

Christ As Intercessor

Printed Text · Hebrews 7:20-28

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: RECOGNIZE that Jesus intercedes with the Father on our behalf; SYMPATHIZE with what it means to be a modern-day intercessor; and DISCOVER how to approach God through prayer and intercession.

In Focus

Tamika stopped at the door where a bright orange sign read, “Blessed Hands Beauty Shop.” She’d lost her lease to her beauty studio and had to rent a booth at Blessed Hands for work. She sighed, took a deep breath, and put a smile on her face before she walked into the shop.

“Welcome to Blessed Hands,” a woman said and ushered Tamika inside. “We know you are skilled so you’ll be at booth eight.”

When Tamika looked to see where booth eight was, she saw a group of ladies whispering and giving her the side-eye. It took everything she had not to run out the door. She could tell these girls were going to cause drama.

Before she could even sit her bag down at her booth, one of the ladies said, “look who’s too good to start at booth one!”

Another stylist said, “Now you know that ain’t right! I worked hard for years to get back here and this chick off the street just sashays back here?”

Tamika was getting ready to say something when she heard someone say, “Y’all need to leave people alone. Shashana, you just learned how to do a decent blowout last month so that’s what took you so long. It’s not the new girl’s fault. Carmen, you’re not even a real friend. You talk behind people’s backs. And if I were you, Latisha, I’d watch my back. Tamika, you can set up near me at booth five.”

No one said a word as Tamika grabbed her bag and followed the girl to booth five. Though Tamika could have defended herself, she was grateful that someone spoke up for her.

In today’s lesson, we are reminded of God’s ability to intercede on our behalf.

Keep In Mind

“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25, KJV).

Words You Should Know

- A. **Order of Melchisedec** (Hebrews 7:21) taxis Melchisedek (Gk.)—The “manner” or “likeness in official dignity” of Melchisedec, the king of Salem whose priesthood superceded Aaron’s.
- B. **Make Intercession** (v. 25) entugchano (Gk.) — To meet in order to converse or make a request for others; pleading in prayer or petition on behalf of another.

Say It Correctly

Consecrate. kon-suh-KRAYT

Levi. LEE-vy

Melchisedec. mel-KIZ-uh-dek

KJV

Hebrews 7:20 And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest:

21 (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:)

22 By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.

23 And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death:

24 But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.

25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

26 For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;

27 Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.

28 For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.

NLT

Hebrews 7:20 And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest:

21 (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:)

22 By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.

23 And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death:

24 But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.

25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

26 For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;

27 Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.

28 For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.

The People, Places, and Times

Levitical Priesthood. Synonymous with Aaronic priesthood and derived from the Law of Moses, this system restricted priestly duties to the tribe of Levi. Levitical priests were appointed by inheritance and were everchanging. They offered up animal sacrifices to the Lord daily for their own sins and for the people. This system was imperfect, impermanent, and ineffective.

Melchisedec. He held the offices of both king of Salem and a priest. He is characterized as a type of Christ in his priestly ministry. Greater than Levitical priests, Melchisedec blessed Abraham and received tithes from him. The Scriptures do not mention his ancestry, priestly pedigree, or birth and death, thereby typifying the eternal existence and unending priesthood of Christ. In the Old Testament his name is spelled Melchizedek, and it means "King of Righteousness." Salem, the name

of his city, signified “peace.” Thus, as king of peace, he typified Christ, the Prince of Peace, the One whose saving work reconciles God and man.

Background

In the first six chapters of Hebrews, the writer warms up the recipients of the letter before making his point. Knowing that many of his readers were wavering in their faith, he began the epistle with a subject they could easily digest—that Jesus Christ is supreme over all. He then emphasized God’s faithfulness to His Word and His promise of rest for believers. At the end of chapter 4, the writer introduces an unfamiliar concept referring to Christ as our great High Priest. To prevent losing his readers, he immediately moves into describing the credentials for the priesthood as they know it (chapter 5). Gently, he discusses the qualifications of a priest and contrasts them to qualify Jesus.

Although the writer mentions Melchisedec in chapter 5 and wants to discuss his priesthood in greater detail, he doesn’t elaborate at this point. Instead, he writes that the readers are spiritually immature and “dull of hearing” (see Hebrews 5:11–14). But he doesn’t leave them hanging; he warns them of the danger of failing to grow in faith and tempers his rebuke with encouragement by saying, “But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you . . .” (Hebrews 6:9).

Finally, in chapter 7 the writer introduces this king who was also a priest, Melchisedec. As if anticipating their questions, he recounts how this king-priest met Abraham, blessed him, and received tithes from him. He also explains that the name Melchisedec means “king of righteousness” and “king of peace” and tells readers that his genealogy and dates of birth and death are not known. This description exalted Melchisedec above Abraham and portrayed the king-priest as a type of Christ, representing Jesus’ eternal existence and unending priesthood.

Hebrews 7:11–14 reveals a transition of great significance: Anyone who turned to Christ and His priesthood must reject the Levitical priesthood and its law. The Levitical system as they knew it disqualified Jesus from becoming a priest since He was from the tribe of Judah. However, Jesus’ priesthood was of a higher order, not an earthly and imperfect one like the Levitical priesthood.

At-A-Glance

1. Christ: The Priest Established by Oath (Hebrews 7:20–22)
2. Christ: The Priest Appointed as Intercessor (vv. 23–25)
3. Christ: The Priest Qualified Through Perfection (vv. 26–28)

In Depth

1. Christ: The Priest Established by Oath (Hebrews 7:20–22)

This new priesthood was marked by many changes. One such change was God’s endorsement of the priest. God swore Jesus in with a solemn oath, “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (v. 21). Never had God done that in the Levitical priesthood. Jesus’ priesthood, pledged in Psalm 110, was superior because it was divinely affirmed with an oath.

Another change of the priesthood was that of its dispensation, or the way in which it was administered. The duties of the Levitical priesthood had to be carried out daily. Priests of the law were sinful and had to offer daily sacrifices for their own sins and for those of the people. And the important Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27), in which the high priest entered the Holy of Holies, came yearly. It was a “shadow of heavenly things” according to Hebrews 8:5. But the Gospel dispensation was surer. With Christ as surety (7:22), man’s reconciliation with God was

guaranteed through an everlasting covenant. Christ, the Mediator, united the divine and human nature in His own Person. What animals' blood couldn't do, Jesus' blood did—once and fully.

2. Christ: The Priest Appointed as Intercessor (vv. 23–25)

According to verse 25, this Mediator of the new covenant “ever liveth to make intercession for them.” This signified another change in the priesthood—Christ's priesthood was permanent and unchangeable. Whereas priests of the law died, leaving a vacancy in the priesthood until they were replaced, with Jesus Christ as High Priest there would never be a vacancy in the priesthood. At all times, in all things, He would be available to negotiate our spiritual concerns in heaven, by interceding with the Father on our behalf.

In 1 Timothy 2:1–5, Paul urges followers of Christ to pray for all people and make their requests known to God. In his writing about Timothy's church member Epaphras, Paul says this servant of Christ “prays earnestly for you, asking God to make you strong and perfect . . . following the whole will of God” (Colossians 4:12, NLT). Based on these passages, it is obvious that the primary function of an intercessor is to petition God's throne of grace through prayer.

3. Christ: The Priest Qualified Through Perfection (vv. 26–28)

Another difference between these priesthoods was the moral qualifications of the priests. Verse 26 records that Jesus was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.” Priests of the law were mortal and sinful; therefore, they had their share of physical infirmities and defects.

No lawful priest could have qualified to make atonement for sin and intercession for sinners except Christ, who was excellent Himself.

Search the Scriptures

1. How was Christ made Priest (Hebrews 7:20–21)?
2. Christ was made priest after the order of what king-priest (v. 21)?
3. Why were there many priests (v. 23)?
4. What unique characteristics did Christ have as Priest (vv. 26–27)?
5. What didn't Christ have to do (v. 27)??

Discuss the Meaning

1. Compare and contrast the Levitical priesthood and Jesus' priesthood.
2. Compare and contrast Jesus and Melchisedec.
3. Which priesthood do we rely upon today? Explain your answer.

Liberating Lesson

In today's society communication is king. Staying “connected” is the important thing. Everyone has a cell phone. We send e-mails, we send text messages, we send DMs (direct messages). Many people have a website or a post videos on social media platforms The goal is to stay as “connected” to one another as possible. With all of this communication going on, becoming a modern-day intercessor should be very easy. We all have the capacity to intercede for one another readily. Ask yourself, “What kind of moral support am I providing (or receiving) that affects my family, friends, coworkers in a positive manner?”

Application For Activation

Are you struggling with a particular area in your life—financial burdens, a toxic relationship, sexual impurity, filthy communication, etc.? This week, commit it to prayer and intercession. Establish a

prayer chain or a prayer group and commit to intercessory prayer for one another. Know that Christ, your High Priest, goes to the Father on your behalf. Give your problem to Him and ask for His help in turning away from it.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Hebrews 7:20–28

During the early period of the Old Testament era, a priestly system was instituted with Aaron and his sons as priests from the tribe of Levi who would offer up sacrifices for the sins of the people. But the priests had to offer up sacrifices every day for their own sins as well. The sacrifices were never perfect or complete. Moreover, the high priest always had to be replaced when he died. The Old Testament prophets saw the need for a priest of a different order than the Levitical priests. Acting as God’s mouthpiece, they foretold that Jesus would come as a holy Priest, and therefore have no need to make sacrifices for His own sins.

Writing long after the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, the writer of Hebrews affirms that Jesus is the Priest about whom the prophet Isaiah spoke: “He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth . . . and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:9, 12).

The writer of Hebrews notes that with the coming of Jesus, the Levitical priesthood was set aside because it was weak and unprofitable (Hebrews 7:18). “A better hope” was introduced, “by which we draw nigh unto God” (v. 19). Jesus did not sacrifice an animal; He sacrificed Himself for our sins. Therefore, no other sacrifice is needed—ever. We have now and will have forever Jesus, who intercedes with the Father for us. Therefore, it is written: “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (v. 25). It is against this background information that our Scripture text begins with a note of exclamation.

20 And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest:

This is the writer’s way of saying the priesthood of Jesus is of a higher order than Levitical succession. Jesus’ priesthood was established by God with an oath, meaning God has sworn and will not change His mind. Just as God kept His covenant with Abraham, He will keep His promise regarding Jesus’ priesthood. Jesus’ priesthood is permanent, in contrast to the Levitical priesthood.

21 (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:)

The Levitical priesthood established under Aaron (Exodus 28:1) was conditional. It was instituted without an oath and therefore lacked permanence. Christ's priesthood was confirmed by an oath, and He is therefore "a priest for ever." The fact that Jesus' priesthood is confirmed by divine oath leaves no room for qualification because of any human weakness, sin, or failure.

The writer of Hebrews aims to show that Christ's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood. To strengthen the argument, the writer references Psalm 110:4, which is understood to be God's comment to Christ: "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." Hebrews is the only New Testament book that makes a direct reference to Melchisedec. This name appears twice in the Old Testament, spelled Melchizedek. In Genesis 14:18–20 he is referred to as "the king of Salem" and "the priest of the most high God." While there are several extra-biblical references to Melchisedec, and it appears that some early Christian writers were aware of a Melchisedec tradition, he remains a mysterious figure. The lack of clarity regarding Melchisedec's role in biblical history, however, does not diminish the truth of the superiority and permanence of Christ's priesthood.

22 By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.

Here the writer of Hebrews surprisingly moves his line of reasoning from that of the priesthood to that of a testament or covenant. The Greek word *diatheke* (dee-ah-THAY-kay, translated "testament" or "covenant," which carries the idea that a promise has been made) is used in conjunction with the Greek word *egguos* (ENG-goo-oss, translated "surety," meaning the guarantee that a promise will be fulfilled). These two words are meant to make perfectly clear the incontestability of God's oath whereby Jesus was made "a priest for ever." God made the promise, and Jesus is the guarantee that the promise will be fulfilled.

It is understood that a will or testament is final and absolute and therefore cannot be successfully challenged except by the testator. God has laid the terms of Christ's priesthood down once and for all time. Jesus' life and God's oath make unnecessary a succession of priests after Christ.

Again, this is the writer's way of saying Christ's priesthood is forever! Christ Jesus is our Intercessor. He now intercedes with the Father for us. Indeed, He "ever liveth to make intercession for" us (Hebrews 7:25).

23 And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death:

The writer of Hebrews continues to contrast Jesus with the Levitical priests. Historians tell us that from the time of Aaron to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, there were between 80 and 85 high priests. Because they were all subject to death, there was need for numerous replacements. Jesus, on the other hand, overcame death and therefore qualified to be the eternal guarantee or "surety" of God's promise. Given such superiority over the Levitical priesthood, Jesus can indeed speak for us. He can go before God and plead our case.

24 But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.

Unlike the Levitical priests, Jesus' priesthood "continueth ever." He has "an unchangeable priesthood." The Greek word *aparabatos* (ahpar-AH-bah-toss, translated "unchangeable," meaning something that cannot be transgressed or transferred to another) conveys the idea that Jesus' priesthood lives with Him through eternity. Since Jesus "continueth ever," His priesthood is "unchangeable." Jesus' priesthood cannot be transferred to another. It extends into eternity. Thus, He is able to intercede for us and for all people in every generation yet unborn. Moreover, His eternal

priesthood cannot be matched by the mortal priests of the past. It is little wonder that such a priest as Jesus Christ “is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (v. 25).

25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

The basic and most significant content of this verse is contained in the Greek verb *sozo* (SOHD-zoh, translated “to save,” also meaning to deliver, make whole, or to preserve safe from danger, loss, and destruction). More specifically, in the context of Hebrews, it is salvation in its broadest and fullest meaning. It implies complete deliverance, no matter what our need, including deliverance from the punishment resulting from sin. In Jesus, we have a Savior who is able to bring complete salvation to all who “come unto God by him.”

Jesus lives to make intercession for us! Because He lives forever, His priestly concern for us never ends. Whatever our need, at any time or in any place, Jesus Christ stands ready to petition God the Father on our behalf. He is able and always available to speak for us, and to go before God and plead our case. Hallelujah! What a Savior.

26 For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;

All priests who served in the temple where God’s presence dwelled were obliged to be holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. In essence, they were to be free of any Levitical impurity—any of the actions or circumstances that would render them unclean according to the Mosaic Law. Any defilement rendered the priest incapable of interceding for the people. When the priest and the Levite refused to help the half-dead man on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho (Luke 10:29–32), their refusal may have been based on the fear that while helping him he might die. Their contact with a dead man would disqualify them from performing their priestly duties.

The writer of Hebrews wants his readers to know that Jesus fulfills all of these requirements. He is holy, harmless, and undefiled, and although He is a friend of sinners, He has been “made higher than the heavens.” While Jesus is apart from sinners, He nonetheless intercedes for sinners in ways that show His capacity to identify with the least of these. In fact, Hebrews 4:14–15 reminds us, “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Christ’s undefiled character attests to His capacity to go before God on our behalf. Unlike the Levitical priests, Jesus has no need to offer a sacrifice for Himself. By virtue of His undefiled character, He was qualified to offer Himself as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He was the “lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19).

27 Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.

This verse presents meticulous students of the Scriptures with a problem. A careful reading of the relevant text will show that while sacrifices were offered daily, the high priest was not required to offer them personally. Those sacrifices requiring the high priest’s attention were offered yearly, not daily (cf. Hebrews 9:7, 25; 10:1). However, the writer wishes to make the point that Jesus has no need to offer sacrifices daily or yearly for His own sins, because He was sinless (4:15). His perfect sacrifice was sufficient for all time, “for this he did once, when he offered up himself.”

The writer’s use of the phrase translated “for this he did once” is a critically important affirmation. It speaks not only of the eternal completeness and efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice of Himself, it also

nullifies every other sacrificial system. Christ's sacrifice of Himself was final, complete, and eternally adequate for our salvation.

28 For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.

Here another comparison is made between the Levitical priests and Jesus. Under Levitical law, which was imperfect, priests were appointed by ordinary men from among ordinary men. Therefore priests, even the high priest, are limited, just as all men are limited. They have astheneia (Gk. ahs-THEN-ay-ah, translated "infirmity" or "weakness"). They are subject to death.

Standing in clear contrast to the law is "the word of the oath," which came much later than the law. One could ask: If the law was perfect, making provision for the appointment of perfect priests, what need would there have been for "the word of the oath"? The mere fact that "the word of the oath" came after the law points to the inadequacies of the Aaronic priesthood.

This verse is really a summary of the preceding verses. It reiterates the thought that Jesus, the Son, is superior to all the priests appointed under the law. The continuous replacement of imperfect priests is contrasted with the permanent placement of Jesus "who is consecrated [or perfected] for evermore." Praise God that we have a perfect High Priest who can speak for us! Who would want to turn away from such a One who is able and available to plead our case before God? May it please God that we will all avail ourselves of His gracious and merciful redeeming grace.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Genesis 14:18-20

Tuesday

Hebrews 7:1-3

Wednesday

Hebrews 7:4-10

Thursday

Hebrews 7:11-19

Friday

Hebrews 7:20-23

Saturday

Hebrews 7:23-25

Sunday

Hebrews 7:26-28