

Script: Pastor Frank R. Johnson

## What More Can God Say?<sup>1</sup> (On Hebrews)

### “The Permanent Priesthood of Jesus”

Hebrews 7:1-28

Take a first look.

**DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE GUY WHO WAS FLYING FROM SAN FRANCISCO TO LOS ANGELES?** My cousin-in-law Dan Smith sent this to me a few years ago. It's told in the first person. "I was flying from San Francisco to Los Angeles. By the time we took off, there had been a 45-minute delay and everybody on board was upset. Unexpectedly, we stopped in Sacramento on the way. The flight attendant explained there would be another 45-minute delay, and if we wanted to get off the aircraft, we would reboard in 30 minutes. Everybody got off the plane except one gentleman who was blind. I noticed him as I walked by and could tell he had flown before because his Seeing Eye dog lay quietly underneath the seats in front of him throughout the entire flight. I could also tell he had flown this very flight before because the pilot approached him, and calling him by name, said, 'Keith, we're in Sacramento for almost an hour. Would you like to get off and stretch your legs?' Keith replied, 'No thanks, but maybe my dog would like to stretch his legs.' Picture this ... All the people in the gate area came to a complete quiet standstill when they looked up and saw the pilot walk off the plane with the Seeing Eye dog! The pilot was even wearing sunglasses. People scattered. They not only tried to change planes; they also were trying to change airlines!"<sup>2</sup>

There is another debate going on right now about airlines giving priority to "diversity hires." Let me make one statement about that: when it comes to boarding the airplane, my only concern is about the *competence* of the crew. That should always be the priority when the airline hires people to be responsible for the lives of all those airline passengers. Other considerations should *always* come after that.

It is all about whom you put your trust in, isn't it!?

**I. WHY WAS PAUL SO UPSET BY THE GALATIAN CHRISTIANS SEEMING RETURN TO THE FAITH OF THEIR ANCESTORS?** Read the book of Galatians to find out! But you could also consider this passage in that hot letter (**Galatians 3:1-5, NIV**): "*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?*"

Upset is an understatement! Paul was severely chapped at these Christians. They were regressing, not moving forward. The entire argument of the book of Hebrews runs parallel to the book of Galatians (and the book of Romans, for that matter). The Old Covenant prepares the way for the New Covenant. The shadow cast by the coming of Jesus the Christ stretched back through history. The Old Testament events and institutions prepared the world for the coming of Jesus. He is God's final word to humanity.

**HE HAS NOW COME!**

**II. THE CENTRAL ROLE THAT JESUS CAME TO PLAY WAS TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN GOD AND HUMANITY.** He came to be the *Priest* of all humanity.

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Ray Stedman for this thematic question.

<sup>2</sup> Dan Smith, Silicon Valley Consultants, via email, 5-17-1999.

III. THE WRITER OF HEBREWS DEVELOPS THIS THEME VERY THOROUGHLY. He begins by comparing Jesus to a shadowy Old Testament figure that appears briefly in the story of Abraham. That man was Melchizedek. In making the comparison, he claims that Jesus has established a *permanent priesthood*.

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Take a closer look at Hebrews 7:1-10.

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Translation: Hebrews 7:1-10

(1) For this “Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God,” the one “who met Abraham while he was returning from the slaughter of the kings” and “blessed him,” (2) to whom “Abraham apportioned a tenth of everything”—which is first interpreted “king of Righteousness” but then also “king of Salem,” which is “King of Peace”—(3) without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but having been made like the Son of God, he abides a priest for all time.

(4) But look at how great this one is, to whom Abraham the Patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils. (5) And the ones from the sons of Levi who are receiving the priesthood have command to receive a tenth from the people according to the law, that is their brothers, although he has come out of the loins of Abraham; (6) but the one not having his descent from them has received a tenth from Abraham and has blessed the one having the promises. (7) Now beyond all doubt the lesser is blessed by the greater. (8) And here dying people received tenths, but there giving witness that he lives. (9) And so to speak, through Abraham Levi, while receiving the tenth, has paid the tenth; (10) for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met with him.

### **I. THE PERMANENT PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS IS FORESHADOWED BY THE STORY OF MELCHIZEDEK. 7:1-10**

1. *Melchizedek appeared in the Old Testament story during the time of Abraham, after Abraham returned from the defeat of the kings. See Genesis 14:17-24.*

Note some of the facts of the story: After Abraham rescued his nephew Lot from abduction by rival kings to the area where Lot lived, Melchizedek, king of Salem, came out to meet him. Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything from the spoils of the battle. The writer makes much of every detail of this story. He even applies the fact that no genealogical record exists for this shadowy figure. See verse 3.

2. *The meanings of his name and title suggest the ultimate ministry of Jesus. His name means “king of righteousness.” This suggests the role of the Messiah Jesus as the One Who would have a righteous rule and Who would bring a righteous standing before God to His people.*

*His title was “king of Salem,” which means “king of peace.” Ultimately, Jesus would bring peace to those who believed in Him: peace in their hearts, peace with God, and the potential for peace with everyone else.*

A—Have each of us found a right standing with God and peace through the Lord Jesus Christ?
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**I—We can place the burden of our hearts on Him.** I have read that when walking through the rural roads of India, you will occasionally come across a post with a sturdy shelf about shoulder height. These posts are called “Soma Tonga,” which means “resting place.” As people travel on foot, they can stop at a Soma Tonga and place their heavy load on the shelf for relief. Once rested, they can then continue their journey. Christians in those locations refer to Jesus as “My Soma Tonga,” My Resting Place.<sup>3</sup> Is this not Jesus’ invitation to all of us? *“Come to Me, all who are growing weary and have become burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls; for My yoke is easy to bear and My burden is light”* (Matthew 11:28-30, FJV).

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<sup>3</sup> McHenry’s notes.

We find a right standing before God and peace in our souls when we open our hearts fully to Jesus Christ.

3. *Abraham's giving of the tenth to Melchizedek suggests the greatness of the man and by comparison the greatness of Jesus Christ.* The Levitical priests were all descendants of Abraham, who, in some sense "paid the tenth through Abraham." So, there were at least two facets of the greatness of Melchizedek:

- a. He blessed Abraham. The lesser is blessed by the greater.
- b. He received the tenth from Abraham. The greater received the tithe from the lessor.

A—Even with the greatness of this brief appearance in the Old Testament story of Melchizedek, Jesus is greater still. Jesus' priesthood stands forever, linking people with God on a permanent basis.

**I—It is as we follow Him, that we find our way to God and to life.** Consider this image conjured up by a man named Steve Winger in Lubbock, Texas (about 25 miles from where my mother grew up). "On a recent ski trip, I saw to my surprise a blind person skiing. The blind skier, wearing a bright pink vest, stayed directly behind an instructor, listening for directions on how and when to turn. Over the next several days I saw many blind skiers, invariably following the person who gave them the information they needed to make it safely down the mountain. Remaining, or abiding, in Jesus means following him in the same way."<sup>4</sup> The skiing guide is the confident link between the blind skier and the mountain. Jesus stands between us and sure ruin apart from the path of God for our lives. We listen to His voice and follow His directions both in Scripture and by the Holy Spirit, and we are sure to make it down the mountain of this life safely.

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Hebrews 7:11-19

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Translation:

(11) Therefore indeed, if there were perfection through the Levitical priesthood (for the people had received law through it), what further need would there be for a different priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek and not to be reckoned according to the order of Aaron? (12) For with the priesthood being changed, out of necessity a change of law is also happening. (13) For the One about whom these things are being said belongs to a different tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar; (14) For it is evident that our Lord has risen up out of Judah, for which tribe Moses said nothing about priests. (15) And it is clearer still, if a different priest was raised up according to the likeness of Melchizedek, (16) Who did not come into being according to a law of human commandment, but according to a power of life indestructible. (17) For it is being witnessed that

You are a priest forever

According to the order of Melchizedek.

(18) For an annulling occurred of a foregoing commandment because of its own weakness and uselessness—(19) for the Law made nothing perfect—and a bringing in of good hope occurred through which we are drawing near to God.

## II. THE PERMANENT PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS IS BASED ON A CHANGE OF THE LAW. 7:11-19

1. *The Levitical priesthood could not bring perfection to the people.* The writer here, after making the comparison between Jesus and Melchizedek, draws the contrast between Jesus and the Levitical priests of the Old Covenant. He asks why there is a need for a new priestly order, if the old order was enough to bring perfection to the people. The answer is, "It wasn't enough." Jesus was

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<sup>4</sup> Steve Winger, Lubbock, Texas. Leadership, Vol. 15, no. 2.

from a different tribe than Levi, and Jesus' priesthood is not based on human ancestry, but rather what the writer calls "the power of an indestructible life" (v. 16).

2. The "better *hope*" (v. 19) is brought through the ministry of Jesus Christ. We can truly "draw near to God" through Jesus Christ. The people could not draw near to God under the Old Covenant. In fact, the entire system of worship was designed to force the people to keep their distance from God. They were glad to do it! Remember the scene from Mount Sinai, when the mountain was shaking and the lightning was flashing? God spoke the Ten Words from the midst of the storm, and the people were terrified. His holiness was established, and the people kept their distance, trembling. Exodus 20:18-21 describes the scene:

**Exodus 20:18-21 (NIV):** *When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance <sup>19</sup> and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."*

<sup>20</sup> *Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."*

<sup>21</sup> *The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.*

Consider what a Jewish person had to do to worship God. He had to bring a sacrifice, exactly in keeping with the prescriptions of the Levitical priesthood. He would then present this offering, either for his sins or for his gratefulness for God's blessings, to the priests. The priests would then offer the gift in his place. The priests would enter the holy place on behalf of the people regularly to offer incense and to lay out the Bread of the Presence, symbolizing the very presence of God with the people.

But only one time, one day of the year, would the High Priest enter the Most Holy Place. It was on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Everything had to be just right for this one man on one day to enter the Most Holy Place, separated by a thickly woven curtain from the Holy Place. The woman who had come to worship never got past the very outer court of the worship place. The rank and file of adult men could only get one step closer, but never into the Holy Place or the Most Holy Place.

But now, says this writer, "a better hope is introduced, by which *we draw near to God.*" No more distance! No more separation! No more human priests through whom one must go to get to God! Straight to the very throne of heaven through Jesus Christ!

A—So then, let's do so! Have we drawn near to God through Jesus Christ?
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**I—We can have such an assurance in our hearts today.** A Christian writer from the 11<sup>th</sup> century put this assurance into words. He is known simply as Simeon the New Theologian. He wrote:

"I know that he who is far outside the whole creation  
Takes me within himself and hides me in his arms,  
And then I find myself outside the whole world.  
I, a frail, small mortal in the world,  
Behold the Creator of the world, all of him, within myself;  
And I know that I shall not die, for I am within the Life,  
I have the whole of Life springing up as a fountain within me.  
He is in my heart, he is in heaven:  
Both there and here he shows himself to me with equal glory."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Simeon the New Theologian (d. 1022), "Eastern Orthodoxy," *Christian History*, no. 54.

Translation:

(20) For in so far as they are not without oath-taking—for these have become priests without oath-taking, (21) but This One with an oath through that which was said pertaining to Him, The Lord has sworn And will not change His mind, “You are a priest forever”—

(22) just so far as Jesus became the Guarantee of a better covenant. (23) And on the one hand they had become priests in greater number because by death they were prevented from continuing; (24) but This One because He remains forever holds the permanent priesthood; (25) for which reason also He is able to keep saving completely the ones who come to God through Him, always living to intercede for them.

(26) For such a high priest was fitting also for us—a holy, guileless, and stainless One—standing separate from the sinners, having become higher than the heavens, (27) Who does not have day to day necessity, just as the high priests did, first to offer sacrifice for their own sins and then for those of the people; for He did this once for all when He offered up Himself. (28) For the Law put in charge men as high priests who had weakness, but the word of the oath that came after the Law put in charge a Son who stands perfect forever.

### III. THE PERMANENT PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS BRINGS FULL SALVATION TO THOSE WHO TRUST IN HIM. 7:20-28

1. God has sworn an oath regarding the priesthood of Jesus. This guarantees the truth of His promise of salvation.

2. Jesus' priesthood meets the need of those who trust in Him, for two reasons:

a. His sacrifice was perfect. No more possibility of thinking that you didn't do enough, didn't offer enough sacrifices, didn't do enough good things or religious things to merit God's favor. This permanent Priest is “holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens” (v. 26). He didn't offer an animal sacrifice; He offered His own body and blood “once for all” (v. 27).

A—We should quit thinking that we can make ourselves good enough for God. Jesus' offering was perfect, and it was offered *on our behalf*.

I—Max Lucado tells about a young man who approached his pastor at the close of a worship service and asked, “What can I do to find peace in my life?” The wise pastor replied, “I'm sorry, but you're too late.” The distraught man was perplexed. He said, “You mean I'm too late to find peace? You mean I'm too late to be saved?” The pastor answered, “No, you're just too late to do anything about it. Jesus did everything that needed to be done 2000 years ago.”<sup>6</sup>

b. His intercession is permanent. He “always lives to make intercession for us” (v. 25). Again, Jesus offered Himself as the perfect offering for sin, “once for all” (v. 27), never needing to be repeated. He has been appointed the powerful Son who fulfills and goes beyond the Law, who has been “made perfect forever” (v. 28).

A—Jesus fully understands the extent of human suffering. There will never be a person nor a time or place at which He cannot help.

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<sup>6</sup> From *In Other Words*, Fall 1999, p. 3, from Max Lucado, “The Beast Within Us All,” 9/26/99.

**I—"Pro quarterback Patrick Mahomes had just limped his way through a last-minute, game-winning drive in the 2023 AFC Championship when he gave the credit for his performance to someone that even the biggest Kansas City Chiefs fans had never heard of.**

"Julie WAS the reason I was the guy I was on the field today!" Mahomes wrote to his millions of followers on Twitter that night. Her full name is Julie Frymyer.

Who is she and why is she so important to the team? She's the assistant athletic trainer. Frymyer had one of the NFL's most important jobs in the 2022-2023 season: She was in charge of putting Mahomes through rehab for his injured ankle and getting the star quarterback ready to play for a spot in the Super Bowl.

Hobbling through a nasty sprain that often requires weeks of recovery, Mahomes wasn't just able to play against the Cincinnati Bengals. He was fantastic. He was clearly gimpy, grimacing through several plays, but he was mobile enough to make several key plays, including a crucial run setting up the last-second field goal that sent the Chiefs to the Super Bowl to face the Philadelphia Eagles.

Mahomes going out of his way to praise her was the first time most people in Arrowhead Stadium had ever heard the name Julie Frymyer ....

Now everyone who heard that broadcast knows about Julie. She had been quietly working behind the scenes to prepare that football player for one of his greatest opportunities. This is something like what Jesus has done and now does for us. He came into history and offered Himself once and for all for our sins on a Roman cross. Now, He has sent His Spirit (see John 15-17) to complete the job of spiritual rehab in every individual that comes to Him in genuine, saving faith. His present saving and sanctifying work will go on "forever" because that is how long He will have this role. He has been where we are—perhaps feeling a bit like we are on "injured reserve," but He is determined to prepare us to compete successfully against the world, the flesh, and the devil and win!

Take it home (applications).

I. Have we come personally to God through faith in His Son, our great High Priest, Jesus Christ?

II. Are we praying with confidence because we know that Jesus always stands before the Father on our behalf, guaranteeing that we have the ear of heaven?

III. Are we suffering under the illusion that we can fix our own lives enough to be pleasing to God and earn our own salvation? We should give that up right now and fall upon the grace of God offered through Jesus Christ.