



1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Hebrews (Part 2)

Theme: High Priest

Overview: The Messiah would be a king, a prophet, and a priest, and Hebrews zeroes in on his priesthood. This month, students will learn that Jesus is a merciful and faithful high priest, designated by God, in the order of Melchizedek, serving in a New Covenant—and that he is both the priest and the sacrifice.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

INTRODUCTION

Author

Hebrews does not name its author. Parts of the letter sound like Paul, but other parts do not, and early Christians suggested Barnabas, Apollos, Luke, and others. The early church scholar Origen concluded that only God knows who wrote it. The writer knew Timothy (Hebrews 13:23) and received the gospel from those who heard the Lord (2:3).

Audience

The letter seems to have been written for Jewish Christians who knew the Old Testament well and were tempted to drift away from Christ and return to Judaism (Hebrews 2:1; 10:35-39). They had endured persecution in the past (10:32-34). The writer called his letter “my word of exhortation” (13:22).

Date

Hebrews likely was written before the destruction of the temple in AD 70, since the writer speaks of the priests and sacrifices as still continuing (Hebrews 10:1-2, 11). Many scholars date it in the 60s AD.

Setting

The readers lived in a world shaped by the Mosaic law, the priesthood, and the sacrifices. Some had grown weary and were in danger of shrinking back under pressure. The greeting from “those from Italy” (Hebrews 13:24) suggests a connection to Rome, either as the place of writing or the home of the readers.

Theme

Jesus is our great High Priest. Unlike the priests descended from Aaron, he was without sin, he was appointed by God’s oath “in the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 5:6), and he lives forever to intercede for us (7:25). He serves in the true tabernacle in heaven, mediates a New Covenant established on better promises (8:6), and offered his own blood once for all to do away with sin (9:26).

Why Study Hebrews?

Hebrews calls believers to approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, to follow God’s plan by submitting to the One he chose as High Priest, to worship in awe of God’s will and foreknowledge, to learn the lessons of the Old Covenant in order to be faithful under the New, and to eagerly wait for Christ, who will appear a second time “to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:28).

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: Hebrews 2:5-18; 4:14-16

WEEK 2: Hebrews 5:1-10; 6:13-20

WEEK 3: Hebrews 7:11-28

WEEK 4: Hebrews 8:1-9:10

WEEK 5: Hebrews 9:11-28

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Approach God's throne of grace with confidence that Jesus is sympathetic and merciful toward you.**

STUDY: Hebrews (Part 2)

THEME: High Priest

LESSON TEXT: Hebrews 2:5-18; 4:14-16

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Psalm 8

A MERCIFUL AND FAITHFUL HIGH PRIEST

BY MARK SCOTT

Catholic scholar Henri Nouwen called us to be wounded healers who demonstrate real compassion. He said compassion is not pity or sympathy or charity. True compassion is entering into another person's problems. Compassion means taking on the burdens of others and standing in their shoes. Jesus demonstrated real compassion as our merciful and faithful high priest.

The writer of Hebrews argued that Jesus was superior to angels (1:5–2:4). We might be tempted to say, “Well, duh.” But in the early days, some may have pushed back against that argument. Some in the Qumran community taught that the coming age would be ruled by the angel Michael and his subordinates. The Hebrew writer made it clear that the merciful and faithful high priest would rule, but that rule would be very different from the typical monarchical style.

The Merciful and Faithful High Priest Understood Subjection

Hebrews 2:5-8

Jesus would be able to subject the world to himself because he subjected himself to the world. He understood *subjection* (i.e., to line up behind or yield to). Angels are God's servants. But angels do not enter into the human sphere. In fact, Jesus taught that they always behold the face of the Father (Matthew 18:10).

Angels are not the epitome of God's creation. That honor is reserved for humankind. The writer quotes lines from Psalm 8. God was *mindful of* (remembered) humans because of their exalted state. The phrase *son of man* may here be metonymy (a type of figure of speech) for humankind. Even though humans are lower than the angels, they have dignity and worth. In fact, they will judge angels (1 Corinthians 6:3). Humans became cocreators with God and stewards of all creation. The world is subject to them even though that is not evident at the present time. Jesus became fully exalted and totally human.

The Merciful and Faithful High Priest Gave Himself in Substitution

Hebrews 2:9-10

The writer does something quite significant with Psalm 8. While the psalm celebrates the dignity and worth of humankind, the writer gives it a Christocentric twist. We may not see everything in subjection to humankind as it will be someday (Romans 8:18-25), but because Jesus subjected himself to the human condition through the incarnation, we do see him. As the ultimate God-man, Jesus was made lower than the angels.

Jesus has now been exalted with glory and honor, but when he came to earth, he suffered death. That death was

vicarious. It was for others. He “tasted death” (an idiom meaning “died in place of”) for everyone. This was called *atonement* in verse 17.

To get sons and daughters (people) to glory (God), someone had to blaze a trail. Jesus was that trailblazer. He was not only the Creator (*for whom and through whom everything exists*), he was the *pioneer* (leader or founder) of salvation. Jesus' sacrifice made people *perfect* (complete in God) through his salvific experience on the cross. This ultimate sacrifice did not come about without suffering.

The Merciful and Faithful High Priest Engendered a Solidarity with His People

Hebrews 2:11-18

The solidarity that priests have with people is their humanness. The significance of the use of Psalm 8 is that Jesus was (and is) human. Jesus shared in the human condition; he was (and is) part of the human family. Even though we have, through sin, embarrassed ourselves, he was not embarrassed to call us brothers and sisters.

The writer collects phrases from Psalm 22:22 and Isaiah 8:17-18 to further this solidarity. Jesus not only experienced life as a human, he also experienced death as humans do. But Jesus' death was not the same as others. His death held power. His death destroyed death and the influence of death's chief enemy, the devil. In addition to this, the people (with whom he held solidarity) were liberated from their fear of death.

Jesus did not have to become an angel because angels did not need saving. He was made like humans because they did need saving. Jesus experienced the full weight of what it meant to be human. His humanity and suffering qualified him to be a high priest. His death paid the punishment for sin. His temptations gave him compassion for those tempted.

The Merciful and Faithful High Priest Was Sinless

Hebrews 4:14-16

Jesus' lack of sin was the striking difference between him and other high priests. High priests had to atone for their own sins when they went to the tabernacle or temple. Jesus had no sin. Jesus never caved in to sin. While he can empathize with our weaknesses, he never surrendered to them (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 John 3:5). This allows believers to do two things: to hold firmly to the faith and to approach God's throne of grace with confidence.

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WHERE WILL YOU TURN?

BY DAVID FAUST

My wife, Candy, and I have lived in our current home for nearly eight years. We try to be good neighbors, but it's not easy to connect because people tend to keep to themselves. (Maybe it's that way in your neighborhood, too.) It takes time to develop trust and build relationships.

On the Friday night after Thanksgiving last year, a house three doors from ours caught fire and burned. It was nearly a total loss, and although we're told that homeowner's insurance is covering the damage, the rebuilding process has taken several months. Immediately after the fire happened, Candy decided we should take up a collection to help. She wrote a letter explaining the need and handed it out around our neighborhood. For several days, neighbors came to our door with cash or checks. In all, 38 neighbors pitched in. A 9-year-old girl gave \$3.00 of her own money. Our neighbors—many of whom barely knew each other's names—gave nearly \$5,000 to the woman whose house burned down.

Earlier this year a shooting occurred in the parking lot of a public school in our area. The facts remain unclear, but evidently it resulted from a domestic dispute; a woman was shot near to where parents drop off their children for school each morning. No one else was injured, but it was a traumatic time for the school's families, teachers, and administrators.

Providentially, for several years volunteers from our congregation have been serving the school—tutoring students, helping to clean up the grounds, providing juice and doughnuts for "Bring Your Dad Day," serving pie to the teachers, and even helping to pay off the school's lunch debt. So, when the shooting occurred, a trusting relationship was already in place. With the blessing of the principal, volunteers from our church held an early-morning prayer walk on the school grounds, asking the Lord to protect those who learn and work there.

Where will you turn when you need help? Do you have a support network of friends, neighbors, and family members you could call anytime day or night? Are you investing in relationships with others in your church and community so that when troubles come, no one has to face them alone? The Bible says, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10).

At a pivotal moment in Jesus' ministry, the crowds turned away from the Lord, and he asked his twelve apostles, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Simon Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:66-68).

When there's nowhere else to go and others drift away, the Lord will be there for you. He is "a merciful and faithful high priest" who empathizes with our suffering and "is able to help those who are being tempted" (Hebrews 2:17-18).

Here's another question: Are you the kind of person others turn to when they need help? Are you staying so close to Jesus, our merciful and faithful high priest, that others know by turning to you they will find mercy and grace in their times of need?

Personal Challenge:

Think of someone who needs help right now. This week, give them a gift, write them a note, take them to lunch, or do some other act of kindness to share God's love in a practical way.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. During the past week, how, specifically, did you live in God's grace, as a member of his church and kingdom?
2. As you look back over the last week, for what are you most thankful?

Ask two people to read aloud **Hebrews 2:5-18; 4:14-16** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to summarize the passages in one minute or less.

3. How do these passages describe Jesus' compassion for and actions toward his people?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - How do these passages compare humans to angels?
 - How do these passages compare Jesus during his time of ministry on earth to angels?
 - How do these passages compare Jesus now to angels?
 - How do these passages describe Jesus' relationship with believers?
 - What do these passages say is God's ultimate purpose for humans?
 - Why did Jesus need to become fully human?
 - What differences do you see between Jesus and other high priests?
 - Why is it important for Jesus as our high priest to understand our trials and temptations?
 - What purposes for Jesus' death do you see in these passages? (See especially 2:14-18.)
5. What do you learn about God from these passages?
6. What do you learn about humans?
7. How are we to respond (in obedience) to what's written in these passages?
8. As followers of Jesus, God has made us, his people, into a "holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5, 9). How can we, then, as Jesus' body on earth, join with our high priest Jesus' mission?
 - In what tangible way will you act as part of Jesus' "holy priesthood" this week?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What trials or temptations do you anticipate facing during the upcoming week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Hebrews 5:1-10; 6:13-20**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Follow God's plan by submitting to the One he chose as High Priest.**

STUDY: Hebrews (Part 2)

THEME: High Priest

LESSON TEXT: Hebrews 5:1-10; 6:13-20

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Exodus 29:1-9; Psalm 110

DESIGNATED BY GOD TO BE HIGH PRIEST

BY MARK SCOTT

The Old Testament depicts at least three major streams that come together in the Messiah. The Messiah would be a kingly figure, a prophetic figure, and a priestly figure. Hebrews primarily zeroes in on the priestly figure (though the kingly emphasis will be evident in this lesson as well by virtue of some of the citations from the Old Testament).

The Chosen is a multi-season television drama about Jesus Christ and those chosen to follow him. But the New Testament doesn't just tell of people who are chosen to meet the Messiah. God himself chose Jesus to be our High Priest.

Called by God*Hebrews 5:1-6*

No one can simply decide they want to be a priest, let alone the high priest. God alone can do this. That was true from the time of Aaron (Moses' brother). Not even Jesus just showed up and expected to serve in that office. He needed to be designated by God—and he was.

After the warning about disbelief and not entering God's rest (Hebrews 4), the writer developed further the calling of Jesus as high priest. In the Old Testament, those who served God's people as high priest were chosen from the people, acted on behalf of the people, and offered sacrifices for the people. Three words describe this designation: *selected* (to take by the hand), *appointed* (made to stand and be recognized), and *called* (marked out or named). Calling the priests from the people made sense because the high priest could *deal gently* (to act in moderation) with the *ignorant* (those not knowing) and those *going astray* (deceived). But there was an enormous difference between the average high priest and Jesus. The high priest had to offer sacrifices for his own sins. Jesus had no such need in his calling as high priest.

Jesus did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest (that is, he did not exalt himself). He relied on the Father's calling. The writer places two very royal psalms side by side to make his point. Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 lend support to God's designation of Jesus as the high priest. Jesus is uniquely God's Son—in fact, he is similar to that strange kingly priest named Melchizedek, who is mentioned three times in our lesson text and later is identified as having no beginning of days or end of life (Hebrews 7:3).

Forged by Suffering*Hebrews 5:7-10*

Forged can mean "falsified," but in this heading it means "pressed" or "hammered out." Another thing designating Jesus as the high priest was how he allowed suffering to forge or refine him. Like other priests, Jesus bore the burdens of the people to God and spoke to the people about God. While in his incarnate state, Jesus offered up prayers and petitions to his Father. The default setting is to think that this refers to Gethsemane, where Jesus' sweat became as blood (Luke 22:44). But in light of the language reminiscent of Psalm 22, it most likely referred to his salvific experience on the cross. (After all, at least half of the seven famous statements from the cross are prayers.) Jesus' prayer was heard because of his *reverent* (godly) *submission*.

Even though he was God's Son, Jesus had to learn obedience in the kiln of suffering. Once the suffering was complete (Luke 23:46 and John 19:30), Jesus became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. The cross always precedes the crown. The recipients of this treatise would also endure suffering. They would be tempted to not mature and ultimately to cave in regarding the faith (Hebrews 5:11–6:12). Jesus' suffering would encourage them not to give up.

Confirmed by an Oath*Hebrews 6:13-20*

After a section about maturity and not falling away, the writer returned to his argument about Jesus being the high priest in the order of Melchizedek. It boils down to God keeping his word. God had made a promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:5-6; 17:1-8, 15-19). He swore to keep it based on his own character (i.e., he swore by himself). After all, it is impossible for God to lie. This oath idea is repeated five times in this section of Scripture. God's character was on the line with this promise.

But God's purpose was also on the line. God made Jesus' high priesthood so sure so that believers could *take hold of* (grasp) the hope that leads to eternal life. Hope is metaphorically described as an *anchor*. And hope entered the Holy of Holies through the person of Jesus—a theme that will be explained later in the letter. Called, forged, and confirmed—that's Jesus' high priestly designation.

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PLAYING HURT

BY DAVID FAUST

Cal Ripken Jr. played in every Baltimore Orioles game from May 30, 1982, to September 19, 1998—a record 2,632 consecutive Major League Baseball games. During that span of 17 seasons, Ripken kept playing shortstop or third base despite sprained ankles, a hyperextended elbow, and a twisted knee caused by a pile of players during an on-field brawl. Before the 1996 All-Star Game, an American League teammate slipped on a platform used for a photo shoot and accidentally slammed his forearm into Ripken's nose while trying to catch his balance. Ripken's broken nose was reset in time for him to play seven innings, and he was back in the Orioles' starting lineup after the All-Star break. In 1997 he played for six weeks with a herniated disc in his back. Doctors said the pain would be intense but playing wouldn't cause permanent damage, so Ripken stayed in the lineup and the Orioles won their division that year.

Ripken showed up and did his job day after day, season after season. Fans nicknamed him "The Iron Man." Baseball experts believe his consecutive games record will never be matched. One sportswriter observed, "His Hall-of-Fame career is a testament to the grueling demands of baseball greatness, the subtle rhythm and constant fire required to compete."

Successful athletes keep playing in spite of minor aches and many battle their way back to health after suffering major injuries. Likewise, serving the Lord requires perseverance through pain. The apostle Paul compared Christ followers to athletes in strict training, runners who refuse to quit till they finish the race, and boxers who take punches and keep swinging till the fight is over (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 4:7). Paul knew what it felt like to be "hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

Bible verses like these challenge the immature part of my soul that rebels against discomfort. I want life to be

easy, but it's not. I would rather avoid painful situations, but I can't. I want ministry to be fun, but often it's not. I hope to make it through each day with minimum aggravation, but that's not realistic.

Bearing one another's burdens often means leaning into stressful situations. If you're a church leader, your job is a complex combination of caring, comforting, correcting, confronting, and challenging. If you try to heal the wounded, instruct the seeker, and motivate the complacent, you can't dodge all conflict and criticism, and you won't enjoy the luxury of sitting on the bench until game conditions are perfect and you feel 100 percent.

Reflecting back on his long career, Ripken said, "I always felt that I still had a contribution to make even when I was 90 percent, or 80 percent. I pushed myself, and sometimes I had some of my better games when I was under the weather."

Christ our High Priest "learned obedience from what he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8).

The late Wayne Smith, longtime minister at Southland Christian Church in Lexington, Kentucky, preached a sermon called "Playing Hurt." He declared, "You either play hurt or you don't play at all."

Jesus played hurt, and because he did, victory and celebration are ahead for all who stay in the game.

Personal Challenge:

Right now, what hurt is tempting you to give up? In your personal journal or on a piece of paper, write a prayer that does two things: (1) honestly expresses your pain and (2) asks the Lord for strength to persevere and "stay in the game."

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. In what tangible way did you act as part of Jesus' "holy priesthood" last week?
2. What trials or temptations did you face over the past week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Hebrews 5:1-10; 6:13-20** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to summarize the passages. Remind them to keep the summary simple and succinct.

3. What most stood out to you as you heard these passages read?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - How did someone become a high priest?
 - How are the purposes, role, and activities of the high priest described here?
 - How is Jesus as our high priest like and unlike other high priests?
 - How was Melchizedek a type (prefiguration) of Jesus Christ? (See Hebrews 7:1-3.)
 - What can we learn from the days of Jesus' life on earth?
 - How do these passages assure you that God will always keep his promises?
 - How do these passages assure you that God will fulfill his purposes?
 - In what ways is our hope in God like an anchor?
5. What do you learn about God from these passages?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. How can you learn to become more obedient to God?
8. People all around us need encouragement and hope. As you apply these passages in your circles of influence this week, how specifically will you offer encouragement and a hope that's firm and secure to others?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What encouragement do you need for the week ahead?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Hebrews 7:11-28**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Worship in awe of the depth of God's will and foreknowledge as seen in the connection between the priesthood of Jesus and Melchizedek.**

STUDY: Hebrews (Part 2)

THEME: High Priest

LESSON TEXT: Hebrews 7:11-28

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Genesis 14:17-20; Hebrews 7:1-10

HIGH PRIEST IN THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK

BY MARK SCOTT

There are many major and minor characters in a narrative as large as the Bible. But some of the people are just, well, a bit weird. They “take stage” briefly, allow their little story to contribute to God’s big story, and then disappear. For instance, what about the witch at Endor (1 Samuel 28)? She was not even supposed to exist (28:9), but she showed up to pronounce the last sentence on Saul’s ruined kingship. Weird. Or, what about Samson? Very few good things are said about this playboy judge. But four chapters of the Bible are devoted to him (Judges 13–16), he judged Israel for 20 years, and his name is found in Hebrews 11 as a hero of the faith. Weird. Or what about Melchizedek, that strange priestly king who met up with Abraham following the battle of the kings (Genesis 14:17–24)? That was a weird gathering.

But Melchizedek mattered in the Hebrews writer’s argument about Jesus’ priestly kingship. Jesus was designated by God as a merciful and faithful high priest. But as the writer moved his argument along about Jesus’ priesthood and New Covenant, Melchizedek became the perfect type of Christ in the Old Testament to connect some interpretative dots between Jesus and his non-Aaronic tribe.

Different Tribe*Hebrews 7:11–16*

The Levitical tribe was the priestly tribe. Aaron and Moses belonged to that one. The law, the sacrifices, and the dietary code were all part of the Levitical covenant. If the Messiah figure was to be a priest, one would assume he would come from Aaron’s line. But Jesus was like Melchizedek—different indeed. The writer had much to say about this change of covenant (Hebrews 8–10), so it was vital to deal with Jesus’ tribe as a possible “push back” to his legitimate priesthood.

Perfection (mentioned three times in this text) for God’s people was possible only if the law was kept perfectly. That at least meant that Levitical priests were the only ones who could serve at the altar. When certain kings took it upon themselves to function as priests, it did not end well (e.g., 1 Samuel 13:8–15). So how could Jesus, from the tribe of Judah, serve as a priest? Answer: Melchizedek. This strange “seeming outsider” was actually an insider in God’s program of redemption. Very little is known about him; we don’t know his origin or demise (Hebrews 7:3). But he appeared on the scene, blessed Abraham, and had an *indestructible life*. Sounds a bit like Jesus—i.e., he came, ministered, and ascended. Wrong tribe but right Savior.

Better Hope*Hebrews 7:17–22*

The Hebrews writer placed the often-quoted Psalm 110 at the heart of his argument. Jesus’ priesthood would be like Melchizedek’s. It would be different but everlasting. The Levitical covenant would be set *aside* (or fulfilled, cf. Matthew 5:17–20) in the coming of one like Melchizedek. The Levitical covenant was weak and *useless* (without profit). It could not fix the problem; it could only reveal the problem.

The better hope that came through Christ would allow the worshipper to *draw near* to God. The Levitical covenant was about fear, darkness, and distance. Nonetheless, the New Covenant ushered in through one like Melchizedek was, like the covenant before it, brought in by a promise from God called an *oath*. The oath (the sure word of God) was evident in Psalm 110. God had sworn and would not change his mind that Jesus would be a priest-king forever. Jesus himself became the *guarantor* (the only time this specific word appears in the New Testament) that the New Covenant would surpass the Old Covenant.

Permanent Priesthood*Hebrews 7:23–28*

Every priest was terminal. In contrast, Jesus, like Melchizedek, had an indestructible life. Jesus lives forever. Therefore, his priesthood continues. Jesus can *save completely* (or as the *King James Version* beautifully states it, “he is able to save to the uttermost”) since he is always available to act as high priest. In addition to saving people, Jesus—since he is alive—can even *intercede for* (to meet or talk to) people.

Jesus is so overly qualified for this priesthood. At least six of his virtues are mentioned. He is *holy* (unpolluted), *blameless* (void of evil), *pure* (unsoiled or Godlike), *set apart from sinners*, *exalted* (elevated above the heavens), and *sinless* because he does not need to offer sacrifices for himself. Jesus performed his major salvific act on the cross once for all. It need not be repeated like typical sacrifices. High priests come and go, but Jesus stays because he was appointed and made perfect. Jesus’ priesthood, at the end of the day, is not weird but special.

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AN INDESTRUCTIBLE LIFE

BY DAVID FAUST

"How long will it last?" That's a good question to ask if you're buying a car or a kitchen appliance. Most things don't last forever. Junkyards are filled with cast-off treasures, and history is littered with the rubble of proud and once-powerful nations. The Babylonians tore apart God's beautiful temple and destroyed the Holy City of Jerusalem, and centuries later—when the city and the temple had been rebuilt—Jesus foretold that the Romans would tear them down again.

Despite all the benefits of modern medicine, we can't prevent the destruction of another kind of temple. Someday our bodies will succumb to the grave. Nature tends toward disorder, disintegration, and death—it's the second law of thermodynamics at work. Clothes wear out. Land erodes. Metal rusts. Wood weathers. Homes and gardens require constant upkeep. Fortunes can be destroyed (and so can careers and reputations). Twenty years ago, terrorist attacks brought massive buildings crumbling to the ground on 9/11. Someday the stars, including our mighty sun, will burn out. Nothing seems indestructible except fictional movie superheroes. Our hearts long for eternity, but death appears to rule the day.

Yet, according to the Bible, indestructible things do in fact exist; just don't expect to find them among worldly treasures that are aging like an outdated wardrobe. The psalmist compares temporary things with the eternal God and tells the Lord, "They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end" (Psalm 102:26-27). Another psalm describes the Messiah in forever terms. "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek'" (Psalm 110:4).

Mystery Man

Melchizedek is a mysterious figure in Scripture. He stepped into the pages of Genesis as the righteous king

of Salem ("peace"), foreshadowing the Prince of peace and King of kings. Long before priests and Levites served in the temple, Melchizedek was a priest of God Most High, foreshadowing Christ, our true High Priest. Melchizedek brought bread and wine to bless Abraham centuries before Jesus blessed the bread and the cup at the Last Supper. Abraham showed respect for Scripture's mystery man by presenting Melchizedek a tenth of his wealth (Genesis 14:18-20).

Jesus Christ didn't come from the bloodline of the priestly tribe of Levi, but like Melchizedek, he derived his priestly credentials from a higher source. Hebrews 7:16 says Christ "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."

An indestructible life? That's what we all want, but where can we find it? Not in philosophies spawned in the minds of ordinary men and women. Not even in the laws and traditions surrounding the Old Testament priesthood. Christ himself owns "the power of an indestructible life." Crucifixion could kill his body, but it couldn't destroy his life. His resurrection proves he can bring us indestructible hope and "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade" (1 Peter 1:4).

When choosing a worldview and deciding what we'll trust when facing death, here is a good question to ask: "How long will it last?" If the answer isn't "forever," we're aiming too low.

Personal Challenge:

In an average day, how much time do you spend thinking about things that last forever compared to things that are temporary? What steps could you take to fix your mind "on things above, not on earthly things" (Colossians 3:2)?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How specifically did you offer encouragement and hope to others last week?
2. In what ways did you receive encouragement over the past week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Hebrews 7:11-28** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. What main point was the writer communicating in this passage?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - Melchizedek, whose name means "king of righteousness," was king of Salem (Salem means "peace"). From these facts and other insights from this passage, in what ways was Melchizedek a type for Christ?
 - In this passage, what proofs does the writer provide for why the order of Melchizedek is superior to the order of Aaron (that is, the Levitical priesthood, which represents the Old Covenant law)? (Look for both doctrinal and practical reasonings.)
 - What benefits does Jesus' high priesthood have for his followers?
 - Why is it vital that we have a high priest who is eternal and permanent?
5. What do you learn about Jesus' nature from this passage?
6. What do you learn about yourself?
7. What reasons does this passage give you to trust and obey Jesus?
8. How would you use this passage to help someone—especially someone who has a law-based belief system and/or a religion that depends on weekly and/or yearly sacrifices to take away sins—put their faith in Christ?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What needs do you have today and in the upcoming week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Hebrews 8:1-9:10**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Learn the lessons of the Old Covenant in order to be faithful under the New.**

STUDY: Hebrews (Part 2)

THEME: High Priest

LESSON TEXT: Hebrews 8:1–9:10

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Exodus 25:1-9; 26:31-35; Jeremiah 31:31-34; 1 Peter 2:1-10

HIGH PRIEST IN A NEW COVENANT

BY MARK SCOTT

Why is so much learning actually relearning? God must know our propensity for amnesia. (Can you say Communion?) Don DeWalt would tell his students, “To be heard you must tell old things in new ways or new things in old ways.” Fred Craddock suggested that one cannot realize the “shock” of recognition until there is the “nod” of recognition.

How does the new high priest (Jesus) connect with the Old Covenant? And how does the New Covenant connect with the priest after the order of Melchizedek? This text is at the heart of the Hebrew writer’s argument about how the high priesthood of Jesus interfaces with the Old and New Covenants.

The New Above the Old*Hebrews 8:1-6*

A thin veil separates this world from the one above us where God dwells. (Sounds platonic, does it not, that things here correspond to things in the next world?) When saints worship in corporate assembly here, be advised that worship at another level is taking place above (Revelation 4–5).

The Israelites had their tabernacle in the wilderness. In many ways the tabernacle was a template of heaven and an image or metaphor of the church. But the sanctuary where Jesus dwells now is superior and above the old one. If a person had a choice of which tabernacle in which to dwell, that person should choose the better one above. Priests in the old tabernacle stood up to serve. But Jesus sat down at God’s right hand. The right hand was the seat of honor, and sitting down meant Jesus’ full work on earth was complete. Bezalel and Oholiab built the earthly tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-11), but the Lord built the heavenly one.

Priests went in and out of the old tabernacle sacrificing and serving in just the prescribed way. But that tabernacle was only a *copy* (pattern) and *shadow* of the one above. Jesus’ priesthood was superior to the former priesthood in the Old Covenant because his was established on better promises. The new is above the old.

The New Different than the Old*Hebrews 8:7-13*

While the law itself was holy and good (Romans 7:12), it was incomplete in bringing people to God due to the weakness of humanity’s flesh (the devil’s foothold). The fault of the old priesthood and covenant was not with them but with the people who attempted to live by them. “God found fault with the people.”

One of the longer quotes from the Old Testament (Jeremiah 31:31-34) was used to contrast the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. The significance of this quote cannot be overstated. This passage was clearly a high-water mark of the Old Testament. In striving to give hope to the exiled people, Jeremiah predicted a time when the New Covenant would overtake the Old Covenant. We know this quote speaks of the messianic age because Jeremiah 31:15 was quoted in Matthew 2:18 when Jesus came.

As the *Sesame Street* song says, “One of these things is not like the other.” The Old Covenant was made with old Israel (Judah). The New Covenant was made with the new Israel (church?). The Old Covenant brought God’s people out of Egypt. The New Covenant brought God’s people out of sin. The Old Covenant witnessed God’s people being unfaithful. The New Covenant witnessed God’s people obeying God from their hearts. Beyond the comparisons, the New Covenant would be written in the minds and on the hearts of God’s people as opposed to tablets of stone (Ezekiel 36:26-27). The New Covenant would not be by birth but by new birth. Finally, the New Covenant would not just push sins back (Acts 17:30; Romans 3:25; Hebrews 10:3), it would completely forgive sins. The old was almost gone (it was about AD 70). It was time for the new.

The New Within the Old*Hebrews 9:1-10*

The Hebrew writer looked back at the Old Covenant with his new “Christian” lens. He saw the new within the old. It was called typology. The first part of the text talked about the furniture and contents in the tabernacle (vv. 1-5). The second part of the text talked about the priests’ work in the tabernacle (vv. 6-10).

While connecting the predictions (types) with the fulfillments (antitypes) is not a pure science, we do see things like the light of the gospel, Communion, prayer, provision, promise, and forgiveness (themes in the New Testament) in the old tabernacle. We also see the full and complete work of Christ by shedding his blood and opening up the way to God in the old observance of the Day of Atonement. The old must give way to the new, but for those who have eyes to see, the new is actually within the old.

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WHAT'S NEW? (AND WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?)

BY DAVID FAUST

I got a new cell phone the other day—under protest. My old phone worked fine. It just didn't have enough capacity. When I tried to add another photo, a stern warning appeared: "You are DANGEROUSLY short on space." That message seemed a little over-the-top, as if the device was ready to explode.

Grudgingly I drove to the phone store where an employee the age of my grandkids asked, "How old is this phone?"

"About five years," I said.

"That's really old," he replied, shaking his head. "It's definitely time to replace it."

"But I'm used to it," I protested. "Just when I finally learn how to use a computer program or a cell phone, why is it always time for an upgrade and everything changes?"

The young man looked perplexed. I continued, "My old phone has the same fantasy football app I've used for five seasons, and I don't want to lose my stats. Plus, I'm familiar with this phone's quirks, like when I'm driving and the GPS suddenly starts giving directions in Spanish. That's funny!"

The sales rep didn't laugh, but he answered my questions politely. As we finished, he handed me a new phone and said, "Take this home and play with it for a while. You'll get used to it."

I thanked him for his help, but in my heart I grumbled, *I don't want to play with a new phone. I just want one that works!*

Adapting to Change

Do you welcome change or resist it? Change isn't always an upgrade. Some things never change, like the Lord himself, and the Scriptures, and basic human needs. But today we face a dizzying array of cultural changes—with shifts occurring not only in technology and style, but in substantive matters like worldviews, ethics, and how to understand the Bible.

When I coach younger leaders, I encourage them to consider several factors when implementing change:

The purpose of change. What is the "why"? Is the proposed change biblical and missional? Does it have the support of wise, trusted advisers and influencers?

The price of change. Are you prepared for what it will cost in time, work, and money to implement this change?

The patience change requires. Don't expect others to immediately embrace a new idea you have been considering for months. Take time to answer questions, think through the pros and cons, and explain the rationale behind proposed changes.

The people who change. Spiritual growth and healthy relationships matter more than flashy programs. Impulsive, herky-jerky leaders make church members feel like carsick passengers in the back seat speeding down a winding road. If God has trusted you with the steering wheel, care well for the passengers traveling with you.

Followers of Christ must embrace positive change because, although God himself doesn't change, he excels at making things new. When the old Mosaic covenant became "obsolete and outdated," the Lord replaced it with a New Covenant of grace and truth "established on better promises" (Hebrews 8:6, 13). "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). We're headed for a new heaven and a new earth, where God will say, "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:5).

I don't think we will need cell phones in heaven, but if we do, I'm sure they will have plenty of capacity.

Personal Challenge:

What is your personal attitude toward change? Rate yourself on a scale of 1 ("I hate change and resist it stubbornly") to 10 ("I love change and adapt to it quickly"). What changes do you sense the Lord nudging you to embrace? How can you be a force for positive change in your church? What cultural changes ought to be resisted?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How were you able to help someone see their need to put their faith in Jesus alone last week?
2. How did you see God respond to your needs last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Hebrews 8:1–9:10** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to provide a concise summary of the passage.

3. What do you learn about the Old Covenant as compared to the New Covenant in this passage?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - In what ways are some of the things we experience on earth merely copies of or patterns of the things we will experience in heaven?
 - How are they different?
 - How has Jeremiah's prophecy (8:8-12; from Jeremiah 31:31-34) come true?
 - In what ways is the New Covenant more personal, internal, and relational than the Old?
5. What do you learn about Jesus and his present ministry from this passage?
6. What do you learn about humanity?
7. What do you learn from this passage about the nature of obeying God under the New Covenant?
8. Jesus, our high priest, came as a servant (8:2; cf. Mark 10:45) and he has called us as his followers to serve (Mark 9:35; 10:43). In what specific way will you seek to serve others this week?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenges are you facing this upcoming week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Hebrews 9:11-28**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FIVE

LESSON AIM: **Anticipate the coming of Jesus, which will “bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”**

STUDY: Hebrews (Part 2)

THEME: High Priest

LESSON TEXT: Hebrews 9:11-28

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Revelation 5:9-13

BOTH PRIEST AND SACRIFICE

BY MARK SCOTT

The Bible is a bloody book—from beginning (Genesis 3:21; 4:10) to end (Revelation 5:9). One could argue that a bloodless Bible is no Bible at all. “Blood” is mentioned 11 times in the *New International Version* of our lesson text. (Of all things—to speak of blood on Halloween!) While the Bible uses the word *blood* in a literal way (Leviticus 17:14), most of the time it is a figure of speech for sacrifice and death.

Under the Old Covenant, priests would bring animals to the tabernacle and sacrifice them. The priest administered the sacrifice, but he was not the sacrifice himself. By contrast, the Messiah not only administers the sacrifice, he is the sacrifice. This is the value of double imagery.

Blood and Priest*Hebrews 9:11-14*

When Christ came to earth, he got his feet dirty with the sand in the land of Israel and taught in the physical temple in Jerusalem. But for the writer of Hebrews, Jesus’ mission while on earth was spiritual in nature. While the physical and spiritual are inextricably linked, the writer pictures Jesus entering a tabernacle that is *greater and more perfect*. It was not humanly engineered and not part of this creation as the tabernacle had been.

When Jesus died on Skull Hill, he was, spiritually speaking, entering the equivalent of the holy of holies and securing eternal redemption for people. His sacrifice was not that of animal blood but of human blood. The fruit of this salvific act was effectual from the inside out. It dealt with the *conscience* (a sort of moral umpire). This liberated the worshipper to serve the living God.

Blood and Will*Hebrews 9:15-22*

Christ could mediate this New Covenant which resulted in a *ransom* because he actually died. The writer used the human illustration of a *will* to drive home his point. A will was not put in place until the death of the person who had it drawn up. In the case of the Old Testament, the animal died. That allowed the sacrifice to be effectual.

The writer reminded the people that Moses sprinkled blood on the Ten Commandments as well as the people themselves to ratify the Law of the covenant (Exodus

24:3-8). That act symbolized their cleansing as well as the cleansing of the tabernacle. Everything got a blood bath. Then the writer offered an aside about blood. He wrote, “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” If that is a Scripture-wide principle, then the priest of the New Covenant would have to use blood as well—and he did.

Blood and Heaven*Hebrews 9:23-28*

The writer returned to something emphasized earlier. The veil between heaven and earth is thin but real. What was on earth and used in the Old Covenant had corresponding spiritual significance to what Jesus did in the New Covenant. He offered a better sacrifice—not an animal sacrifice. He did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands. That sanctuary was simply a copy of the sanctuary in heaven. Jesus came to earth, but he operated “heavenly.” By dying on Calvary’s cross, he brought heaven’s sanctuary to earth.

Unlike the priests who had to offer sacrifices again and again, Jesus offered himself once for all. In Judaism, the high priest would enter the holy of holies once each year (in the fall) with the blood of an animal. He would sprinkle that blood on the mercy seat, which sat on top of the ark of the covenant. It was a dark and somewhat foreboding place. The act was repeated each year at the same time. If Jesus had followed this same rhythm, he would have had to be crucified yearly. This would mean, spiritually speaking, that Jesus would have had to suffer many times since the *creation* (foundation or “handing down”) of the world.

But, of course, that was not necessary. Jesus *appeared* (became known or manifested) *once for all at the culmination* (end purpose) *of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself*. The deal was sealed. The deal that remains concerns the believer. All humans are terminal. Once they die, they are judged. Once Christ died, sin was atoned for. But Jesus is coming back a *second time*. (This is the closest the New Testament gets to using the language of “second coming.”) And when he returns, Christ won’t have to deal with sin anymore. Rather, he will bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

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THE LORD'S PORTMANTEAU

BY DAVID FAUST

Years ago, I coined the word *idrealism* to describe someone who is idealistic and realistic at the same time. I use my made-up word to explain what it means to live by faith. *Idrealism* is an example of a literary device known as a portmanteau.

The word *portmanteau* originally meant a large trunk or suitcase that opens into two equal parts. In time, writers used it for terms that combine two other words, like *motel* (from *motor* and *hotel*), *brunch* (breakfast combined with lunch), *podcast* (an iPod broadcast), and *smog* (smoke mingled with fog). At dinner you can experience two portmanteaus at once by using a *spork* (a spoon combined with a fork) to eat *turducken* (a turkey stuffed with duck and chicken). Do you ever fasten something with Velcro? That's a portmanteau derived from *velvet* and *crochet*.

TV portmanteaus include sitcoms, infomercials, mockumentaries (fictional stories told in documentary style), romcoms (romantic comedies) and telethons (television marathons). Pop culture gives portmanteau nicknames to couples like Bennifer (Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez), Brangelina (Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie), and Billary (Bill and Hillary Clinton). Someone quipped that if Natalie Portman married Jacques Cousteau, they could be called Portmanteau.

The Sacrifice and the Sacrificer

God puts together some unexpected combinations. Lions and lambs don't have much in common, but Scripture uses both to illustrate the glory of Jesus Christ. The twelve apostles included an unlikely combination of personalities, like Matthew the tax collector (whose work required collaborating with the Romans) and Simon the zealot (who most likely despised the Romans). First-century Jews and Gentiles seemed irreconcilable, but the Lord brought them together as one body.

The incarnation required a mysterious intermingling of divinity and humanity. "For in Christ all the fullness of

the Deity lives in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9), yet, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity" (Hebrews 2:14). Revelation 7:17 says "the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd." As the Lamb, Christ acts like a member of the flock who identifies with the sheep; yet simultaneously, as the Good Shepherd, he is the leader who guides and protects the flock.

A fascinating combination appears in the book of Hebrews, which portrays Christ as both the ultimate sacrifice for sin and the high priest who stands before the altar. Christ is both the sacrifice and the sacrificer—the offering and the offerer—the gift and the giver at the same time. As the priest, he serves as our intermediary. As the sacrifice, his own precious blood (not the blood of animals) atones for our sins. He came "to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

It took incredible ingenuity and sacrificial love to secure our salvation! How could sinful people like us stand in the presence of the holy God? How could God uphold his justice while showing mercy and lavishing his grace upon us? Why was the sinless high priest willing to lay his own life on the altar as the sacrifice for our sin? How could "love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other" (Psalm 85:10)?

Somehow God brought it all together at Calvary, like two wooden beams coming together to form a cross.

Personal Challenge:

Think about the personal and theological significance of Jesus' death on the cross. What did his sacrifice mean for the world? What does it mean for you as an individual? Write or say aloud a prayer expressing praise for the great high priest who sacrificed himself for your sin.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How did you serve others last week?
2. What challenges did you face last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Hebrews 9:11-28** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to provide a summary of the passage. Remind them to keep it to a minute or less.

3. What functions does blood play in both the Old and New Covenants?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - What roles does Christ play for our salvation as shown in this passage?
 - Contrast the human-built tabernacle/sanctuary with the heavenly one and the activities that happen within each. How are they different and how are they the same? What do you learn?
 - What is the difference between being made "outwardly clean" and having our consciences cleansed?
 - Why should people be careful of depending too heavily on things made with human hands, especially in their spiritual lives?
 - Look at the word *appear/appeared* in verses 24-28, and the timing of each appearance by Christ. What does this summary statement of Christ's finished work reveal to you?
5. What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?
6. What do you learn about humanity?
7. Under the Old Covenant, people tried to be right with God by perfectly obeying him, and when they failed, they needed sacrifices offered again and again to cleanse them of their sins. As New Covenant believers, however, Jesus has made us right with God through his once-for-all sacrifice. What is our motivation, then, for obeying God? (See John 14:23-24; cf. 1 John 2:4-6; 2 John 5-7.)
8. Every person must make a choice between the earthly and the heavenly, between the temporary and the eternal, between earthly treasures and treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20). How might you use this passage (and others like it) to help someone make the better choice?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What challenges are you facing this upcoming week?

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.