

HEBREWS CHAPTER 7

[V] THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST SUPERSEDED THE LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD (7:1-28)

Hebrews chapter 7 teaches a change of priesthood (and a change of the Old Testament law).

The writer of Hebrews teaches the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus Christ to the priesthood of the Old Testament for the following reasons:

1. The priesthood of Christ is the antitype of the type, Melchizedek the priest (7:1-3).

7:1. Melchizedek in the bible.

The only record about Melchizedek in the Bible is found in Genesis 14:18-20 and Psalm 110:4. For the writer of the book of Hebrews this is a very important argument that proves the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus Christ. He makes a typological exegesis and regards Melchizedek as a type of Jesus Christ.

Melchizedek is a priest of “God Most High” (Θεος υψιστος), a current divine title among Jews for the Lord, the God of the bible (Acts 7:48) and among the Greeks for Zeus, who is of course not the God of the bible (Acts 16:17). The name nevertheless provides *a common denominator in referring to ‘the supreme God’* (7:1).

The biblical narrative and archaeology points to the Elamite king, Chedorlaomer, who with three allied kings raided Transjordan and the Negev, defeated the city-states around the Jordan river and carried off a large number of captives, including Lot, the nephew of Abraham. Abraham and his neighbours set off in pursuit, overtook them at Damascus, launched a surprise attack, put them to flight and recovered the captives and plunder. On the return journey, Abraham was met by the king of Salem (Jerusalem), Melchizedek, who was also ‘priest of God Most High, Creator (Hebrew: qoneh) of heaven and earth’ (Gen 14:19,22). Melchizedek blessed Abraham and Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils.

7:2. The writer of Hebrews finds as much significance in what is not said about Melchizedek as he does in what is said about him. In the natural order, the name “Melchizedek” means ‘king of righteousness’ (Hebrew: mele+ zedek) and the title “king of Salem” includes the word ‘peace’ (Hebrew: salem). The writer of Hebrews uses him as an example in explaining the gospel and this is quite fitting, because in the spiritual order, peace with God is based upon the righteousness of God. Isaiah 32:17 says, “The work of righteousness shall be peace”. And Romans 5:1 says, “Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God” (7:2).

7:3. When the writer refers to Melchizedek as being “without father and mother or genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life”, it does not mean that he regarded him as a biological anomaly or an angel in disguise. Historically, Melchizedek appears to have belonged to a dynasty of priest-kings in which he had both predecessors and successors. However, nothing is recorded in the Bible about this. For the writer, the silences of Scripture were as much due to divine inspiration as were its statements. In the biblical record nothing is said about his ancestry or progeny, birth or death. He appears and disappears within the biblical revelation as “a living person”. This makes him a fitting type of Christ (7:3). He remains a priest ‘forever’ or ‘without interruption’ or ‘continually’ (διηνεκης).

The writer has *the eternal being* of the Son of God in view and not his human life (cf. for his human ancestry: our Lord descended from Judah, Hebrews 7:14). In his eternal being, the Son of God has *really*, as Melchizedek has *typically*, “neither beginning of days nor end of life”. And just as Melchizedek remains a priest continually for the duration of his appearance in the biblical narrative, so the exalted Son of God at the right hand of God remains a priest continually without qualification (cf. 7:23-25). It is not the type that determines the antitype, but *the antitype that determines the type*: Jesus is not portrayed after the pattern of Melchizedek, but Melchizedek is “made like/ made as a copy” (αφωμοιωμενος<αφωμοιαω)(participle perfect passive) of the Son of God. Similarly, the earthly sanctuary is ‘a copy’ of the heavenly sanctuary, in which Christ discharges his high-priestly ministry, and not vice versa (8:2-5).

2. The priesthood of Christ is great, because Melchizedek is great (7:4-10).

That Melchizedek should be greater than Abraham (as Gen 14 clearly indicates) constituted a problem for Jewish exegetes. Earlier Jews said that Melchizedek was Shem, whose life according to the Masoretic text overlapped Abraham’s. Later Jews said that Melchizedek’s made the mistake to first bless Abraham before he blessed God and straightway the priesthood was given to Abraham. God’s words in Psalm 110:1 makes Abraham sit at God’s right hand and Psalm 110:4 makes Abraham the high priest forever. Abraham’s priesthood was again superseded by that of Levi, who was still in the loins of his ancestor, Abraham (TB Nedarim, 32b).

7:4. Abraham was a great man indeed. He was “a mighty prince” to his neighbours (Gen 23:6) and called “God’s friend” (2 Chron 20:8). Yet, in the account of his meeting with Melchizedek, the latter appears greater than the first. The superior greatness of Melchizedek is evident from three reasons: he accepted tithes from Abraham, he bestowed his blessing on Abraham and he is declared to be living. ‘Consider’ (θεωρειτε)(imperative present active) these arguments:

a. Melchizedek accepted a tenth from Abraham.

7:4-6a,9-10. The patriarch Abraham gave a tenth (δεκατη) of the spoils which were recovered from the invading kings to Melchizedek. The dedication of one tenth of the spoils of war to a deity (on whose behalf his priest acted) was practised among the Greeks and other nations, but is not attested for in Israel. The institution of 'the holy war' in Israel devoted everything to God according to the law of the ban (Hebrew: herem)(Dt 7:2).

Much later the Old Testament law required that the Israelites 'give a tenth' (αποδεκατου) of certain possessions to their brothers, the Levitical "priesthood (priestly office, priestly service)(ιερατεια)(Num 18:21,26), even though they also 'descended' (εξεληλυθοτα<εξερξομαι)(participle perfect active) from Abraham. Although during the Old Testament period the Levites collected the tithes, by the 1st century A.D. the priests administrated the tithes. It may have been this knowledge that caused the writer to say that "the priests collected the tithes" (7:5).

"Having come forth out of the loins of Abraham" (7:5) is corporate thinking. In biblical thought, an ancestor is regarded as containing within himself, his 'loins' or 'hip' or 'waist' as reproductive organ (οσφυς), all his descendants (Gen 25:23; Mal 1:2-4; Rom 5:12)(cf. 7:9-10). Thus, Abraham is regarded as containing in himself his ancestors, both the Israelites and the Levites and priests. Levi was Abraham's great-grandson and was not yet born when Abraham gave a tenth to Melchizedek. And thus (ως επος ειπειν)(so to speak, 7:10), the Old Testament priests are regarded as having given tithes in and through Abraham to the priest Melchizedek, who did not 'trace his descent' (γενεαλογουμενος) (participle present medium) from Levi. This way of corporate (not individual) thinking is also reflected in Genesis 25:23, where 'two nations' are in Rebekkah's womb (cf. Mal 1:2-3; Rom 9:11-13), and Romans 5:12, where "all people have sinned" in Adam's sin.

This proves that the earlier priesthood of Melchizedek enjoyed a higher status than the later priesthood of the Levites. That this higher status is *permanent* is also indicated by the two perfect verbs: Melchizedek "had taken or received or collected a tithe" (δεδεκατωκεν)(indicative perfect active) from Abraham (7:6,9) and that tithe is still his. And Melchizedek "had blessed" (εβλογηκεν)(indicative perfect active) Abraham (7:6) and that blessing remains (7:4-6a)!

b. Melchizedek blessed Abraham.

7:6b-7. 'Without any dispute' (contradiction)(not 'doubt' (χωρις αντιλογιας), 'the lesser or inferior' (ελαττον) is 'blessed' (εβλογειται)(indicative present passive) by 'the better, greater or superior' (κρειττων)(7:6b-7).

c. Melchizedek lives.

7:8. Another token of Melchizedek's superiority to the Levitical priesthood is that the biblical record nowhere relates the fact that Melchizedek lost his priestly office by death, whereas there are many records of the Levitical priests who died and had to hand on their duty and dignity to their heirs. "It is being witnessed or reported" (μαρτυρουμενος) "that he lives" (οτι ζη+ι)(indicative present active) in the sense that we never read of him otherwise than as 'a living person'. Thus, *so far as the biblical record goes*, Melchizedek has "no end of life". Likewise, of Christ it can be said that he lives in the sense that, having died once for all and risen from the dead, he is alive for evermore (cf. Rom 6:9; Rev 1:18)(7:8).

3. The priesthood of Christ is not based on the Old Testament Levitical priesthood (7:11-14).

(based on ancestry and making nothing perfect)

In God's decree, two things must be superseded: the priesthood of the Old Testament and the law of the Old Testament (7:11-14). The reasons for this supersession is given in the rest of the chapter: *Both the Old Testament priesthood and the Old Testament law belonged to the temporary order and were ineffective (unable to bring perfection)(7:15-19). The Old Testament covenant had no guarantee that it could or would be fulfilled (7:20-22).* The Old Testament priesthood was characterised by many mortal priests who could never complete their task (7:23-25). The Old Testament priesthood never possessed a sinless priest (7:26-28).

a. A change of priesthood.

The Qumran literature shows that some Jewish expectation did look forward to a time of restoration in which the high priest (the Messiah of Aaron) would take precedence over the Davidic prince (the Messiah of Judah). This was probably influenced by the description of the ideal commonwealth in Ezekiel 40-48, where the priesthood takes practical precedence over the prince. This expectation might have lived among the Hebrews.

7:11. Under the Levitical priesthood, the people of Israel "were furnished with (given)" the law (νενομοθετηται <νομοθετηομαι)(indicative perfect passive), that is, the Levitical priesthood kept the Mosaic Law alive and functioning among the people. It cannot be argued that the Levitical priesthood superseded that of Melchizedek, because at the time that the Levitical priesthood was well established God's word hailed the Messiah of David's line as "a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4). If God's plan with the Levitical priesthood (ιερωσυνη)(more abstract than 'ιερατεια' 7:5, emphasising the worth or honour of the office) brought 'perfection' (τελειωσις) in the sense of

bringing direct and unfettered access to God, then why was there a need for “another priest” (ετερον ιερα) “to arise” (ανιστασθαι<ανιστημι)(infinitive present medium), one after the order of Melchizedek? The Levitical priesthood, however, was neither designed nor competent to inaugurate the age of fulfilment (perfection). It was *designed to be temporary and only for Israel during the Old Testament period*, because God himself decreed another priesthood after an eternal order.

b. A change of law.

Jesus taught that he did not come to ‘destroy’ or ‘annul’ (καταλυσαι<καταλυω)(infinitive aorist active) the law, but to ‘fulfil’ (πληρωσαι<πληρωω)(infinitive aorist active) the law (Mt 5:17).

7:12. The writer to the Hebrews teaches that the Levitical priesthood was instituted under the Law of Moses and formed an integral part of it. Thus, *when there is a change* (μετατιτεμενης<μετατιτημι)(participle present passive) *of priesthood, there must also be a change* (μεταθεσις) *of the law.* The word ‘μεταθεσις’ in Hebrews 7:12 and in Hebrews 12:27 implies not merely ‘a change’, but ‘an abrogation’ or ‘removal’ (cf. ‘αθετησις’ in Hebrews 7:18). If the Levitical priesthood was instituted for a temporary purpose, to be brought to an end when the age of fulfilment dawned, the same must be true of the law under which that priesthood was instituted!

7:13-14. The Law of Moses spoke of a priesthood coming from the tribe of Levi, but God’s word spoke of a new priest coming from the tribe of Judah. The Law of Moses says nothing about a priest from the tribe of Judah. Jesus “shared or partook or belonged to” (μετεσχηκεν<μετεχω)(indicative perfect active) another tribe. The choice of this word ‘μετεχω’ points to the voluntary assumption of humanity by Jesus. It is not said simply that he was born of another tribe, but that of his own will he was born so. The perfect tense stresses a condition of fact, both historic and official. He “sprung up or arose (like the sun to prominence)” (ανατεταλκεν<ανατελλω)(indicative perfect active) from that tribe. *As far as the law of the Old Testament is concerned*, no man in the tribe of Judah has ever “served” (προσεσκεν>προσεχω) (indicative perfect active) at the altar or the place of sacrifice. However, *as far as the historical books of the Old Testament are concerned*, David and Solomon had offered sacrifices on various occasions (cf. 2 Sam 6:13,17-18; 24:25; 1 Ki 3:4; 8:62-64)!

Like the writer of Hebrews, the apostle Paul also concluded that the Old Testament law was temporary. “The law was our ‘tutor’ or ‘schoolteacher’ put in charge to lead us to Christ. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law” (Gal 3:24-25). While Paul thinks of ‘the law’ (νομος) as a means designed to promote people’s awareness of sin (Rom 7:7) and not (as he once believed) to procure their justification before God, the writer of Hebrews thinks rather of the law as the sacrificial cultus as something that could never effectively remove sin (Heb 10:1-4). While Paul has *the moral law* in mind, the writer of Hebrews has *the ceremonial law* in mind! However, both agree that *the law was a temporary decree of God*, valid only until Jesus Christ came to inaugurate the age of perfection!

4. The priesthood of Christ is superior, because it is permanent and effective (7:15-19).

(based on an indestructible life and saving completely)

The reason why both the Old Testament priesthood and Old Testament law had to be superseded, is that they both belonged to the temporary order and were ineffective (unable to bring perfection). The priesthood of the Old Testament was characterised by externalities and transience and therefore had to be set aside. God raised up another priest whose priesthood is characterised by permanence and effectiveness. The priesthood of Jesus Christ enables people to draw near to God and to become perfect.

a. The priesthood characterised by externalities and transience contrasted with the priesthood characterised by permanence and effectiveness.

7:15-16a. The Levitical priesthood was instituted not simply “on the basis of a regulation of his ancestry” (NIV), but on the basis of “the law of a carnal commandment” (κατα νομον εντολης σαρκινης γεγονεν<γινομαι)(indicative perfect active), that is, it was based on ‘a system of earth-bound or external rules, like the physical descent of the priests, the hand-made sanctuary and animal sacrifices (the Mosaic Law)’ and remained such an earthbound priesthood. It is characterised by *transience and externalities of religion.*

7:16b-17. In contrast, this ‘other priest’ (ιερευς ετερος) ‘was raised up’ (ανισταται<ανιστημι)(indicative present medium)(cf. 7:11) on the basis of ‘the power of an endless or indestructible life’ (κατα δυναμιν ζωης ακαταλυτου), because Psalm 110:4 witnesses of him, ‘you are a priest for ever’. It is characterised by *permanence and effectiveness.* No Levitical priest is ever described as an everlasting priest. If the words ‘for ever’ were applied to a dynasty of priests, it could only be understood of *a hereditary succession of indefinite duration* (Ex 40:15; Num 25:13). *Jeremiah 33:14-26 is missing in the Greek text and the Hebrew text may possibly be a much later Jewish addition.* In contrast, Jesus Christ is immortal – having died once for all and having arisen from the dead, he exercises his function in the power of a life that can never be destroyed.

b. The setting aside of the earlier regulation and the introduction of a better hope.

7:18-19. Thus, there came about an ‘annulment’ or ‘setting aside’ or ‘cancellation’ or ‘abrogation’ (αθετησις)(cf. Mark 7:9) of the earlier law that instituted the Levitical priesthood. The word ‘cancellation’ was a legal term used in the papyri for the cancellation or annulment of a legal enactment. It is a much stronger word than the word ‘change’ (μεταθεσις) (7:12). The Old Testament ceremonial law was ‘weak’ (ασθενεες) and ‘useless’ or ‘profitless’ (ανωφελεις) and ‘made nothing perfect’ or ‘brought nothing to the goal’ (ετελειωσεν)(indicative aorist active). It brought no real peace of conscience and no immediate access to God!

This does not mean that faithful men and women in the Old Testament period did not enjoy peace of conscience and a sense of the nearness of God (cf. Ps 32:1-2; 73:28). But these men experienced peace of conscience and the nearness of God, *not because of keeping the law, but because they believed!* Their experience had nothing to do with keeping the Mosaic Law. *The whole ceremonial (ritual) law of the Old Testament was calculated to keep people at a distance from God rather than to bring them near to God.* With the first coming of Jesus Christ this ceremonial law is (fulfilled and) ‘set aside’ (7:18-19a; cf. Mt 5:17; Eph 2:14-15; Col 2:14).

“The law made nothing perfect, but ‘an introduction’ or ‘a bringing in addition to’ (επεισγωγη) of a better hope (does)”. This hope, introduced in the gospel in the New Testament, is better, because it accomplishes what was impossible under the old ceremonial law in the Old Testament. It enables believers in Christ to draw near to God (cf. Hebrews 4:16). Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, all people who believe have forgiveness of sins, have a clear conscience and have an uninhibited access to fellowship with God!

5. The priesthood of Christ is superior, because God guarantees the fulfilment of the covenant (7:20-22).

(based on God’s sworn oath)

The priesthood of the Old Testament had to be superseded, because it could not guarantee the fulfilment of the Old Testament covenant. *While the Old Testament covenant had a mediator, but no guarantor, the new covenant has a mediator and a guarantor.* Therefore also the Old Testament covenant in the sense of the Mosaic Law had to be superseded. .

a. The new priest is confirmed by God’s oath.

7:20-21. While the inauguration of the Levitical priesthood rested on a divine command (Ex 28:1), the priesthood of Christ rests on a divine oath, “the taking of an oath” (ορκωμοσια). The supreme oath in Israel is, “as surely as the Lord lives”. Abraham himself swore by God and made others do the same (cf. Gen 14:22; 21:23-24; 24:3). But because God has none greater than himself by whom to swear, he swears by himself, “As sure as I live” (Num 14:28; Dt 32:40; Jer 22:24; Ez 14:16,18,20; Rom 14:11). While the bare word of God is guarantee enough, confirming it with an oath makes assurance double sure. The purpose of God’s oath is to make the unchanging nature of God’s purpose very clear to the heirs of what he promised (6:17). The institution of the Levitical priesthood was never accompanied by God’s oath. People were “made priests and acted as priests” (εισιν ... γεγονοντες)(participle perfect active). The perfect tense marks the imparting as well as possession of the office of priesthood. But in Psalm 110:4, the appointment of Jesus Christ as priest was confirmed by God’s oath, God ‘swearing’ or ‘taking an oath’ (ωμοσεν<ομνυμι)(indicative aorist active) and not ‘regretting’ or ‘repenting’ or best ‘changing his mind’ (μεταμεληθησεται<μεταμελομαι)(indicative future passive). The purpose of God’s oath is to show the unchanging nature of his purpose with Jesus Christ and to suggest the superior dignity of his priesthood.

b. The new covenant is a better covenant. (The first occurrence of the word ‘covenant’ in Hebrews).

7:22. The divine oath became the “guarantee” of “a better covenant” (κρειττονος διαθηκης γεγονεν)(indicative perfect active). The word ‘covenant’ means ‘contract’, ‘agreement’ or ‘testament’. The word ‘guarantee’ or ‘surety’ (εγγυος) is frequently used in common Greek in legal and other documents in the sense of ‘a surety’ or ‘bond’ or ‘bail’ or ‘collateral’ or ‘guarantee’ that a promise would be fulfilled or ‘guarantor’ or ‘one who stands security’. The ‘guarantor’ undertakes a weightier responsibility than the ‘mediator’ (μεσιτης)(8:6; 9:15; 12:24), because he is answerable for the fulfilment of the obligation which he guarantees. Note the relationship between the functions of a mediator and a guarantor. The old covenant had a mediator (cf. Gal 3:19) but no guarantor. There was no one to guarantee the fulfilment of the people’s undertaking. The people promised to God, “We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey” (Ex 24:7), but no one guaranteed that this would actually happen! In comparison, the new covenant has a mediator and a guarantor! *Jesus Christ not only mediates the covenant between God and mankind, but also guarantees the perpetual fulfilment of the covenant, which he mediates, on the manward side as well as on the Godward side.* As the Son of God, he confirms God’s eternal covenant with his people and as his people’s representative, he satisfies its terms with perfect acceptance in God’s sight.

6. The priesthood of Christ is superior, because it is non-transferable and never-ending (7:23-25).

(based on the fact that Christ always lives)

The priesthood of the Old Testament had to be superseded, because it was characterised by many mortal priests who could never complete their tasks.

a. The priesthood of the Old Testament was characterised by discontinuance and imperfection.

7:23. It was characterised by *discontinuance*. If the words ‘for ever’ were applied to a dynasty of priests, it could only be understood of a *hereditary succession of indefinite duration* (cf. 7:17). There were “many” priests in the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament covenant (at the same time and in succession) that followed one another up, because death prevented or hindered them from continuing or remaining in their office. Generation after generation, the high priests in Israel died and their office was passed on to another high priest (Num 20:28; Josh 24:33). The historian Josephus (Antiquities 20:227) calculated that there had been 83 high priests in Israel from Aaron to the fall of the second temple in A.D. 70.

It was also characterised by *imperfection*. People, who counted on their high priest to intercede for them with God, were suddenly confronted with the fact that he died and was replaced by another high priest, who did not know their situation. People felt that the new high priest was less qualified to discharge his duties as far as their personal needs were concerned.

b. The priesthood of Jesus Christ is non-transferable and never-ending.

7:24. But because Jesus Christ ‘remains’ (μενειν) forever, his priesthood is ‘unchangeable’ or ‘not transmittable’ or ‘non-transferable’ or ‘not able to be passed on to others’ or ‘without successors’ (απαραβατον< α+παραβαινω, ‘not deviate-able’). The New Testament teaches no succession of bishops (cf. Mt 16:18)!

7:25. Therefore, people who have Jesus Christ as their Mediator and Guarantor, have in him a Saviour whose saving power is available ‘εις το παντελες’. This expression can have the temporal sense: ‘for all time’ or ‘without end’ (Latin Vulgate, Syrian, Coptic translations) or ‘qualitative sense: ‘complete’ (Armenian translation, NIV, cf. Luke 13:11). It probably has both senses. The priesthood of Jesus Christ is not liable to the mischance of mortal priests or the changing circumstances of this life. Believers have in him a Saviour whose salvation, which he secured by his death and resurrection, is qualitatively ‘complete’ and temporally ‘for all time’!

Jesus Christ effectively saves people, because he effectively intercedes for them in God’s presence. He never stops “to intercede” (εντυγγανειν)(infinitive present active) for them in the presence of God (7:25; Isa 53:12; Lk 22:32; Jn 17:1-26; Rom 8:33-34; 1 Jn 2:1-2). He should not be thought of as “an orante, *standing* before God the Father with outstretched arms, like the figures in the mosaics of the catacombs, and with strong crying and tears pleading our cause in the presence of a reluctant God’. He should be thought of as ‘the *enthroned* Priest-King, asking whatever he wills from God the Father who always hears and grants his requests. Our Lord’s life in heaven is his prayer” (Swete, ‘The ascended Christ’, London 1912). While the rabbinical scholars assigned an intercessory function to angels and the Roman Catholics to Mary and the saints, the writer makes it perfectly clear that Christ is the only mediator and intercessor!

7. The priesthood of Christ is superior, because of the perfect character of Christ (7:26-28).

(based on the fact that Christ is sinless)

The priesthood of the Old Testament had to be superseded, because it never possessed a sinless priest. The final argument for the superiority of the priesthood of Christ is that the new priest is Jesus. Jesus is a high priest that meets our needs perfectly. He has a unique perfect character. He brought a unique perfect sacrifice that dealt with sin once for all. Thus, Jesus perfectly qualifies to be the Saviour and High Priest of the new covenant.

a. Jesus Christ is a high priest that meets our needs perfectly.

7:26a. “Such a high priest does indeed ‘suit’ or ‘fit our condition’ or ‘meet our need’ (επρεπεν<πρεπω)(indicative imperfect active). The imperfect stresses the continuance. Jesus Christ was resurrected and lives forever. Also his human nature has become immortal and glorious (1 Cor 15:42-44). By God’s oath, he received a high priesthood forever. His high priesthood comprises of the following:

i) Jesus Christ is the unique ‘mediator’ between God and man, because in him God draws near to people and in him people may draw near to God, with the assurance of constant and immediate access.

ii) Jesus Christ is the unique ‘guarantor’ of God’s new covenant, because he guarantees the complete fulfilment of both God’s part and man’s part in that covenant in God’s sight.

iii) Jesus Christ is the unique ‘high priest’, merciful and faithful, who ensures people’s never-failing acceptance before God through his sacrifice of atonement for their sins (2:17); is able to help them in their temptations (2:18); sympathises with their weaknesses (4:15); ensures that they always find mercy and grace to help them in their time of need (4:16); never stops to intercede for them in the presence of God (7:25).

His once-completed self-offering is utterly acceptable and efficacious. His contact with the Father is immediate and unbroken. His priestly ministry on behalf of his people is never-ending. Therefore, the salvation which he secures to them is 'never-ending' (in temporal sense) as well as 'absolute', 'complete', 'fully', 'wholly', 'entirely' (in qualitative sense)!

b. Jesus has a unique perfect character.

7:26b. While in the Old Testament, the high priest of Israel was never personally free from sin, in the New Testament (new covenant), the new and permanent high priest (αρχιερεως), Jesus Christ, is absolutely perfect. He is 'holy' (οσιος)(Hebrew: chasid), that is, 'holy' or 'godly in manner', 'pleasing to God'. He is 'blameless' or 'free from evil' (ακακος), that is, 'the absence of all that is bad or wrong'. He is 'pure' or 'free from defilement' (αμιωντος), that is, 'not merely ritual cleanliness, but moral purity'. While the Jewish philosopher, Philo, regarded the Logos in the realm of ideas as the ideal high priest, free from all defilement here on earth, the writer of Hebrews says that Jesus Christ preserved his purity even when, in his incarnation, he walked among defiled people in a defiled world! Although Jesus Christ came into the world "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3), that is, he shared our weak human nature, he lived amongst sinners, received sinners, ate with sinners, was known as the friend of sinners, yet he is "set apart from sinners" (κεχωρισμενος απο των αμαρτων < χωριζω)(participle perfect passive). The perfect tense suggests that he is permanently (forever) in a class separate from sinners. In his human nature, he remained completely separate from sin in all its forms and completely dedicated to God the Father (cf. 4:15; Jn 8:46). The Levitical high priest was not personally free from sin, but was ceremonially and temporally set apart from his fellows for the proper discharge of his sacred functions. In contrast, Jesus Christ did not need *to be set apart* in any such ceremonial manner, because he is permanently in a class separate from all sinners. On the one hand, his separation from sin is inward and moral, not merely outward and ceremonial. On the other hand his separation from sin is the consequence of his now being exalted to the right hand of God, withdrawn from the midst of a sinful world.

c. Jesus brought a unique sacrifice that dealt with sin once for all.

7:27. The Old Testament high priests had to offer daily sacrifices, first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people of Israel. The high priest brought a *yearly* sacrifice on the Day of Atonement to make atonement for his own sins and that of his household (Lev 16:6). But he often had to bring such a sacrifice *daily* to make atonement for his inadvertent sins in order not to bring guilt on the people of Israel (Lev 4:3). According to Philo "the high priest ... day by day offers prayers and sacrifices ...". But Jesus had no need to present a daily sacrifice, nor even a yearly sacrifice, either for his own sins or for the sins of his people. For himself, he had no need to be set apart in any such ceremonial manner. For other people, "he sacrificed for their sins *once for all* when he offered himself". The word "once for all" (εφαπαξ, απαξ) is used repeatedly in the book of Hebrews to convey the finality and perfection of the self-offering of Christ (6:4; 7:27; 9:7,26,27,28; 10:2; 12:26,27). He 'offered up' or 'sacrificed' himself (εαυτον ανενεγκας < αναφερω)(participle aorist active). The writer of Hebrews need not look for extra-biblical precedents to enable him to interpret the death of Jesus in terms of a voluntary sin offering. It was prophesied in the Old Testament (cf. Isa 53:10) and Jesus himself envisaged his death as such (cf. Mk 10:45; 14:21).

The Maccabaeen martyrs yielded up their lives with the confidence that they would be accepted as an atonement on behalf of their fellow-Israelites, cf. 2 Mac 7:3f; 4 Mac 6:27ff; 17:22; 18:4. Also the Qumran sectarians believed that their piety and privations would make propitiation for the land of Israel, cf. Rule of Community, Qumran cave 1, 3:6-12; 4:20f; 5:6f; 9:3-5. Note that also the Roman Catholic practice of daily mass or Eucharist cannot be deducted from the New Testament teaching.

d. Thus, Jesus perfectly qualifies to be the Saviour and High Priest of the new covenant.

7:28. The *temporary* priesthood after the order of Levi or Aaron was designed to be superseded by the *perpetual* priesthood after the order of Melchizedek.

The Old Testament law 'appointed' or 'constituted' (καθιστησιν)(indicative present active) a high priest that was weak. The present tense implies that the time when this letter was written, the Levitical priesthood was still functioning, with the further implication that the Jerusalem temple was still standing. But this Old Testament priesthood was superseded at the moment Jesus Christ came during his first coming. The word of God's oath, which came after the law, appoints a Son that is perfected (τετελειωμενον)(participle perfect passive) for evermore, that is, 'perfectly qualified for evermore'. His perfection consists in being forever qualified to be the Saviour and High Priest of his people. His priesthood was absolutely 'efficacious' or 'sure to produce the desired effect' and 'eternally suited to meet his people's need'.