

<sup>23</sup> Now many have become Levitical priests, since they are prevented by death from remaining in office. <sup>24</sup> But because he remains forever, he holds his priesthood permanently. <sup>25</sup> Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, since he always lives to intercede for them.

<sup>26</sup> For this is the kind of high priest we need: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. <sup>27</sup> He doesn't need to offer sacrifices every day, as high priests do—first for their own sins, then for those of the people. He did this once for all time when he offered himself. <sup>28</sup> For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak, but the promise of the oath, which came after the law, appoints a Son, who has been perfected forever.

### He's No Levite

He's no Levite. What does that mean? Jesus wasn't a part of the priestly class, genetics weren't on his side, he wasn't of the tribe of Levi. The Messiah came from Judah. And since the Levites were the only ones who were allowed to be priests and serve in God's temple that sounds like a problem. But the writer to the Hebrews has introduced Jesus as, "*A merciful and faithful high priest...*" (2:17)

But first, what did a priest do? In the OT priests would intercede on behalf of the people. They take prayers before God. They would offer your sacrifices. They would take the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkle it on the Ark of the Covenant. They took care of the temple and saw to it that sacrifices were being offered according to the Torah. But that death of Jesus, the temple curtain has been torn, we now have direct access to God. *We are a royal priesthood a holy nation a people belonging to God.* Do we even need the priesthood anymore?

We're so unfamiliar with a priest that we might even believe that we don't need one. We might be completely unaware of the work that Jesus continues to do for us. This is what the author wants us to understand. We have a priest who intercedes for us. We have a priest and salvation doesn't depend on us. Not even in part. You don't need to worry that there is more that needs to be done. There is no work you need to do in order to make up for past sin. There is nothing more that needs to be done. Because, he is no Levite, he's your Savior.

The author wants us to see Jesus as our high priest. He certainly didn't want us readers to return to Judaism but there was something missing or so they thought. They didn't have the sacrificial system anymore. They didn't have the priesthood or so they thought. To whom should they go to make atonement for their sin? The writer to the Hebrews points them to Jesus. He is the great high priest. He is the one that the office of priest pointed ahead to, in fact he is greater.

And there were problems with the priestly system. The main problem was the people. Even the tribe of Levi was full of sinners. This is apparent almost immediately not only when Aaron's sons tried to enter into God's presence on their own terms but also later with Eli's sons. They weren't perfect people but even the good priests were sinful. How can we tell? They all died. There was a continuous succession of priests. They were replaced on a regular basis. They were sinners and first needed to sacrifice for their own sins before they could offer sacrifices on behalf of the people. Their work was never done. The author writes, "*It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.*" (Hebrews 10:4). If it did take away sin, then there would be no further need for sacrifice. But since the people were sinners the priests were never without work. Their position was a temporary one.

They were Levites and Jesus wasn't one. And Jesus was accused of being an illegitimate priest. Jesus was of the tribe of Judah, that's true but he is not only a legitimate priest he is also a superior priest. This is not based on the law given to Moses but based on an oath made in Psalm 110:4. *The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."*

He is a priest to the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek is only mentioned a handful of times in the Bible. Initially back in Genesis 14, and again in the book of Hebrews. We don't know much about Melchizedek. He is called the King of Salem (Jerusalem), a priest of God the Most High. In the time of Abram, he brought out bread

and wine and blessed Abram. Abram gave him a 1/10<sup>th</sup> of all he had. We don't have his genealogy, no father or mother are mentioned. He's a mysterious character what just appears in scripture and then disappears. We don't know much about him but we do know that the author of Hebrews all but stops short of calling Melchizedek the pre-incarnate Christ. We don't know much about him but what we do know is that there existed other priests, before the law was given on Sinai. He's no Levite that's for sure. He's greater.

We're not tempted to return to Judaism. But we face problems in this world of sin. We'll cry out to God for help in time of need. That's not bad. That's what God wants. He wants us to pour out our hearts, our cares our concerns to the God who hears and answers prayer. We may even begin to think of Jesus as the answer to all our problems, pain, suffering, death, economic hardship, and the like. When we cry out to him we may not see results. We may feel alone as if we stand before God on the basis of our own merits. If we fall into some serious sin then we may feel like we can't approach God. We can't come near him or his church. We may even feel like we must make amends, restitution with God before coming in through the doors. So we'll try to live a better life, get our act in order before coming to church. That's not Christianity. That's works righteousness. That's what we are saved from.

We'll fall into moralism. We'll assume the pastor he'll just lecture us on morality and pressure us to try harder and do more. And so stay away rather than drawing near to the one who saves. That makes the center of Christianity around what I do for God. And the heart and center of Christianity is what God has done for you. God didn't start something and then leave you to finish it... that's synergism and you could never be sure you've ever done enough. God didn't leave you to find the way. He knew that we needed a savior and there was no hope that we would save ourselves. So he saved us. He saved us because he knew we couldn't clean up our act.

The great things that God has done for you aren't necessarily that we will be saved from the temporary effects of sin, pain, famine, disease, overreaching government. That's not even close. We are saved from something even greater. We say, "Sin, death, and the devil." We are saved from what our sins deserve which is the wrath of God. This wrath is being revealed against all mankind. We are under his wrath and we need to be saved from God.

That's why I'm thankful that he's not Levite. We have a high priest in the order of Melchizedek. *He remains forever, he holds his priesthood permanently. He is able to save completely, he always lives to intercede.* Jesus stands with us and intercedes for us. A priest would go before God and represent your case before him. A priest makes restitution for your sin through a sacrifice. The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin. They were an interest only payment but the principal still needed to be paid. That debt under the priesthood of Levi was pushed forward. But that sacrifice could never take away sin so Jesus offered himself.

And the priests clashed. When Jesus was going to the cross it's said, *"All the chief priests plotted to put him to death."* The Levites went to war with the priesthood of Melchizedek. They were sinful people. They didn't recognize the Messiah when he came to them. Jesus is not only the priest but he is also the sacrifice. He offered up his life on the cross, once for all. There is no need for further sacrifice. His death paid for all sins, past, present and future. But he is a priest forever. But his work wasn't done at death either. God raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand. Psalm 110:1, *"The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool."*

Jesus doesn't sit around strumming a harp all day. He intercedes for the saints. *He always lives to interceded for them.* This is a permanent priesthood. He is able to save completely. That means there isn't anyone who is too far gone. Even if someone has sold their soul to the devil if they believe in Jesus, he tears up the contracts and says, "Forgiven. I've redeemed you. You are mine." He now lies to make intercession for us. He stands between us and God. There he prays for you. He intercedes for you, "Yes, I paid for that too." We can draw near to God, not on

the basis of our works, membership, or because we have our lives together but on the basis of Jesus and Jesus alone.

Jesus continues his work by equipping the priesthood of all believers. He does so through his pastors and teachers. He provides for his people with faithful workers who don't wag fingers but proclaim Christ crucified and risen. We proclaim God's gifts. We remind you that you are forgiven even when you don't feel like it. We distribute God's gifts.

False religion says, "It's up to you. Jesus only gets you part of the way. God starts the work now you must complete it." But that flies in the face of "*He saves completely.*" Either he has saved us or he hasn't. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

How can I tell if I'm in Christ Jesus? Are you baptized? Have you heard this word? Are you part of this world? Then it's for you. We can drop the guilt and shame over our sin. You're forgiven. You don't have to try harder. It's already done. Your past sin doesn't rule your life anymore. Your present sins don't take you away from following him now. You're forgiven. You can follow Jesus. Just like blind Bartimaeus, we cry out for mercy, ready to receive whatever it is that God gives. Then having received his gifts we follow wherever he leads, be it sickness, pain, or even death. And even in this we can offer our bodies as living sacrifices. We can thank God for all he has done. We can receive his gifts. We can even intercede for others and share what you have. .

And even in these we have a faithful high priest because he is not like the Levites. He is our merciful and faithful high priest to the order of Melchizedek. He is the King of Righteousness, who makes his righteousness ours at the cross and continues to intercede before our Father in heaven. Amen.