

**Text:** Hebrews 7:11-24

**Title:** Priesthood and Law Had to Change Due to Psalm 110:4

**Date/Location:** March 13, 2011 at FBC

## Introduction

The substance of 7:1-10 boils down to two major assertions: Melchizedek has a continuing priesthood, and he was greater than Abraham and Levi.

Hebrews now asks us to stop and think about the Psalm 110 declaration that God would raise up a priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Why would God do that in light of the fact that He already had some priests and a law established that prescribed their function in Israel?

### I. Huge Implication of the Promised Melchizedek Priesthood, v. 11

If you are thinking that the Levitical priesthood is all that you need, that it is the be-all and end-all of priesthoods, then Hebrews has a question for you. And that question is this: what need would there be for God to speak about some other priesthood if the first one was so good?

The parenthetical statement “under it” should be translated “upon it” or “based on it.” The “it” is the Levitical priesthood. The idea is that the Israelites received the law, which was integrally connected to the Levitical priesthood. The Mosaic Law could not be fulfilled apart from the priesthood.

Perfection means that the Levite priesthood did everything possible to bring people into proper relation to God. After all, the priesthood is all about relating people to God. We are supposing, for the moment, that the Aaronic system did everything that we could need.

Note that in v. 11 the “if” is assumed true for the sake of the argument. Assuming it is true, if there indeed was perfection in the Levitical priesthood, then there would be *no* need for another priest; the Aaronic order would be sufficient in that hypothetical case.

But God doesn't do things uselessly, so there must have been a need for him to call another priest. There was some bona fide reason why He did so.

The question of v. 11 is obviously a rhetorical device. Such a question actually makes an assertion in the mind of the reader. This assertion is that **the Levitical priesthood did *not* bring perfection, thus the need for another priesthood** (see verses 18-19 on this thought as well). Thus the

argument of verse 11 is that something else was needed because of some imperfections in the old system.

## **II. A Second Implication: The Law Had to Change, v. 12**

Now, the second car in this train of thought: given that that the priesthood did not bring perfection and so needed a change, something else had to change too.

That something else that has to change is the law. Remember that verse 11 asserted that law and the priesthood were intimately connected. You could not have the one without the other.

The law code established Levi as recipient of tithes (7:5) and set up the whole system of priesthood and sacrifices. Exodus 27:21, 28:1, chapter 29, Leviticus 16 and many other passages address the role of Aaron and his sons as priests. All of this was foundational for the “religious” duties of any Jew. But that is all going to have to be reworked to fit with God’s oath to establish a new priest in Melchizedek’s order.

If you suddenly eliminated the priests, there would be no way to fulfill the sacrificial and other religious provisions of the Law; if you eliminated the Law, then the priests would have no means of support or worshippers coming to them to offer sacrifices or have their sins atoned.

This change is *of necessity*. There is no way around it—once the priesthood changes, the whole nine yards has to be redone.

The change itself is a “metathesis,” which is a transposition or rearrangement of things. The system had to be so changed that the resulting “compounds” are different than before.

## **III. Reasons for the Change of the Law, v. 13-24**

### **A. The New Priest is from the Tribe of Judah, v. 13-14**

The first thing that makes the needed change obvious (evident) is that the Lord is from the tribe of Judah. This is a problem because he does not descend from Levi. No one from Judah could usurp the priesthood in the Old Testament. If anyone did, he was in big trouble (consider Uzziah, 2 Chron. 26:16-21).

### **B. The New Priest Lives Forever, v. 15-17**

Verse 15 says “it is yet far more evident,” reflecting on the “evident” of verse 14. That there is a need to change the law is evident from the fact that Jesus is from Judah. It is even more obvious that a change is needed if another priest arises who is not installed on a temporary and material basis but rather has an endless life.

The power of Christ is in Himself, not in some physical commandments having to do with temple buildings, sacrificial altars, dress code, killing of animals, etc.

#### C. The Old Law was Weak, v. 18-19a

It was annulled because it was weak and unprofitable—it made nothing perfect.

*Weak* means “without power,” and reflects a limitation or lack of ability in the law to accomplish something—namely, it was ineffective at perfecting the worshippers. See Romans 8:3. The law could never justify (Rom. 3:20, Gal. 2:16); it could not change one’s heart; in fact, it made sin worse (Rom. 7:7-9).

*Unprofitable* means useless or not of any advantage. The Law was a kind of pay-as-you-go system that could not deal with the underlying cause of sin nor make any ultimate or final payment for it. People were saved by faith in God; but the final payment for sin had not yet appeared.

#### D. The New Way Brought a Better Hope, v. 19b

The “on the other hand part” reflects that there is something better than the law. Since it could not perfect those who came, it left something to be desired. It only allowed the people to make a sacrifice for recently past sins and never to have assurance that their future sins were fully taken care of or that they would ever be delivered from sin.

There is now a **better hope**. It does perfect those of us who come by it. And this enables us to draw near to God. Psalm 24:3-5 reflects this idea of the purity needed to draw near to God and the righteousness that God supplies.

#### E. The New Priest Was Installed With an Oath, v. 20-22

There is a comparison in v. 20-22 which describes that Jesus was made priest *with* an oath, but the old priests were made *without* an oath. Again, Psalm 110:4 justifies the statement that Jesus was made priest with an oath.

Because of this, Jesus has become a surety of a **better covenant**.

Surety means “assurance for the fulfillment of something, under good security” or guarantee (BDAG). Jesus Himself has become the fulfillment of the better covenant—promise—part of which is the promise of God in the oath of Psalm 110:4. It should be clear that we are talking about the New Covenant here, the Melchizedek promise being part of the establishment of that new covenant. However, the New Covenant does not come into focus until Hebrews 8.

#### F. The New Priesthood Is Unchangeable, v. 23-24

Here is yet another reason the old law was annulled, namely because the old priests could not continue by reason of death, so a succession plan had to be present in the Law. Who knew if the new priest would be good or bad, or better or worse than the previous one? There was a certain lack of stability in the whole system because of this.

But now no succession is necessary because Jesus lives forever and so has an unchangeable priesthood.

Once God gave the priesthood to Him, God won't take it away.

### Conclusion

Hebrews is an interesting book because much of it is simply expositional teaching about passages of the OT. In our case today, the author has been unfolding the meaning of Psalm 110:4.

0. What Melchizedek and thus his “order” was like was the subject of verses 1-10.
1. Just the existence of such a promise implies the change of priesthood and law that he spoke about in 11-12.
2. He then gives several reasons explaining why the change to the law in 13-24.
3. He focuses on the term *forever* in the quote. This shows that the Lord lives forever and so his priesthood does not end or change.
4. He focuses on the phrase *sworn and will not relent* in the quote. This oath gives double assurance that Jesus is the ground of our better hope and better covenant which will never change. There is never going to be another step above the “Christian” system as far as sin and salvation are concerned. That's it!

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