to the law** to collect a tithe from the people, that is, from their fellow countrymen, although they too are descendants of Abraham. (Heb 7:5)
- Priesthood and Law go together
 - Hence a change of priesthood triggers a change of Law
 - Law has chiefly to do with the Temple worship
- Jesus is not from a priestly family (tribe of Judah)
- Psalm 110 is the word of God and *must* mean something
- Psalm 110 is from David, that is, long after the time of Aaron; hence Aaron does not supersede *later* promise of a priesthood like Melchizedek's
- This later promise of another priesthood implies inadequacy

Hebrew 7:11-14 — Imperfection

Heb 7:11 So if perfection had in fact been possible through the Levitical priesthood—for *on that basis* the people received the law—what further need would there have been for another priest to arise, said to be in the order of Melchizedek and not in Aaron's order? 12 For when the priesthood changes, a change in the law must come as well. 13 Yet the one these things are spoken about belongs to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever officiated at the altar. 14 For it is clear that our Lord is descended from Judah, yet Moses said nothing about priests in connection with that tribe.

- Was the OT priesthood adequate?
- Its purpose was "perfection", i.e. to bring people to God
- Perfection: human transformation rather than cultic transaction
- Perfection: maturity and moral growth, leaving sin behind, cleaning the conscience, holiness, faithful obedience
- OT priesthood did not achieve perfection
- There has been a change of priesthood because...
- Jesus is not come from a priestly tribe (hence the change)
- Jesus' descent from David is affirmed in the most ancient tradition
- Descent: anatellō, with messianic associations

Hebrews 7:15-19 — Superiority

Heb 7:15 And this is even clearer if another priest arises in the *likeness* of Melchizedek, 16 who has become a priest not by (*kata*) a legal regulation about physical descent but by the power of an indestructible life. 17 For here is the testimony about him: "You are a priest *forever* in (*kata*) the order of Melchizedek." 18 On the one hand a former command is set aside because it is weak and useless, 19 for the law made nothing perfect. On the other hand a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

- Arises = resurrects
- Physical descent v. indestructible life
- Forever = Melchizedek (the promise) and Jesus (the fulfilment)
- Hence, the Law has been set aside (abolished)
- A better hope: a new way to encountering God intimately
- Hope = Jesus

Hebrew 7:20-22 — The divine oath

Heb 7:20 And since (*kata*) this was not done without a sworn affirmation—for the others have become priests without a sworn affirmation, 21 but Jesus did so with a sworn affirmation by the one who said to him, "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever'"— 22 accordingly (*kata*) Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

- Three affirmations confirm the superiority of the new priesthood
- Firstly, it was done by an oath, like the Levitical priesthood (Ex 28:1)
- God will not change his mind
- Ps 110:1-4 and Genesis 14
- NB: shift to the word "covenant"

- In Greek, the last word in v. 22 is “Jesus”, an emphatic position

Hebrews 7:23-25 — Permanence

Heb 7:23 And the others who became priests were numerous, because death prevented them from continuing in office, 24 but he holds his priesthood permanently since he lives forever. 25 So he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

- The one and the many
- Adequate v. repeated necessity
- *They* died, *Jesus* rose.
- The priesthood of Jesus is permanent *and therefore better*
- Intercede: a legal term with a rich biblical background
- And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit *intercedes* on behalf of the saints according to God’s will. (Rom 8:27)
- Christ is the one who died (and more than that, he was raised), who is at the right hand of God, and who also is *interceding* for us. (Rom 8:34)

Hebrews 7:26-28 — Character of Jesus

Heb 7:26 For it is indeed fitting for us to have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, separate from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. 27 He has no need to do every day what those priests do, to offer sacrifices first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people, since he did this in offering himself once for all.

28 For the law appoints as high priests men subject to weakness, but the word of solemn affirmation that came after the law appoints a son made perfect forever.

- The mediator takes us intimately into the heart of God because of character (v. 26), achievement (v.27) and status (v. 28)
- Holy: attached to God
- Innocent: cf. Jer 11:19
- Undefiled: without sin
- Separate: sinless himself
- Exalted: in resurrection
- Repetition = imperfection
- Daily offering: an error of fact?
- “This”?
- Offering of *himself*
- Again, many v. one
- V. 28: summary and synthesis
- V. 28: Jesus as the Son from earlier in the letter

Conversation