

# Hebrews - A Letter Addressed to Modern-Day Christians

## Part 11

# Hebrews 7:1 –28

We have come now to a passage of scripture which is of paramount importance for the writer of Hebrews.

As a background we need to start with the basic idea that religion is access to the Creator God.

**True religion allows a person into the presence of God without fear and without barriers.**

To make this access to God possible two things existed under the Old Covenant.

### (1) The Law

The basic idea of the law is that so long as a person is faithful and obediently observes the commandments of the law, they are in a position of friendship with God and the door to God's presence is open to them.

There is one problem with this.

**Human beings from the very beginning have not, and indeed never can, keep the law.**

Therefore our fellowship and access to God's presence is constantly interrupted.

### (2) Priests and Sacrifices

It was exactly to deal with this situation of total estrangement that the whole system of priesthood and sacrifices was set up.

The Latin for priest is "*pontifex*" which means a "*bridge-builder*".

The priest was a man whose function it was to build a bridge between humanity and God.

How?

By means of the sacrificial system.

A person broke the law, their fellowship with God was interrupted and their access to God was barred.

The offering of the correct sacrifice caused the breach of the law to be atoned for, the fellowship was restored and the barrier was removed.

That was the theory.

But what this system showed was what could **not** be accomplished.

There was **no** escaping the human estrangement from God that followed the person's sin.

No priesthood or sacrifices could cause the human being, so prone to sin, to feel at home with God. No peace of mind, no assurance of God's friendship.

**There was a need for a new and different priesthood – a new and lasting sacrifice for sin.**

The writer of Hebrews seeks to show that Jesus Christ was the only high priest who could fully open up the access to God. For a permanent and peace-filled relationship between human beings and God being sealed.

Where did He get the idea?

**Psalms 110:4 [NIV]** *“The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: **“You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek.”**”*

This is a psalm that shows the credentials of the coming Messiah, the Hebrew term meaning “*anointed one*” and the Greek “*christos*” which belongs only to Jesus Christ, the one who was truly anointed by the Holy Spirit from before birth and without any breaks of anointing.

**Genesis 14:17-20 [NIV]** *“After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). **Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.” Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.**”*

The original story of Melchizedek.

**From these two passages the writer of Hebrews gets his picture of the Melchizedek priesthood.**

He uses the inner, allegorical, mystical meaning of these scriptures, the most important meaning of the passage of scripture.

He also argues **not** only from what is uttered in the scripture but what is **not** said, the silences of the scripture and what they also indicate or imply.

**Melchizedek has no genealogy**

He is without father or mother.

This is drawn from the silence of scripture, which does **not** provide Melchizedek with any genealogy.

This is very unusual for two reasons:

a) It is the very reverse of the habitual practice of Genesis.

Genealogies are a feature of Genesis, long lists of human ancestors constantly occur.

But Melchizedek arrives on the scene, as it were, from nowhere.

b) More important is the reverse of the rules that governed the Aaronic priesthood that was dependent totally on descent.

Genealogy was literally everything.

Aaronic priesthood depended only on genealogical descent, **not** on personal qualification.

Melchizedek priesthood was based on what he was, **not** on what he had inherited.

The difference between claim of legality and the claim based on personality.

c) **Hebrews 7:1-3 [NIV]** *“**This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king**”*

*of peace". Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest for ever."*

This scripture collects further qualities that Melchizedek had.

The name Melchizedek literally means "*king or righteousness*".

The word salem means peace, therefore he was also king of peace, a title held only by the Messiah. [Isaiah 9:6]

d) We are told that there was **no** beginning to the priesthood of Melchizedek **nor** any end. No time when he was born and no time when he died, he is eternal.

**This all goes to prove that the priesthood of Melchizedek is far superior and greater than the Aaronic priesthood.**

**Hebrews 7:4-10 [NIV]** *"Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people, that is, their brothers, even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor."*

Abraham, the founder of the Jewish nation, gave tithes to Melchizedek, making him superior to Abraham and Levi the origin of the Levitical priesthood, also tithed to Melchizedek for at that time he was still in the body of Abraham, not yet born.

**Hebrews 7:11-16 [NIV]** *"If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law. He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no-one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life."*

The fact that a new priesthood was promised shows that the old was inadequate.

**Hebrews 7:17 [NIV]** *"For it is declared: "You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek."*

The new priesthood was for ever.

Under the old system the priests kept on dying and had to be replaced.

**Psalms 110:4 [NIV]** *"The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek."*

The new priesthood of Melchizedek was introduced by an oath of God.

No Levitical priesthood was introduced in this way.

**Hebrews 7:27 [NIV]** *"Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself."*

The new Melchizedek priesthood did **not** need endless sacrifices for he offered himself as the perfect eternal sacrifice.

**Romans 5:1** [NIV] *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,”*

Without righteousness we can never have peace.

**Romans 14:17** [NIV] *“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,”*

The same dependency of peace and joy on righteousness and this stems only from a relationship with the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

**John 14:26-27** [NIV] *“But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.** I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

The peace that comes from Jesus Christ is linked to the coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives.

**Humanity is constantly looking for peace in the wrong places.**

**a) Look for peace in escapism** – it is possible to find peace by the route of escaping but it is never lasting.

Escape is not always wrong, sometimes it is necessary for health and sanity to be preserved, but escape is always palliative and never a cure.

**b) Look for peace by evasion** – by refusing to face our problems.

But the refusing to face a problem will never solve a problem for it still remains and often gets worse because of delay in facing it and solving it.

**c) Look for peace by compromise** – this is one of the most common methods of seeking peace between nations or people who are at odds with each other.

This is mostly an uneasy agreement in which neither party is fully satisfied, so it is never long-lasting.

Tension inevitably leads to worry and stress so compromise is really the enemy of peace.

**d) Look for peace in righteousness** – there is another way of putting this.

Peace of mind by seeking the Will of God.

Once we offer the problem to God and say *“Your will be done”* peace will flood into our life.

**Luke 22:39-44** [NIV] *“Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; **yet not my will, but yours be done.**” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”*

Jesus went into the garden on the Mount of Olives under great tension, so much was this tension that He sweated blood.

But once He accepted what was about to happen, as the Will of God, He became a man at peace.

**To take the way of righteousness, to accept God's Will, is the only way to lasting peace.**

**Hebrews 7:18-19 [NIV]** *“The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.”*

The law was never intended to save people, but to point them towards sin and its destructive power.

**Romans 3:20-26 [NIV]** *“Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished, he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”*

These verses show the function of the law, it shows us where we go wrong and points us to the solution to the sin we commit.

Faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the only One who kept the law perfectly.

**Romans 3:31 [NIV]** *“Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.”*

Faith does **not** eradicate the law for the law shows us what sin is.

**1 Timothy 1:8 [NIV]** *“We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.”*

The law is good when it is used this way and **not** as a means of attempting to be righteous before God.

The example of those under the Old Covenant of law-keeping proves that such a life is impossible to maintain.

**1 Timothy 1:9-11 [NIV]** *“We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers — and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.”*

The law will convict such people of their need to accept the good news of the gospel that Christ preached.

Forgiveness through faith in what He was about to do for all humanity.

**John 3:16-17 [NIV]** *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

**This is the only way**, never again will righteousness in God's eyes be the result of our attempting to keep the law, only in accepting what Jesus Christ has done for us.

**The righteousness of Jesus Christ being credited to us by faith in His sacrifice is the only righteousness accepted by God.**

Abraham is given as an example of righteousness being credited to us by faith in what God has promised through Jesus Christ.

**Romans 4:1-25 [NIV]** *“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about, but not before God. **What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”** Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.” Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! **And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.** So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. **It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.** For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring, not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed, the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead, since he was about a hundred years old, and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” **The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness, for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.**”*

Does this mean that “works” are excluded from our Christian life?

No!

**James 2:8-9, 12-24 [NIV]** *“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbour as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law-breakers.” ... “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. **Mercy triumphs over judgment!** What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that, and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? **Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.** And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. **You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.**”*

The good works we do shows how grateful we are to God for what He has done for us through Jesus Christ. All of which we could **not** do ourselves.

**Romans 12:1** [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, **in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.**”*

Laying down our lives for others, shows our gratitude to God, and is an acceptable form of worship of God.

**Hebrews 7:20-24** [NIV] *“And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest for ever.’” Because of this oath, **Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.** Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but **because Jesus lives for ever, he has a permanent priesthood.**”*

This is a “*better covenant*” because it allows each of us to go directly to God through Jesus Christ.

There is **no** need for us to rely on sacrificed animals and mediating priests to obtain God’s forgiveness.

This New Covenant is better because while human priests die, Christ lives for ever.

This New Covenant is better because priests and sacrifices could **not** save us from eternal death but faith in Jesus Christ can.

Jesus Christ is always available for us, but we **do** need to go to Him with our needs.

**Hebrews 7:25-28** [NIV] *“Therefore he [Jesus Christ our High Priest] **is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.** Such a high priest meets our need, one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. **He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.** For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect for ever.”*

**Jesus Christ as the priest of the order of Melchizedek, was the first high priest, and is the last high priest, for He is the eternal Son of God.**