

# Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews

## Chapter 7

(also available on-line at [ichthys.com](http://ichthys.com))

by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill

I. Introduction

II. Translation

III. Summary and Paraphrase

IV. Verse by Verse Commentary

Verses One through Three

Verses Four through Ten

Verses Eleven through Twelve

Verses Thirteen through Sixteen

Verses Seventeen through Nineteen

Verses Twenty through Twenty One

Verses Twenty Two through Twenty Five

Verses Twenty Six through Twenty Eight

### **Introduction:**

Having reoriented the Jerusalem believers to the basic truths of our salvation, and having given them confidence in that salvation as being based on God the Father's immutable promise and unchangeable oath, validated and paid for by the blood of Christ (chapter six), Paul now moves on to contrast the present priesthood which was merely symbolic of the glories now accomplished by our Lord with the eternal and effectual High Priesthood of Jesus Christ, undermining thereby any idea that continuing in the Old Covenant could be anything but sinful. This, the middle chapter of the book (chapter seven), is also the arch, so to speak, of Paul's argument and approach to reaching the Jerusalem believers. The demonstration of the superiority of Jesus Christ over the angels (chapter one), the exposition of the purpose of the incarnation in delivering us from our sins (chapter two), the discussion of our Lord's superiority to Moses (chapter three), His effective establishment of the new Sabbath (chapter four), the introduction of the importance of our Lord's high-priesthood (chapter five) and his attempt to reorient the Jerusalem believers to the hope we have as a result of our Lord's sacrifice for us (chapter six) are all summed up in the proofs given here (chapter seven) where Paul establishes the superiority of Christ's unique, royal-priesthood and then draws an unavoidable conclusion from it: since we have a new High Priest, the Law of Moses which was inextricably linked to the old Aaronic priesthood has now been superseded; the Old covenant has now been definitively replaced by the New.

Chapter seven may be divided into eight parts. The first paragraph (vv.1-3) contains Paul's comparison of Melchizedek to our Lord Jesus Christ (very importantly *not* the other way around), given in order to demonstrate the superiority of His new High Priesthood (similar to the

prior proofs of Christ's superiority to angels and to Moses, but now Paul is directly disestablishing the Law). The second paragraph (vv.4-10) demonstrates Melchizedek as greater than Abraham and thus, *a footsore*, greater than Levi, with the implied conclusion that this superiority applies to Christ, since. He was appointed "in the order of Melchizedek". The rhetorical question and its supplied conclusion in paragraph three (vv.11-12) prove that there has indeed been a change of Law and gives the reason for it. In paragraph four (vv.13-16), Paul relates the conundrum of assuming the validity of the Law when it is not in consonance with the new priesthood. Paragraph five (vv.17-19), wherein Paul demonstrates that the coming of our Lord in and of itself proves the need for a change of Law, contrasts the Old Covenant's ineffectual nature with the better hope of the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. Paragraph six (vv.20-21) reminds us that this is the Father's will, confirmed on oath. Paragraph seven (vv.22-25) describes the great results of the replacement of the Law (which had only been symbolic) by the new high-priesthood whereby we are actually and effectively saved and helped. Paragraph eight (vv.26-28) summarizes the contrasts between the old priesthood and the new and reinforces the impression of the complete change of order which our Lord's appointment as the unique High Priest and King has brought about. In short, no one can read Hebrews – and no one can read chapter seven of Hebrews – and still believe that the Law still has validity for those who believe in Jesus Christ; and for those who do believe in Him who is our King and High Priest, continuing to give any allegiance to the defunct Law and its replaced priesthood can only undermine that faith.

### **The Levitical Priesthood:**

(12) "Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance to the tent of meeting and wash them with water. (13) Then dress Aaron in the sacred garments, anoint him and consecrate him so he may serve me as priest. (14) Bring his sons and dress them in tunics. (15) Anoint them just as you anointed their father, so they may serve me as priests. Their anointing will be to a priesthood that will continue throughout their generations."  
Exodus 40:12-15 NIV

(22) The Lord said to Moses, (23) "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: (24) 'The Lord bless you and keep you; (25) the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; (26) the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.' (27) So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."  
Numbers 6:22-27 NIV

For Church Age believers today, especially for those of us who have grown up in the Protestant tradition, the strong emotional attachment that the Jewish believers of Paul's day felt towards the Levitical priesthood with its privileges and distinctions is understandably distant. One may compare the pomp, regalia and respect given to prelates in the Roman Catholic cult, but greatly accentuated by the fact of the Levitical priesthood was actually ordained by God and thus possessed a glory that no man-made substitute could ever achieve. Letting go of that body of tradition could not have been an easy thing to do.

(1) "Now take Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of

Israel, that he may minister to Me as priest, Aaron and Aaron's sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. (2) And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, *for glory and for beauty.*"

Exodus 28:1-2 NKJV

(39) "You shall skillfully weave the tunic of fine linen thread, you shall make the turban of fine linen, and you shall make the sash of woven work. (40) For Aaron's sons you shall make tunics, and you shall make sashes for them. And you shall make hats for them, *for glory and beauty.*"

Exodus 28:39-40 NKJV

While the passages above apply specifically to the priests and their families, all Levites enjoyed a special status within the body politic of the theocracy of Israel (one heightened rather than diminished by the cessation of Davidic rulership).

(15) "After you have purified the Levites and presented them as a wave offering, they are to come to do their work at the tent of meeting. (16) They are the Israelites who are to be given wholly to me. I have taken them as my own in place of the firstborn, the first male offspring from every Israelite woman. (17) Every firstborn male in Israel, whether human or animal, is mine. When I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set them apart for myself. (18) And I have taken the Levites in place of all the firstborn sons in Israel. (19) From among all the Israelites, I have given the Levites as gifts to Aaron and his sons to do the work at the tent of meeting on behalf of the Israelites and to make atonement for them so that no plague will strike the Israelites when they go near the sanctuary."

Numbers 8:15-19 NKJV

(20) And the Lord said to Aaron, "You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel. (21) To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service that they do, their service in the tent of meeting, (22) so that the people of Israel do not come near the tent of meeting, lest they bear sin and die. (23) But the Levites shall do the service of the tent of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, and among the people of Israel they shall have no inheritance. (24) For the tithe of the people of Israel, which they present as a contribution to the Lord, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance. Therefore I have said of them that they shall have no inheritance among the people of Israel."

Numbers 18:20-24 NKJV

Letting go of that body of tradition after the cross though difficult was yet essential to do, especially in regard to the priesthood in particular since that was the very foundation of the Law (Heb.7:12). This fact alone explains the need on Paul's part to spend so much time and effort on this subject. For while it may seem odd to us, unless and until the Jewish believers of Jerusalem could make their peace with parting with the Levitical priesthood, liberation in their hearts from the Law was impossible. And without turning from the Law, their entire relationship with Jesus

Christ would be flawed . . . and vulnerable.

**Politics:** For believers who are disturbed about the increasing rancor in our own society and the growing depth of political division here, history informs us that what we are experiencing is not unique, and that what we are presently seeing is mild compared to the social meltdowns which other societies have experienced in the past. Case in point is the political situation in Judea in the days of Paul's writing of this epistle. All readers of the gospels and Acts will have some idea of the tensions in Judea several generations earlier between the competing interests and objectives of the Romans, the Herodians, and the Judean Jewish authorities (Priests, Sanhedrin, Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes). But the level of vitriol and violence which had already been manifest and which would boil over with horrific consequences only a few years after the epistle to the Hebrews had been received are not necessarily obvious from biblical sources alone, but reviewing some of that evidence here will be helpful:

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him."  
Matthew 2:13

(19) But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, (20) Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.  
Luke 3:19-20 NIV

Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot.  
Luke 6:15 NKJV (cf. Acts 1:13)

From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar."  
John 19:12 NKJV

(34) Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. (35) And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. (36) For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. (37) After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed."  
Acts 5:34-37 NKJV

(37) Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I speak to you?" He replied, "Can you speak Greek? (38) Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins (*sacer*) out into

the wilderness?"  
Acts 21:38 NKJV

(6) But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!" (7) And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. (8) For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection – and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. (9) Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God." (10) Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks.

Acts 23:6-10 NKJV

(12) And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. (13) Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. (14) They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. (15) Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

Acts 23:12-15 NKJV

The breakup of the Persian empire (under whose auspices the temple had been rebuilt and there had been a return to Judea after the Babylonian captivity) resulted in the better part of three centuries of political instability as the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucids in Syria (dynasties founded by Alexander the Great's successors) vied for control of the Levant. Notable in the territory of Israel was the Maccabean revolt (167-141 B.C.) which wrested control of Judea from the Seleucids. Importantly, the Maccabeans (from whom arose the dynasty of the Hasmoneans, replaced by that of the Herodians in 37 B.C.) who ruled then until the time of the Roman conquest (63 B.C.) were not of the line of David but were Levites and specifically were (or at least claimed to be) of the priestly line as well.

In the mid-first century, political instability was the rule, occasionally even erupting in civil war, between the factions of the religious Pharisees and secular Sadducees over matters of interpretation and implementation of the Law. Uneasy peace returned after Pompey the Great conquered the entire eastern Mediterranean in 63 B.C. and imposed political settlements on its various countries and kingdoms in the name of Rome, including Palestine, which then found itself thereafter under Roman rule, either directly, as in the case of Judea (which officially became a Roman province in 6 A.D.), or indirectly under a kaleidoscopic series of changing tetrarchies, most of which were governed by members of the Herodian dynasty whose founder, Herod the Great, had been installed by Rome as king of Judea in 37 B.C., i.e., the same Herod

who ordered the murder of all infants in the region of Bethlehem with the objective of eliminating our Lord: Matt.2:1-18 (other rulers of the Herodian family mentioned in scripture include: Herod Philip II: Lk.2:1; Archelaus: Matt.2:19-23; Herod Antipas [the man who imprisoned John and to whom Pilate sent Jesus]: Matt.14:1-12; Mk.6:14-29; Lk.3:1; 23:7-12; Herod Agrippa I [who killed James and imprisoned Peter]: Acts 12:1-24; and Herod Agrippa II [who witnessed Paul's defense]: Acts 25:13-32).

Although Roman rule generally kept an uneasy peace between the various factions in Palestine with all political levers beyond those specifically touching local issues now in Roman hands, Judea remained a powderkeg merely awaiting the requisite spark to set it off. In addition to many nameless factions and sub-factions dotting the troubled political landscape of the day, we know of the Pharisees who desired strict adherence to the Mosaic Law and the Sadducees who preferred a secular, Hellenized approach, the Essenes (an extremist sect that sought separation from the secular society), the Sicarii (literally, "knife-men"), and the Zealots (Messianic purists prone to violence). About all these groups had in common was their hatred of Roman rule – for which they sometimes had good reason (e.g., in 40 A.D., Caligula had ordered a statue of himself to be placed in the temple).

(17) "Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?" (18) But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? (19) Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, (20) and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" (21) "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

Matthew 22:17-21 NIV

(5) Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. (6) This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. (7) Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Romans 13:5-7 NIV

Despite the above, believers with any knowledge of this country's history should be able to understand the outrage involved in having to pay taxes to an occupying power. In the case of Judea in the first century, this feeling would have been heightened by the false teaching evident and implied in the question leveled at our Lord above, namely that doing so was not only unpatriotic but was also an affront to God and thus an abomination for any true follower of the Law. With Roman authority infringing to at least some degree on every point where the Law touched Jewish society, it is not hard to see how that anyone with any zeal for God or at least for the traditions exemplified in the Law might easily be swept up in whatever spontaneous resistance might break out against the hated occupiers. After the events of the crucifixion and resurrection, things worsened in Judea over the next thirty or so years (through the feckless actions of a string of incompetent Roman governors among other things), until finally, when the volcanic forces lying just beneath the surface were finally awakened in 66 A.D., Palestine

erupted into the rebellion which would bring about the destruction of Jerusalem and of the second temple only a few years thereafter in 70 A.D.

The variable justice of Roman rule and the temptation to be free of it through any and all means compounded with the powerful draw of tradition and the Law, especially among anyone of Levitical or especially priestly background (Acts 6:7), were for many a deadly combination in the end, drawing them into political violence.

(41) As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it (42) and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes. (43) The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. (44) They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."  
Luke 19:41-44 NIV

(20) "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. (21) Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. (22) For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. (23) How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. (24) They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."  
Luke 21:20-24 NIV

While some of the Christians in Jerusalem seem to have heeded this warning, taking flight to Pella in the east before it was too late<sup>1</sup>, we cannot know how many refused to do so, preferring instead to strive for a political solution.

"Depart from Babylon! Flee from the Babylonians!"  
Isaiah 48:20a

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out from her, O my people, that you may not receive a share of [the punishment for] her sins, and that you may not partake of the plagues [which are about to fall upon] her."  
Revelation 18:4

There are parallels between first century Judea and our own day, especially in terms of many present-day believers preferring political solutions to spiritual ones. It remains to be seen how many will on that account fail to heed the similar warnings above that we who remain until the threshold of the second advent will receive months before our Lord's return. All who remained in Jerusalem and fought died; all who allow themselves to be distracted by politics in the near

---

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Church History* 3.5.3; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 29.7.7-8; 30.2.7.

future, whatever the side, are likely to suffer the same fate.

Finally, on this score, rather than allowing themselves to be pulled back into the rituals of the Law through veneration of the priesthood these first century believers (and all contemporary believers who for whatever reason find that pomp of Roman Catholicism similarly appealing) should have kept in mind the blessed truth that we who belong to the new and true High Priest Jesus Christ are all priests now in our own right, not through biological descent but by virtue of our relationship with Him (1Pet.2:5; Rev.1:6; 5:9; 20:6).<sup>2</sup>

But you are a chosen people, *a royal priesthood*, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

1st Peter 2:9 NIV

### **Melchizedek and Christophany:**

Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.

Hebrews 7:3 KJV

From a quick and superficial reading of the verse above in English, it is not surprising that many have concluded that Melchizedek could not have been an actual human being, and that, therefore, he must have been an angel or, more particularly, the Angel of the Lord, that is to say, a Christophany.<sup>3</sup> While there are many appearances of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Old Testament – and indeed, since He is the revealed member of the Trinity, we conclude that even purported appearances of the Father are actually Jesus Christ acting in His stead (as scripture itself confirms in the case of Isaiah 6:1-13, where John tells us that this appearance of the Lord in the temple was in fact Christ: Jn.12:39-41). But such is not the case with Melchizedek, and the problems with this very popular false theory are evident even from a quick second glance at the KJV translation above. How, for example, could Melchizedek be "made like unto" Jesus Christ if he were in fact Jesus Christ? It may be suggested that this controversy is of little import, but in fact it does need to be resolved as an introductory matter, because otherwise over-focus on Melchizedek is apt to blur the whole point of Paul's comparison. Hebrews chapter seven is, as mentioned, not only the linear but also the thematic center of the epistle. If the Aaronic priesthood has been replaced, then by definition the entire ritual function of the Law has also been abolished since, as Paul says in this chapter: "indeed the law given to the people established that priesthood" (Heb.7:11 NIV). Without the Law, there would be no Aaronic priesthood; without the priesthood, there can be no Law since the priesthood is the Law's foundation.

None of this has anything to do with Melchizedek – except for the fact that Paul under the Spirit's guidance is making use of what scripture says in prophecy about our Lord to explain the

---

<sup>2</sup> See BB 4B: Soteriology, section III.3.a, "Access to God as Priests of Jesus Christ".

<sup>3</sup> See BB 1: Theology, section II.C, "The Trinity in the Old Testament".



superiority of Christ's unique high-priesthood and the implications of His reception of it: once Christ became the true High Priest whom all other priests merely foreshadowed, no other priesthood was valid from that time forth, "for when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also" (Heb.7:12 NIV). We will be going over all of the details of these important doctrinal points as we proceed through the chapter seriatim below. What is necessary to understand at the outset is that all of Paul's references to Melchizedek are important entirely because of Jesus Christ, because of what the prophetic comparisons tell us about Him and because of the implications for those who were wrongly assuming that the Law was still in any way in force.

The Lord has sworn and He will not recant, "You are a priest forever in the manner of Melchizedek."

Psalm 110:4

Paul will explain in detail in the body of chapter seven what the verse above means (and we will attempt to further elucidate the "things hard to be understood": 2Pet.3:16 KJV). For our purposes here it should be noted that if the Messiah is "a priest forever in the manner of Melchizedek", He cannot, at the same time, be, or have been, Melchizedek. So that if Melchizedek "abideth a priest continually" (Heb.7:3 KJV), he can't at the same time be Jesus Christ who is "a priest forever *in the manner* of Melchizedek" (Ps.110:4). Simply put, Melchizedek with his priesthood was used as a point of comparison to the coming Messiah by David, and is also used here as a point of comparison to the now revealed Christ by Paul, both under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Melchizedek is not Jesus Christ (nor a Christophanic appearance of Him); Melchizedek's priesthood tells us important things about the new High Priesthood of Jesus Christ and the implications of it. Just as the Aaronic priesthood has been replaced by the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ, so also now of necessity the Old Covenant has now been replaced by the New Covenant. In neither case can the one be separated from the other. Change the priesthood, and the Law must be changed; retain the Law, and there can be no new High Priesthood, no new High Priest, no New Covenant . . . and no salvation.

[Melchizedek], lacking a genealogy [in scripture] on either his father's or his mother's side, lacking [also in scripture] a [recorded] beginning of his days or an end of his life, continues in his priesthood forever – [that is] in respect to this *comparison* of him to the Son of God.

Hebrews 7:3

And this [need for a change of Law] is even more clear if another Priest arises who is fundamentally *similar* to Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:15

In both of these passages, Paul uses language which is unmistakable (at least in the Greek) to demonstrate that this is an *analogy*. Christ is *not* Melchizedek (or vice versa); but there are important points of comparison between the priesthoods of the two, already present in prophecy (i.e., in Psalm 110, a Messianic psalm which no doubt many of Paul's recipients knew by heart). Drawing the logical conclusions from what scripture says about the Messiah's priesthood, Paul

makes it abundantly clear that Jesus' priesthood is not only superior to the superseded Aaronic one, but that the very fact of this new high priesthood means *ipso facto* that the Law has now been rendered invalid, with the Old Covenant now being replaced by the New. This is the main point behind Paul's bringing in of the Melchizedek comparison, so that wrongly confusing Christ with Melchizedek obscures this important truth – which is in many ways the cornerstone doctrine of the epistle.

**Fulfillment; Completion; Perfection:** It is difficult to choose between these three English words in attempting to find a suitable counterpart for the *tel-* group of terms in this chapter which, while important enough in the New Testament generally, have a special thematic application in Hebrews.<sup>4</sup>

(11) So if there were any ***completion/perfection/fulfillment*** [of the plan of God] through the Levitical priesthood – and the entire people [of Israel] received the Law on the basis of their priesthood – why then was there a need for another Priest to arise "according to the order of Melchizedek" (Ps.104:4), rather than being selected according to the order of Aaron?

Hebrews 7:11

(19) – for the Law ***fulfilled/completed/perfected*** nothing – and instead the bringing in of a better hope through which we [actually do] draw near to God.

Hebrews 7:19

(28) So while the Law appoints mortal priests beset by physical weakness, the word of God's [own] oath which succeeds the Law appoints a Son who has been ***perfected/completed/fulfilled*** forever.

Hebrews 7:28

Jesus Christ is the Rock upon which the plan of God is founded. Jesus Christ *is* the plan of God, the Logos who expresses, exemplifies and reflects perfectly the Father, the One who has and is perfectly carrying out the Father's will, His plan of salvation.

(1) God, from antiquity communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, (2) [but now] in these last days He has communicated to us in a Son, [the One] whom He has appointed heir of all things, [the One] through whom He created the universe (i.e., time-space). (3) He is the shining forth of [the Father's] glory, ***the precise image of His essence***, the One who [in His deity] sustains the universe by His mighty Word. When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins [in His humanity], He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Hebrews 1:1-3

---

<sup>4</sup> For more on the meaning and import of the *tel-* theme in scripture, see BB 6A: Peripateology, section I.2.A.7, "7. The Result of the Process: Spiritual Maturity"; Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews: Chapter 2, Verse Ten, under "Make Complete"; and Chapter Five, Verses Seven through Ten, under "Perfected".

For it was fitting for [the Father] *to make complete* (i.e., "perfect/fulfill": *teleiosai*) through sufferings (i.e., His spiritual death on the cross) Him on whose account all things exist and through whom all things exist, namely, the Captain of their salvation, even Him who has led many sons to glory, [our Lord Jesus Christ].

Hebrews 2:10

. . . and, once He was *perfected* (i.e., had perfectly completed and fulfilled His mission: *teleiotheis*), He became the source of eternal salvation for all who are obedient to Him (i.e., believers).

Hebrews 5:9

For by one sacrifice he has made *perfect* (*teteleioken*) forever those who are being made holy.

Hebrews 10:14 NIV

. . . turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and *completer* ("perfecter/fulfiller": *teleiotes*) of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:2

Jesus Christ was perfect in His deity before He created the world. He was born perfect in His humanity and lived a perfect life. He perfectly endured the gauntlet that led to the cross and through His suffering for the sins of all mankind, His spiritual death, He perfectly accomplished salvation and then sealed and validated it by His resurrection (Rom.4:25).

And He said to them, "Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day *I shall be perfected* (*teleioumai*).'"

Luke 13:32 NKJV

Jesus Christ is the One to whom the Law merely refers and foreshadows. The Law by definition, therefore, could never bring perfection, completion, fulfilment. Only Jesus Christ could do that. . . and that He *has* done. That was as true during Paul's day as it is today.

They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: *He has done it* (i.e., accomplished, completed, perfected, fulfilled salvation)!

Psalms 22:31 NIV

(28) After [all] this (i.e., His physical suffering and His spiritual death for the sins of the world), when Jesus knew that everything *had now been accomplished* (i.e., perfected, completed, fulfilled: *tetelestai*) in order for the [prophecy of salvation found in] scripture to be fulfilled (*teleiothe*), He said, "I am thirsty". (29) Now a jar of wine-vinegar lay there, so they placed a sponge full of the wine-vinegar on a hyssop [stalk] and brought it to His mouth. (30) So when He had taken the wine-vinegar, Jesus said, "It (i.e., salvation) *has [now] been accomplished* (i.e., perfected, completed, fulfilled: *tetelestai*; quoting Ps.22:31)!", and having thrown back His head, He gave up His spirit.

John 19:28-30

Being in many ways, as we have noted, an *apologia* or persuasive piece, Hebrews thus approaches things in the opposite way of what we might do if we were trying to teach the meaning of the cross and the new covenant directly. Instead, Paul brings out many important facets of the amazing relationship we have with God through Jesus Christ and His blood-sacrifice for us by de-constructing, so to speak, the false assumptions and spiritually contradictory behavior of his readers. In the process, we are given to see just how important this unique new High Priesthood of Jesus Christ actually is, even as we are also brought to the inescapable conclusion that the old Aaronic priesthood along with the Law which it supported has now been revoked . . . or, better put, has now been ***accomplished, fulfilled, completed, perfected***.

(17) Do not assume that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets: I did not come to abolish but ***to fulfill***. (18) For what I say to you is the truth: Until heaven and earth pass away, not one iota or one serif will pass away from the Law – until everything has come to pass (i.e., the shadows of the Law fulfilled on the cross).  
Matthew 5:17-18

For Christ is ***the fulfillment*** (lit., "end": *telos*) of the Law, resulting in righteousness for everyone who believes [in Him].  
Romans 10:4

Every aspect of the Law, as we have seen, had as its essential purpose the foreshadowing of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice which is the entire foundation of the plan of God. Now that the true High Priest has accomplished, fulfilled, completed the perfect sacrifice on our behalf, there is "no longer any [animal] sacrifice for sins" necessary to teach that coming sacrifice of sacrifices (Heb.10:26). Everything which the Law demanded has now been perfectly carried out by Jesus Christ.

(18) knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, (19) but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.  
1st Peter 1:18-19 NKJV

Their failure to appreciate, understand, digest and apply this fundamental truth of the Law's fulfillment and replacement was a stumbling block that threatened to trip up the faith of all those within the Jerusalem congregation who were turning back to the darkening shadows and away from Him who is the very Light of truth – just as it is for all today who prefer legalism to the grace of God.

(15) We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles (16) know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.  
Galatians 2:15-16 NIV

You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.  
Galatians 5:4 NKJV

The Law's purpose was to teach, not to actually accomplish anything; it is therefore sadly ironic that the Jerusalem believers (and all legalists ever since) were, through failing to accept the truths which the Law actually taught, essentially rejecting the salvation perfectly accomplished by Jesus Christ, His death for us which fulfilled the demands made by the Law which no other human being could ever have accomplished.

The [Law merely gave] an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered [under it] were not able **to perfect** (*teleiosai*) the conscience of the worshiper (i.e., only the blood of Christ [represented by animal sacrifice] could do that).  
Hebrews 9:9

(1) For the Law, being a [mere] shadow of the good things to come, not an exact representation of the [actual] events [of Christ's work represented therein], in company with the sacrifices themselves which they offer continually year by year cannot **bring perfection** (*teleiosai*) to those who approach [God] thereby. (2) For [if they could], would they not have stopped offering [them], since the worshipers would no longer have a conscience [plagued by] sins, having once been purified [by such shadow sacrifices]?  
Hebrews 10:1-2

In starkest contrast with the shadow sacrifices of the Law which accomplished nothing, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ "once and for all" (Heb.7:27; 9:12; 10:10) has perfectly completed the Father's plan of salvation for every human being willing to accept it (Ps.22:31; Jn.19:28-30). It is therefore incumbent upon us who have received salvation through faith in the person and in the precious sacrifice of our Savior **not** to turn back to the shadows of the time before He died for us, but instead to embrace with all of our hearts the perfect salvation that He has fulfilled and accomplished on our behalf, striving to complement that perfect salvation we now enjoy with the spiritual maturity and fulfillment of the ministries He gives us in honor of Him and to His glory in the Church of Jesus Christ, to the end of our own glorification before Him on that great day of days. In short, we like they should always be looking forward, not backward.

Solid [spiritual] food is for the [spiritually] **mature** ("perfected": *teleion*), those who by [diligent] practice have trained their [moral] perceptive faculties (i.e., consciences) to [properly] distinguish between good and evil.  
Hebrews 5:14

(39) And through their faith, all of [the great believers of the past], though they became witnesses [to the world] (lit., "were martyred"), yet they did not receive the promise (i.e., resurrection and reward), (40) since God was **looking forward** for our sakes to something better, so that they might not be **made perfect** (*teleiothosin*; i.e., resurrected and rewarded) without us.

Hebrews 11:39-40

(22) But you have come [not to Mount Sinai which stands for the present Jerusalem (Gal.4:21-31), but] to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, [that is, you have come to] the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of [elect] angels in assembly [before God], (23) and to the Church of the firstborn enrolled [as its citizens] in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of justified [believers] [who have now] **completed** [their tasks] (i.e., been rendered "perfect" once and for all: *teteleiomēnon*), (24) and to Jesus, the Mediator of a **better covenant**, and to sprinkled blood (i.e., the work of Christ in bearing our sins) which speaks [far] more powerfully than that of Abel[*'s* sacrifice].  
Hebrews 12:22-24

## II. Translation

(1) For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God most high, who came to meet Abraham when he was returning from routing the kings and blessed him, (2) and to whom Abraham divided a tenth part of everything, on the one hand being "king of righteousness", when we translate his name, and on the other hand being also "king of Salem" which means "king of peace", (3) lacking a genealogy [in scripture] on either his father's or his mother's side, lacking [also in scripture] a [recorded] beginning of his days or an end of his life, continues in his priesthood forever – [that is] in respect to this comparison of him to the Son of God.

(4) Now do you see how great this [Melchizedek] was, to whom also Abraham our forefather gave a tenth of the spoils? (5) For while those descended from Levi who obtain the priesthood have authorization to tithe the people [of Israel] according to the Law, that is to say, their own brothers, even though they themselves have also come from Abraham, (6) one who does not share in that descent tithed Abraham and blessed him who was given the promises [which we have been discussing (Heb.6:12-17)]. (7) Beyond all argument, the lesser is blessed by the greater. (8) And while in the case [of the Levites] it is mortal men who receive the tithes, in the case [of Melchizedek, representing Christ], we have One who has received testimony as living [forever] (Ps.110:4, i.e., Jesus Christ). (9) One might even say that Levi, the one who receives the tithes, was himself tithed. (10) For he was still in the body of his father Abraham when Melchizedek met with him.

(11) So if there were any fulfillment [of the plan of God] through the Levitical priesthood – and the entire people [of Israel] received the Law on the basis of their priesthood – why then was there a need for another Priest to arise "according to the order of Melchizedek" (Ps.104:4), rather than being selected according to the order of Aaron? (12) For when there is a change of priesthood, of necessity there must also be a change of law.

(13) After all, the One about whom these things are said, [Jesus Christ], came from a different tribe, one which never had a share in the altar. (14) For it is crystal clear that our Lord stemmed from the tribe of Judah, a tribe about which Moses never said anything about priests. (15) And this [need for a change of Law] is even more clear if another Priest arises who is fundamentally similar to Melchizedek (i.e., in the two main points of comparison: eternity and superiority to Abraham), (16) namely, One who becomes [Priest] not on the basis of the Law's commandment, but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life [which brings with it an unchanging priesthood].

(17) For [the Father] testifies that "You are a Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek". (18) Herein we have then a revoking of the prior commandment (i.e., the Law) on account of it being weak and ineffectual (i.e., unable to bring fulfillment to the plan of salvation), (19) – for the Law fulfilled nothing – and instead the bringing in of a better hope through which we [actually do] draw near to God.

(20) And indeed this has not occurred without an oath! For while [the Levites] became priests without [God's] oath, [Jesus Christ] became Priest through the oath of the One who said to Him, (21) "The Lord has sworn, and will not change His mind: 'You are a Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek' ".

(22) To such a superior degree then has Jesus become our Guarantor of an even better Covenant (i.e., the New replacing the Old). (23) Now the others who have become priests are [of necessity] many since they are prevented from remaining [in office] because of their mortality. (24) But He, [Jesus Christ], because He abides forever, possesses the priesthood irrevocably. (25) For this reason He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, since He lives forever making intercession for them.

(26) This is just the sort of High Priest we needed, holy, without fault, without imperfection, completely separated from sinners, and having ascended higher than the heavens [into God's presence]. (27) Unlike the [other] high priests, [Jesus] has no need of making sacrifice day by day, first on behalf of His own sins, and then for the sins of the people. For this [latter] He did once and for all when He offered Himself [as a sacrifice]. (28) So while the Law appoints mortal priests beset by physical weakness, the word of God's [own] oath which succeeds the Law appoints a Son who has been fulfilled forever.

Hebrews 7:1-28

### **III. Summary and Paraphrase**

*Melchizedek was a type of Christ. His royal priesthood illuminates our Lord's dual position of King of Kings and High Priest. This change of priesthood likewise demonstrates that the Law has now been replaced by something better.*

What I have been trying to explain to you by these references to Melchizedek (Heb.5:10; 6:20) is this. Melchizedek was, uniquely, both a king and a priest: king of Salem (Jerusalem) and priest of God Most High, *'El-'Elyon*, or God the only true God. In his capacity as priest Melchizedek blessed Abraham and Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek in that capacity. Now there is no genealogy of Melchizedek in scripture nor any mention of his birth or death. That makes him a perfect "type" to represent the Son of God in, e.g., Psalm 110:4, since Christ's priesthood is actually eternal, the point that is represented and foreshadowed by what scripture says about Melchizedek. By analogy then, Christ is greater than Abraham because Melchizedek, a type of Christ, received tithes from Abraham rather than the other way around. And also by analogy then, Christ is greater than Abraham because Melchizedek, a type of Christ, blessed Abraham rather than the other way around. And the fact that the Levites are all offspring of Abraham, means, in effect, that they also paid tithes to Melchizedek and were blessed by him, the lesser by the greater in both cases, symbolizing further that Christ's high priesthood is superior in every way to that of the Law which the Levites administer and from whom the priests of the Law derive.

After all, if the priesthood of the Law of Moses could bring about actual salvation, why would scripture even mention the need for another priest "in the order of Melchizedek"? Changing the priesthood, which is precisely what Christ's sacrifice of Himself on the cross as our true High Priest brought about, of necessity occasions also a change in law – from that of Moses to that of the Spirit (Rom.8:2; 2Cor.3:6). According to the Law of Moses, all priests must be Levites, but Christ in His human nature was of the tribe of Judah. More than that, this new High Priest serves not on the basis of a temporary, hereditary commission but through the power of eternal life, just as the scripture says: "You shall be a priest *forever*" (Psalm 110:4). It is for this very reason that the Law has been set aside, namely, because it could not itself bring about salvation; it merely gave us hope through foreshadowing it of the coming of the One who would take away our sins and open up the door of life eternal for us – it is through this hope that we actually draw close to God.

And since Christ received His high priesthood not by physical birth like the Levites but by direct commission from the Father, verified by His oath (Psalm 110:4), for that very reason He has also become the Guarantor of a covenant, a testament, a promise which is better than the old one, a New Covenant of eternal life through faith in Him and what He did for us on the cross. The Levites served only as long as they lived, but Christ's high priesthood whereby He saved us and through which He intercedes for us always is eternal just as He is. Jesus is therefore able to save all who come to Him for salvation and to intercede always on behalf of all of us who have been saved by putting our faith in Him. That is the kind of High Priest we need, not a sinful human being who can only perform ritual actions but One who can actually provide salvation and help for those who belong to Him. He is holy, without fault, without imperfection, completely separated from sinners, and has ascended higher than the heavens into the presence of the Father. Unlike the human priests, Jesus has no need of making sacrifice day by day, first on behalf of His own sins (since He never sinned), and then for the sins of the people. For this latter He did once and for all when He offered Himself as a sinless sacrifice on the cross to take away the sins of the world once and for all. The Mosaic Law appoint high priests who were mere human beings, but the Son of God who comes after the Law which has now been replaced was appointed by the Father's oath to serve as the true High Priest forever – and He has accomplished the perfect salvation which the Law never could.

#### **IV. Verse by Verse Commentary**

##### **Verses One through Three**

(1) For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God most high, who came to meet Abraham when he was returning from routing the kings and blessed him, (2) and to whom Abraham divided a tenth part of everything, on the one hand being "king of righteousness", when we translate his name, and on the other hand being also "king of Salem" which means "king of peace", (3) lacking a genealogy [in scripture] on either his father's or his mother's side, lacking [also in scripture] a [recorded] beginning of his days or an end of his life, continues in his priesthood forever – [that is] in respect to this comparison of him to the Son of God.

Hebrews 7:1-3



**This Melchizedek:** Paul has mentioned Melchizedek already in the process of establishing that Jesus Christ is the new High Priest appointed directly by the Father on oath.

(5) In the same way Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, [rather, God the Father appointed Him, even] the One who said to Him, "You are My Son; today I have begotten you", (6) just as He likewise says [of Him] in another verse, "You are a priest forever in *the order of Melchizedek*".

Hebrews 5:5-6

(9) And, once He was perfected (i.e., had perfectly completed His course), He became the source of eternal salvation for all who are obedient to Him (i.e., believers), (10) having been previously proclaimed by God [the Father Himself] High Priest in *the order of Melchizedek*.

Hebrews 5:9-10

(19) And this hope is what [truly] "anchors" our lives, so to speak: it is certain; it is solid; it penetrates beyond the [heavenly] veil into the [holy of holies], (20) where our vanguard, Jesus, has entered on our behalf, having become a high priest forever according to *the order of Melchizedek*.

Hebrews 6:19-20

For the first time here, however, Paul brings in the details given about Melchizedek in Genesis 14:18ff. First, he reminds us that Melchizedek was a king, king of Salem, later called Jerusalem, site of the temple and eventual seat of the world capital of the Messiah; second, that he was a "priest of God Most High", namely, of God the Father, represented in this world by His Son our Lord Jesus Christ (Col.1:15; Heb.1:3); third that Melchizedek blessed Abraham the conquering hero and not the other way around; and fourth that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek and not the other way around.

(18) Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, (19) and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. (20) And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Genesis 14:18-20 NIV

Note that Abraham paid a tithe of the spoils to Melchizedek. Now beyond all question, Jesus Christ Himself, whether in His deity or His humanity or in previous appearances in human form as a Christophany (i.e., "the Angel of the Lord"), has never had need of such tithes personally.<sup>5</sup> Tithing under the Law was meant to materially support those who minister to God, specifically the Levites (e.g., Num.18:21-28; Deut.14:22-29; Neh.10:37-38), something of which our Lord, being God, has no need (Ps.50:9-13; Acts 17:25). Note also that Melchizedek is said to be the king of a particular geographic place, and that he brought out "bread and wine" from the town of Salem (i.e., the later Jerusalem), attributes and activities which, while typically human, are never

---

<sup>5</sup> See BB 1: Theology, section II.C.3, "Appearances of Christ in the Old Testament".

attributed to God. In short, the entire situation is one which is inconsistent with other instances of Christophany (e.g., such as in the case of the "three visitors" in Genesis 18, where the speaker is specifically and repeatedly identified as "The Lord" [YHVH]: Gen.18:1; 18:13-14; 18:17; 18:19-20; 18:22; 18:26-27; 18:33). But while Melchizedek was a human being and not the Lord, not, that is, a Christophany, the uniqueness of his situation, being both a priest *and* a king, ministering to Abraham on the one hand and receiving tithes from him on the other, provided Paul with a perfect, God-given analogy to explain the superiority of Christ's new high priesthood. Wrongly imagining Melchizedek to be Christ Himself, however, merely distracts from these important points of comparison: Melchizedek was a human being; he was also, however, a "type" of Christ (i.e., someone, like David, whose life and circumstances provide apt analogies for writers of scripture to draw comparisons between that "type" and the "antitype", Jesus Christ).

**Priest of God Most High:** Melchizedek was installed by God Himself as the priest of *'El Elyon*, "Highest God" – that is, he was appointed by *our* God, the one and only true God. We know that because scripture says that he "*was* a priest of God Most High" (*'Elyon* meaning "uppermost" and so "above all [others]", the title showing that our God is the one and only God). From this we also can deduce that there were other human beings on earth in the past who sought the Lord, and that the Lord did as He has always done, namely, He provided spiritual guidance and sustenance for said individuals, including as here the appointment of qualified individuals to represent Him (even if secular human history does not record other such instances).

We can also say that Melchizedek's arrival to bless Abraham was no more of an accident than was God's providential installment of him at Salem at this particular time. However he was prompted to do so by the Lord, Melchizedek's mission to Abraham was definitely divinely inspired and was necessary as well. We all face temptations and trials in this life, but when it comes to subtle attacks from the evil one, God is gracious to give us the help we need to meet them in a godly way. Directly after this encounter, the king of Sodom would make Abraham a very tempting offer, one which, under the circumstances, might very well have seemed reasonable, namely, for Abraham to take for himself the spoils which he had won in battle (a longstanding tradition in the ancient world generally), merely giving the citizens of Sodom back to the king.

But accepting this offer would have undermined Abraham's spiritual position. For while the king of Sodom would have lost materially thereby, he would have gained spiritual leverage, so to speak, over Abraham. Strengthened by the encouragement and blessing of Melchizedek, Abraham was reminded that it was the Lord who had wrought this great deliverance ("And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand"), and that He was the One who had enriched Abraham and would continue to do so.

(21) Now the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself." (22) But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, (23) that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich' ".  
Genesis 14:21-23 NKJV

For as Melchizedek had assured Abraham, it was most certainly "God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hand" (Gen.14:20 NKJV), not Abraham's own efforts without God's help, as courageous as he had been (cf. Ps.43:3). This was not the sort of test that anyone but a mature believer was capable of passing, and the Lord in His great mercy sent Melchizedek to encourage and fortify Abraham to help him pass it – which he did (with "flying colors").

As we consider this passage, we ought to keep in mind that the Lord does similar things for us all the time as well. We are all given such "Melchizedek moments", and the more spiritually mature we become, the more we begin to see God's hand in everything we experience. So it does behoove us all to strive to recognize and respond to the signals that the Lord graciously gives us (especially when, as in this case, they are far from subtle). And finally on this score, it is also the case that the Church is one Body and that we all have been given gifts and ministries to perform. For all those with combinations of gifts related to encouraging and guiding other believers, we also need to take advantage of the opportunities the Lord may give us to steer fellow believers towards the truth and away from dangerous traps, just as Melchizedek did for Abraham.

(19) My brothers, if someone of you wanders from the truth, and someone [else] turns him back [to the faith], (20) he should know that the one who turns [the] sinner back from the error of his way will save his life from [the sin unto] death, and will [thus] cover a multitude of sins (i.e., the result will be forgiveness instead of the sin unto death).  
James 5:19-20

**King of Righteousness:** Whether this priest-king was named "Melchizedek" at birth or acquired that name as an honorific on account of his good service in that position, while scripture does not say, the latter is more likely (if only on account of the otherwise unlikely coincidence of his name matching his conduct). In either case, the title clearly points towards and looks forward to the ultimate Righteous King, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Behold! The King (i.e., the Messiah) will rule in righteousness. And as for His princes (i.e., the Church, ruling with Him), they will govern justly.  
Isaiah 32:1

Righteousness and justice, while different words in English, are synonymous in terms of biblical doctrine. The Hebrew morpheme *tsdk* (צדק) and its Greek counterpart *dik-* (δικ-) express in all of their related terms the essential notion of being right and just and acting in that same fashion, namely with justice and in a righteous way. God is inherently and perfectly just/righteous and could not possibly be otherwise, nor could He ever possibly act in a way that was not absolutely and completely compatible with genuine justice and uprightness.<sup>6</sup> This is the single most important quality for any ruler to possess, and the fact that Melchizedek, "Righteous-King", demonstrated it to the degree that he earned this title, makes him the perfect "type of Christ", that is, an individual who reflects, represents, and foreshadows Christ Himself in important ways.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> See BB 1: Theology, section I.B, "Perfection".

<sup>7</sup> See BB 4A: Christology, section I.5.c, "Old Testament Typology".

One of the key characteristics of the Millennium will indeed be the justice of our Lord's world kingdom, perfectly administered by Him and by those He appoints to share in His rule (e.g., Rev.2:26-27; 3:21).

Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with *justice* and *righteousness* from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.<sup>8</sup>

Isaiah 9:7 NIV

But let *justice* roll on like a river, *righteousness* like a never-failing stream!

Amos 5:24 NIV

No king can be truly good and allow unrighteousness in his presence (Ps.101:2-8 NIV). We believers, while certainly imperfect, have been made righteous in God's eyes (Gen.15:6), we have been "justified", considered righteous by God because of our faith and subsequent uniting with Jesus Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Rom.1:16-17; 3:22-24; 3:28; 4:1-25; 5:1; 5:9; 5:16-21; 8:30; 9:30; 10:4-6; 1Cor.1:30; 6:11; 2Cor.5:21; Gal.2:16; 3:24; Tit.3:7).<sup>9</sup>

[God] made Him who had no [personal] experience of sinning [to be] sin (i.e., a sin offering) for us, so that we might have God's *righteousness* in Him.

2nd Corinthians 5:21

But while our righteousness at present is positional and not perfectly experiential, i.e., we don't always live up to this high standard, our Lord Jesus Christ has never been and could never be anything but absolutely *righteous*. Therefore our consideration of this aspect of Melchizedek's character invites us to move beyond the type to the antitype, that is, to Jesus Christ our coming King, and to contemplate thereby His surpassing integrity in the realm of justice and righteousness, looking forward to the day when "the government will be on His shoulders", and justice and righteousness will "roll on", "like a never failing stream". On that day, we will be experientially righteous ourselves in every way, this sinful body having been replaced by the perfect and eternal one which we will receive at our Lord's return.

"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear."

Matthew 13:43 NIV

**King of Peace:** In addition to being a just and righteous ruler, in his capacity as "king of peace" (Hebrew *shalom*, from which root "Salem" derives), Melchizedek's godly reign promoted peace and prosperity throughout his kingdom, and in this way too he foreshadows the ultimate Prince of

---

<sup>8</sup> See Coming Tribulation 6: Last Things: The Millennium and New Jerusalem, section III.1.a.2, "[The Millennium's] Exceptional Justice and Righteousness".

<sup>9</sup> See BB 4A: Christology, section II.8, "Justification".

Peace (Is.9:6-7), and the unique prosperity of His millennial kingdom (Ps.72:1-4; 72:16; Is.11:6-9; 30:23-26; 35:1-2; 35:5-6; 41:18-20; 55:12-13; 61:3-7; Jer.31:12-14; Ezek.34:25; 36:29-36; 38:6-12; Hos.2:21-23; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13; Zech.8:4; cf. Rom.8:18-24).

In his (i.e., the Messiah's) days the righteous will flourish; prosperity (*shalom*) will abound till the moon is no more.

Psalm 72:7 NIV

I am about to extend prosperity (*shalom*) to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent.

Isaiah 66:12

But the most sublime blessing of all on that day to which Melchizedek's reign only symbolically corresponds will be the presence of the Light of the world, the Messiah Himself, Jesus Christ our dear Lord and Savior.

(1) Rise up! Shine forth! For your Light has arrived, and the glory of the Lord has burst forth upon you. (2) For behold, the darkness – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you. (3) Nations will come to His light, and kings to the brilliance of His rising.

Isaiah 60:1-3

**Melchizedek's Lack of Genealogy:** The only place where Melchizedek occurs in the Old Testament is at Genesis 14:18-20 (and Psalm 110:4), and although the Old Testament is replete with genealogies (e.g., even the Horites of Mount Seir are given one in Genesis 36:20-30), we are not given any indication of Melchizedek's family. This is no doubt by divine design, so that this comparison to the Messiah, first provided in Psalm 110:4, may now be employed through the Spirit by Paul in Hebrews to completely undermine the dangerous notion that the Law might still be in force. The comparison of Christ's priesthood to that of Melchizedek was tailor-made (and divinely inspired) in order to demonstrate the impossibility of the symbolic Levitical priesthood coexisting with the effectual new priesthood of our Lord.

As we have seen, however, this comparison has confused many interpreters, theologians and translators of the past, and even today it remains a matter of unnecessary controversy. The entire point of Paul's introduction of Melchizedek is precisely to explain Christ's new high priesthood and distinguish it from the now defunct Levitical one, demonstrating in large part by this comparison the superiority of the former to the latter. Failure to properly understand Paul's admittedly challenging Greek and somewhat intricate argumentation is partly to blame for this confusion as attention to some of the differing renderings of the key verse here will show:

Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.

Hebrews 7:3 KJV

. . . without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days

nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.  
Hebrews 7:3 NKJV

There is no record of his father or mother or any of his ancestors – no beginning or end to his life. He remains a priest forever, resembling the Son of God.  
Hebrews 7:3 NLT

The phrase "without descent" in the KJV suggests that Melchizedek was not human. This is improved upon by the NKJV's "without genealogy", a fairly literal rendering of the Greek word, *agenealotetos* (where the prefix *a-* negates the meaning as in "atonal", "without tone"). The NLT rendering brings us closer to what is meant by the Greek words *apator* and *amator*, clarifying that, as a human being, of course he had a father and a mother, but there is no record of them in scripture. That is what *agenealotetos* conveys to a Greek reader, and why it follows these other two words (*apator* and *amator*) directly.

This still leaves us with the difficulty of the final phrase added by Paul in the Spirit in order to make it clear that the comparison is just that, not an exact equating of Melchizedek with Jesus Christ – for no one could be exactly like our Lord for many reasons, not the least of which is His absolutely unique human birth – but a sanctified and biblically authorized (Ps.110:4) comparison of their priesthoods. Putting all of these elements together properly of necessity results in something akin to the translation we are proposing here:

(3) . . . lacking a genealogy [in scripture] on either his father's or his mother's side, lacking [also in scripture] a [recorded] beginning of his days or an end of his life, [he] continues in his priesthood forever – [that is] in respect to this comparison of him to the Son of God.  
Hebrews 7:3

. . . which is to say that *as far as scripture tells us*, we find no end to Melchizedek's priesthood because neither his beginning nor his end is recorded therein. So *in this respect* Melchizedek is "like Jesus Christ", namely, in regard to the comparison of their respective priesthoods. Neither priesthood has an end: Melchizedek's, because his death is not recorded in scripture; Christ's, because in resurrection He lives forever. Thus Melchizedek's priesthood is the perfect and divinely inspired model for the new high priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord has sworn and He will not recant, "You are a priest forever *in the manner of Melchizedek*."  
Psalm 110:4

Therefore, Paul in this passage, Hebrews 7:3, is merely explaining under divine inspiration what the verse above really means: Jesus Christ, the Messiah, would be a unique high priest with a priesthood which, unlike in the case of the sequential Levitical high priests, would never come to an end. That is so, of course, because our Lord has been resurrected.

. . . knowing that Christ, now that He has been raised from the dead, is no longer mortal;

death no longer has any power over Him.  
Romans 6:9

Being no longer subject to death, of course our Lord continues as High Priest forever, having accomplished not merely some symbolic sacrifice but the sacrifice of sacrifices that has actually taken away our sins, His spiritual death in the darkness on our behalf.

"He himself bore our sins" (Is.53:4) in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed" (Is.53:5).  
1st Peter 2:24 NIV

Melchizedek is not Christ nor is he identical to Christ in every detail. Melchizedek is a "type of Christ", where the points of similarity have to do with the foreshadowing of Christ's superior, eternal high priesthood which has replaced the inferior and temporal/temporary Levitical one, thus invalidating the Law with which said earlier priesthood was inextricably connected (Heb.7:12).

### **Verses Four through Ten**

(4) Now do you see how great this [Melchizedek] was, to whom also Abraham our forefather gave a tenth of the spoils? (5) For while those descended from Levi who obtain the priesthood have authorization to tithe the people [of Israel] according to the Law, that is to say, their own brothers, even though they themselves have also come from Abraham, (6) one who does not share in that descent tithed Abraham and blessed him who was given the promises [which we have been discussing (Heb.6:12-17)]. (7) Beyond all argument, the lesser is blessed by the greater. (8) And while in the case [of the Levites] it is mortal men who receive the tithes, in the case [of Melchizedek, representing Christ], we have One who has received testimony as living [forever] (Ps.110:4, i.e., Jesus Christ). (9) One might even say that Levi, the one who receives the tithes, was himself tithed. (10) For he was still in the body of his father Abraham when Melchizedek met with him.  
Hebrews 7:4-10

Having in the previous verses established Melchizedek's *bona fides* as a righteous king and provider of prosperity to those over whom he ruled, thereby foreshadowing the millennial rule of Christ (a proposition to which none of his readers were likely to object), Paul goes on now to demonstrate the superiority of Christ's priesthood through the same comparison of Melchizedek to Christ, one made all the stronger by this prior unbreakable linkage of the kingship to the priesthood, true in Melchizedek's case, and thus true also in our Lord's case as the one appointed by the Father "in the order of Melchizedek" (Ps.110:4).

**Tithing and Blessing:** Melchizedek in his capacity as priest blessed Abraham and Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek in his capacity as priest, but Melchizedek was also a king as Christ is *the* King of Kings as well as *the* High Priest (no Levites were kings under the Law). At every point in the case being built by Paul through this comparison, we see not only the superiority of

Christ but also the necessity of the passing away of the Law which was inextricably connected to and dependent upon the Aaronic priesthood. And the fact that the priest-king Melchizedek was a mere, sinful human being just as we are, makes Christ's superiority all the more clear. Because if a mere man such as we are was so superior to Abraham that he blessed him (instead of the other way around), and if his priesthood was so superior to the Aaronic one (which would spring from Abraham) that he received rather than paid tithes, how much more is it not abundantly clear that Christ's heavenly High Priesthood is so exceedingly superior so as to supplant the earthly Levitical one entirely?

By analogy then, Christ is greater than Abraham because Melchizedek, a type of Christ, received tithes from Abraham rather than the other way around. And being greater than Abraham, Christ's priesthood is definitely greater than that of the Levites since Levi, one of Abraham's great grandsons, had not even been born when Melchizedek blessed him and received tithes from him. And to reiterate, Melchizedek was only a *type* of Christ, that is, someone who represented and foreshadowed Him in some important respects (kingship and priesthood in Melchizedek's case), so that *a fortiore* (i.e., "with stronger reason"), if it is true that on account of Genesis 14:21-23 and Psalm 110:4 we can say that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham in these respects (and we can), then so much the more it is true that Christ's High Priesthood is greater than the Levitical priesthood – since the actual new High Priest is clearly greater than the human being who foreshadowed Him – even though said Levitical priesthood was still being held in (no longer appropriate) high esteem by many in the Jerusalem church.

**Tithing:** Tithing was a system of taxation common in the ancient world where, literally, "a tenth" was collected from the whole. Sometimes this whole was, as in the case we have been studying in Genesis chapter fourteen, the spoils gathered from some conquest or victory. Sometimes it was essentially a tax on income (agricultural "income", that is, a tenth of a crop produced). Sometimes it was a tax on net-worth (variously figured; that was the system but not the rate of the Roman census system of taxation).

(20) Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear (21) so that I return safely to my father's household, then the Lord will be my God, (22) and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me ***I will give you a tenth.***"

Genesis 28:20-22 NIV

Regarding the passage above, it should be noted that the night before the Lord had appeared to Jacob and had already assured him of his safe return (among many other future blessings)"

(12) There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. (14) Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. (15) I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I



have done what I have promised you."  
Genesis 28:13-15 NIV

This set of promises was given by the Lord to Jacob unconditionally. It did not require either a subsequent vow or a promise to render a tithe on "all that you give me" (Gen.28:22) in order to be fulfilled. It is impossible to know the heart of any human being, but it does strike the reader that "thank you" might have been a more appropriate response, whereas vowing a tithe and a subsequent "house of God" appears to be more of an attempt to solidify God's promises through bargaining rather than being an expression of complete faith.

Jacob's faith in the Lord would be tested repeatedly and solidified in the proper way during his twenty years of hard service under Laban. There is no record of Jacob ever actually fulfilling this vow. No "house of God" is ever said to have been constructed at Bethel (Luz) – though Jacob did construct an altar there at the Lord's command (Gen.35:1-7). Nor is there any record of Jacob ever paying a tithe to the Lord "of all that you give me" (Gen.28:22), and it is unclear how he might have done so even if he had possessed the inclination to do so. The Lord does remind Jacob of his vow in general terms (Gen.31:13), but that is in the context of sending him back to the land of Canaan and likewise reminding him of who it is with whom he is speaking, namely, the Lord "who has been with me wherever I have gone" (Gen.35:3; cf. Gen.31:5; 31:42).

The tithing which the Mosaic Law established was meant to support the Levites and the tabernacle (later "temple") worship (as well as to provide for the poor). This certainly fulfills the thought behind Jacob's original vow.<sup>10</sup> And in that sense, Israel (all of Jacob's descendants in the other tribes of Israel) does pay a tenth to the Lord (to the Levites for their support through his other descendants).

"A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord."  
Leviticus 27:30 NIV

The Lord said to Aaron, "You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites. (21) I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting."  
Numbers 18:21-22 NIV

This tithe was in addition to portions from sacrifices and offerings and first-fruits and required the Levites to give tithes of what they received to the priests. As to the tithe itself, it was paid only every third year so that it seems likely that there were two tithing years anticipated in every set of seven years, the seventh being the Sabbath year when no work was to be done (but this portion of the Law was never actually carried out: cf., Lev.26:34; 26:43). The tithe of the other

---

<sup>10</sup> Much ink has been spilled in scholarship in attempts to understand and harmonize the various passages in the Bible concerning tithing. For basic background, see the excellent article "Tithe" in John D. Davis' *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Philadelphia 1898), s.v.

two years was in fact mostly to be enjoyed in celebration to the Lord by those responsible to set it aside.

(22) "Be sure to set aside **a tenth** of all that your fields produce each year. (23) Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the Lord your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always. (24) But if that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the Lord your God and cannot carry your tithe (because the place where the Lord will choose to put his Name is so far away), (25) then exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go to the place the Lord your God will choose. (26) Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice. (27) And do not neglect the Levites living in your towns, for they have no allotment or inheritance of their own. (28) **At the end of every three years**, bring all the **tithes of that year's produce** and store it in your towns, (29) so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

Deuteronomy 14:22-29 NIV

When you have finished setting aside **a tenth** of all your produce **in the third year, the year of the tithe**, you shall give it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.

Deuteronomy 26:12 NIV

Later on in Israel's history, tithing seems to have occurred sporadically and to have been seen only as a yearly tax for Levite and temple support (2Chron.31:4-12; Mal.3:7-12; Lk.11:42; 18:12).

(37) "Moreover, we will bring to the storerooms of the house of our God, to the priests, the first of our ground meal, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees and of our new wine and olive oil. And we will bring a tithe of our crops to the Levites, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work. (38) A priest descended from Aaron is to accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury. (39) The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and olive oil to the storerooms, where the articles for the sanctuary and for the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the musicians are also kept. We will not neglect the house of our God."

Nehemiah 10:37-39 NIV

For our purposes in this passage, it is enough to understand that a tithe is an offering paid **to a superior authority**, whether voluntarily as in Abraham's case or out of obligation as should have been the case throughout Israel's history.

Given the abusive guilt-inducing practice of "tithing" in many churches today, it must be said here that there is nothing in scripture which even suggests the continuation of the practice of tithing as it is described in the Mosaic Law and sometimes practiced in Israel. There is nothing wrong with a Christian giving his/her church ten percent of their income (gross or net) . . . or twenty percent or thirty percent or zero percent. For a pastor to suggest that giving ten percent (gross or net) is godly and that anything less (such as net rather than gross) is falling short of what God requires is nothing more than unauthorized manipulation of the congregation. Simply put, tithing is an Old Testament system of obligatory taxation and/or entirely voluntary provision of an offering from the spoils of battle. Adopting it as a means of paying a church's bills is not biblical.

(9) For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? (10) Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. (11) If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? (12) If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. (13) Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? (14) In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

1st Corinthians 9:9-14 NIV

(17) The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. (18) For Scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain", and "The worker deserves his wages".

1st Timothy 5:17-18 NIV

While mandatory tithing is not valid for Church Age assemblies, neither is failing to provide for the man (or men) who are providing the spiritual nutrition to the congregation. In keeping with the grace basis found throughout the New Testament, no "rules" about this subject are ever given beyond the principle stated above, namely, that a church which is not sufficiently providing for its pastor-teacher is out of line with the Word of God.

Paul, it is true, refused to use this right of support in respect to the Corinthian church to whom the first passage above is addressed (cf. 1Cor.9:15-18), and that has been the model adopted by this ministry, Ichthys (without regrets), but the majority of men called to the pastorate will have material needs for themselves and for their families. If a group of believers wishes to have a face-to-face, in person pastor-teacher, the very *first* order of business is to settle the problem of how to support him in a sufficient, consistent and reasonable way – *not* to find a space or building dedicated to its use.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> These issues are discussed in some detail in BB 6B: Ecclesiology, section II.C, "Organization and Functions of the Local Church".

And while in the case [of the Levites] it is mortal men who receive the tithes, in the case [of Melchizedek, representing Christ], we have One who has received testimony as living [forever] (Ps.110:4, i.e., Jesus Christ).  
Hebrews 7:8

What, then, is the spiritual significance of Melchizedek's tithing of Abraham? Simply put, it proves that Melchizedek was the spiritual superior of Abraham, since the superior tithes the inferior rather than the other way around. Moreover, Abraham represents the Levitical priesthood of Paul's day, since Levi was Abraham's descendant; and Melchizedek represents Jesus Christ, since Christ's unique high priesthood was established by the Father "after the manner" of Melchizedek (Ps.110:4).

Christ's high priesthood is thus superior in every way to the Levitical one to the extent of supplanting it altogether. For the latter is founded on the Law without which there was no authority or authorization for the Levites to tithe anyone, but Melchizedek tithed Abraham, the forefather of all Levites, without any Law whatsoever. The Levites tax their own kin, but Abraham was no relation of Melchizedek. And in doing so, "mere mortal men" receive the tithe, but Melchizedek's genealogy is unknown and in that regard he represents the eternal nature of Christ's new and unique high priesthood.

Thus Levi and the priesthood which fell to his descendants was himself subject to the tithing which Abraham paid to Melchizedek, representing the complete subordination of the old priesthood to the new. By using this comparison, therefore, Paul completely demolishes any claim that might be made for the continuation of the Levitical priesthood after the establishing of Christ's new high priesthood, "in the manner of Melchizedek", as a result of the great victory of His once-for-all sacrifice on Calvary's cross.

(1) The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit down at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." (2) From Zion the Lord will send forth your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! (3) Your people will volunteer on the day of your valor[ous victory] (i.e., the armies of Israel). In the holy chambers, from the womb of the dawn, your young [troops] will [come] to you like the dew (i.e., the armies of the newly resurrected). (4) The Lord has sworn and He will not recant, "You are a priest forever in the manner of Melchizedek."  
Psalm 110:1-4

(11) Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. (12) But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, (13) and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool.  
Hebrews 10:11-13 NIV

**Blessing:** The verb "bless" in Hebrew and the noun "knee" come from the same root (*barach*), and are likely related. The verb originally seems to have meant to go down on one's knees to worship God (which explains why there are many passages where it is said that individuals "bless

God", i.e., going down on one's knees to worship Him; e.g., Gen.9:26; 24:28; Ex.18:10; Deut.8:10), and from that usage the verb also came to mean to supplicate oneself in asking for God's blessing and thence "to bless" others (its most common use in the Old Testament). God's blessings which consist of all the wonderful and gracious things He does for us are directly counterpoised in scripture to His cursings (e.g., Deut.27:12-13; 28:1-68), the former coming to His people who respond to Him and the latter to those who oppose Him. This much, at least, is obvious to any reader of scripture.

(1) Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. (2) I will make you a great nation; I will **ble**ss you and make your name great; and you shall be a **ble**ssing. (3) I will **ble**ss those who **ble**ss you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be **ble**ssed."  
Genesis 12:1-3 NKJV (cf. Gen.27:29)

In our context, however, we see that this ability to confer God's blessing on others is sometimes delegated to human beings, as was the case when Melchizedek blessed Abraham – although he left no doubt as to just **who** it was that was the source of that blessing: "Blessed be Abram **by God Most High**, Creator of heaven and earth. (20) And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand" (Gen.14:19-20 NIV). These words, carefully considered, make it clear that whenever anyone is said to legitimately "bless" anyone else in scripture, what they are actually doing is asking for or confirming **God's** blessing:

(22) And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: (23) "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, '**This is the way you shall bless** the children of Israel. Say to them: (24) "The Lord bless you and keep you; (25) The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; (26) The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.'" ' (27) "So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and **I will bless** them."  
Num 6:22-27 NKJV

No human being has the power to bless another in a supernatural way, but on occasion in scripture we do find God having made a direct delegation of this power of blessing to certain unique individuals.

(32) His father Isaac asked him, "Who are you?" "I am your son," he answered, "your firstborn, Esau." 33 Isaac trembled violently and said, "Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and **I blessed him – and indeed he will be blessed!**"  
Genesis 27:32-33 (cf. Gen.28:3-4)

Isaac's conviction that Jacob would "indeed be blessed" instead of Esau as he had intended derived from his trust that God's gift to him of passing on blessing was true and would endure regardless of anything else:

**By faith** Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

Hebrews 11:20 NKJV

In other words, Isaac had total confidence in what the Lord had told him: the one he blessed, would indeed be blessed . . . because God would see to it (cf. Gen.48:9-22). It was always God's will for this to be Jacob, not Esau, despite Isaac's personal preference for his firstborn son. So here we see even in this most striking case of delegation of the ability to bless, it is those who respond to the Lord who are blessed, not those who refuse to do so; and even Isaac could only confirm God's will (even against his own will, though he had received this right to bless).

The Lord said to [Rebekah], "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and ***the older will serve the younger.***"

Genesis 25:23 NIV

We find a similar situation in the case of Balaam whom Balak hired to curse Israel – but God caused him to bless Israel instead, much against his will.

(16) The Lord met with Balaam and put a word in his mouth and said, "Go back to Balak and give him this word." (17) So he went to him and found him standing beside his offering, with the Moabite officials. Balak asked him, "What did the LORD say?" (18) Then he spoke his message: "Arise, Balak, and listen; hear me, son of Zippor. (19) God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? (20) I have received a command to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot change it. (21) "No misfortune is seen in Jacob, no misery observed in Israel. The Lord their God is with them; the shout of the King is among them. (22) God brought them out of Egypt; they have the strength of a wild ox. (23) There is no divination against Jacob, no evil omens against Israel. It will now be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'See what God has done!' (24) The people rise like a lioness; they rouse themselves like a lion that does not rest till it devours its prey and drinks the blood of its victims." (25) Then Balak said to Balaam, "Neither curse them at all nor bless them at all!" (26) Balaam answered, "Did I not tell you I must do whatever the Lord says?"

Numbers 23:16-26 NIV

In our day, saying "God bless you!" is a commonplace, engaged in liberally by unbelievers as well as believers. It is thus necessary to say that scripture gives no credence to any idea that believers have this power (all the Old Testament examples involve prophets specially empowered by God), much less any unbeliever. Scriptures which indicate the "blessing" of one human being by another in actuality mean showing appreciation for what others have done and asking God's blessing upon them as a result. However, for a believer to use such language, even if by it they merely mean, "I wish God's blessing upon you!", is at the very least potentially misleading.

"You shall in any case return the pledge to him again when the sun goes down, that he may sleep in his own garment ***and bless you.***"

## Deuteronomy 24:13a NKJV

Melchizedek, as a human being, could only do what God allowed him to do, namely, to affirm God's blessing on Abraham. As a type of Christ, he conferred that blessing (in the analogy), demonstrating in this regard too the superiority of the high priesthood of Jesus Christ (represented by Melchizedek) to that of the Levites and the Law (represented by Abraham).

### Verses Eleven through Twelve

(11) So if there were any fulfillment [of the plan of God] through the Levitical priesthood – and the entire people [of Israel] received the Law on the basis of their priesthood – why then was there a need for another Priest to arise "according to the order of Melchizedek" (Ps.104:4), rather than being selected according to the order of Aaron? (12) For when there is a change of priesthood, of necessity there must also be a change of law.  
Hebrews 7:11-12

**An Unanswerable Question:** Not for the first time nor for the last, Paul seeks to drive home his main point about the obsolescence of the Law through unassailable logic. If this seems somewhat repetitive, indeed it is: sanctified repetition authorized by the Holy Spirit. And necessary. When it comes to rebellion from the truth, rebels are not generally easily persuaded even when the arguments used against them are untouchable in their reasonableness.

"Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you."  
Psalm 32:9 NIV

In such cases, when the resistance to the truth is high, especially when said opposition is based upon long held and sentimental attachment to something, nothing short of a logical two-by-four applied directly to the cranium is likely to have much of an impact. As we have noted before, it is not clear from the biblical record (or from the secular history which survives) what effect this masterful epistle had on the majority of the Jerusalem believers.

Could the plan of God for salvation have been "fulfilled through the Levitical priesthood"? If it could, then Christ would not have had to suffer and die for our sins (Heb.10:1). If it could, then there would be no need for continual sacrifice (Heb.10:11). If it could, then why had it not yet done so and if so, then why were sacrifices still being made?

Is it possible to separate the Levitical priesthood from the Law? Certainly not, because the Jewish people "received the Law *on the basis* of their priesthood". So either Christ is the High Priest or the high priests taken from the Levites are still authorized to serve. Both cannot be true.

Was there a need for a new High Priest, "according to the order of Melchizedek"? Scripture affirms that this is the case (Ps.104:4). Was this selection according to descent from Levi or was it extraordinary (in the etymological sense of the word, namely, outside of the normal order)? Not from the Levites but from One who was of the tribe of Judah by birth.

None of the objections woven into the complex question which is verse eleven have an answer. Not a biblical one, that is. All attempts to "square the circle" here will run afoul of scripture. Either the Messiah is our Priest-King or there is no Messiah.

### **An Inescapable Conclusion:**

For when there is a change of priesthood, of necessity there must also be a change of law.  
Hebrews 7:12

The Greek conjunction *gar* at the beginning of verse twelve ("for") explains the reason for what went before; by using this conjunction Paul is saying, essentially, "the reason I ask this question is because of the obvious incompatibility of the two priesthoods, and the clear necessity of abandoning the prior Law which is inextricably linked to the former priesthood if there has indeed been a change to a new High Priesthood".

Paul will detail in the verses and chapters to come the further implications for the rituals of the Mosaic Law of Christ's victory gained at the cross. What he is forcing the Jerusalem believers to accept with this inescapable conclusion – inescapable, that is, for all who claim to be believers in Jesus Christ, His perfect person, God and man, and His perfect work in dying for our sins on the cross, the essential expression of His priestly mission to save us – is the absolute irreconcilability of the cross and the Law, that is, the incompatibility with true faith of continuing to engage in the rituals of the Law which Christ has now fulfilled.

This point Paul has made before in a variety of different ways. In this chapter we see the essential reason for his long dissertation on the priesthood. Every priesthood is based upon, defined and authorized by the law under which it operates. The two cannot be disaggregated, disconnected or otherwise separated. Change one, and the other must change. Change the priesthood from Levites to Christ, and of necessity the Law must also now be considered obsolete. And this change of priesthood *must* have happened since only Jesus Christ can be our true High Priest (Ps.110:4), the One who has fulfilled the requirements of the Mosaic Law which were merely symbolized by its rituals: the Law required animal sacrifice to represent Christ's spiritual death on our behalf; but Jesus actually paid for our sins.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"  
John 1:29 NIV

(18) For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, (19) but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.  
1st Peter 1:18-19 NIV

In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"  
Revelation 5:12 NIV



A further, unavoidable inference from Paul's argument is the uncomfortable realization that by following the Mosaic Law, one is of necessity denying the change of priesthood which took place when our Lord won the great victory of the cross and subsequently received the pronouncement validating His new High Priesthood ("You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek": Ps.110:4 NIV) at the Father's proclamation of session after our Lord's resurrection and ascension to the third heaven ("Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet": Ps.110:1 NIV). Such a denial is tantamount to denying the efficacy of the cross, to denying Jesus Christ.

This is, of course, precisely the logic of what the wayward Jerusalem believers were doing (cf. Heb.6:4-6; 10:26-27), and Paul is going to great lengths to point this out unmistakably. By inseparably connecting the priesthood to the Law upon which it was founded, and by reminding these believers that Jesus Christ is our new and our true High Priest, Paul proves that continuing in the Law is fundamentally incompatible with honoring our Lord who fulfilled the "righteous requirements" of the Law by dying for our sins (Rom.5:16; 5:18; cf. Rom.1:32; 2:6; 8:4). By continuing in the Old Covenant, one is necessarily *rejecting* the New Covenant.

He has made us competent as ministers of *a new covenant* – not of the letter (i.e., the Law, the old covenant) but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.  
2nd Corinthians 3:6 NIV

Cleaving to the old priesthood thus alienates those who do so from the new law, the law of the Spirit, the New Covenant which has been ratified by the blood of Christ.

(1) So now, there [awaits] no judgment of condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the Law of sin and death.  
Romans 8:1-2

But for those who reject the New Covenant "in My blood" (Lk.22:20; 1Cor.11:25), as continuing with the ritual sacrifices of the Old Covenant surely signifies (because it proclaims a Savior not yet come or His sacrifice not sufficient), there exists no other "sacrifice [capable of taking away] sins" (Heb.10:6): if Jesus' sacrifice is rejected, the rituals of the Law which merely looked forward to that sacrifice are surely of no help when it comes to eternal salvation – and especially not after they have been fulfilled and rendered obsolete. Not only is continuing in these rituals ineffective (whereas before the cross they represented the hope and confidence of their eventual fulfillment – true faith), but such behavior is actually a horrible affront to God the Father, throwing, in effect, His sacrifice of His one and only dear Son for us back in His face.

You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.  
Galatians 5:4

Whether the fall from grace on the part of the Jerusalem congregation was temporary (i.e., God being displeased with them so that they have incurred His disfavor until they repent) or would

become permanent (through complete apostasy, the death of their faith, through persistence in turning their back to God), remained to be seen at time of writing. Paul was certainly sparing no effort in attempting to orchestrate their repentance.

[We] know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

Galatians 2:16 NIV

(23) Before faith [in Jesus Christ] arrived, we were being guarded under the Law[*'s* protection], shut in [in anticipation of] our faith which was destined to be revealed. (24) So the Law acts as a guardian to us [who leads us] to Christ so that we might be justified by faith. (25) But now that faith has come (i.e., now that we are believers in Jesus Christ), we are no longer under that guardianship [of the Law].

Galatians 3:23-25

True faith – faith in Jesus Christ – is thus incompatible with the Mosaic Law, in no small part because Christ's sacrifice has fulfilled the Law (Matt.5:17). This is a principle of critical importance today just as much as it was in Paul's day. All putative believers in Jesus Christ who wish to follow the Mosaic Law's rituals in any fashion and in any degree need to consider carefully that doing so as a means to spirituality is a dangerous mistake, and how much more deadly if salvation is seen to rest thereon even to the smallest degree.

Therefore no flesh shall be considered righteous before Him through the works of the Law, for it is through the Law that we come to acknowledge [our] sin.

Romans 3:20

On account of its fulfillment by Jesus Christ (Matt.5:17), the Law has now become obsolete (Heb.8:13). The change of priesthood occasioned by our Lord's victory has required a concomitant change of Law, from the Law of the dead letter to the powerful Law of the Spirit (Rom.8:1), from the Old Covenant which could never provide salvation to the New Covenant (Gal.3:21-22; cf. Heb.8:6; 8:8; 9:15; 12:24), wherein we who believe in Jesus Christ have been born again, born from above, and have become, instead of slaves to the Law, freeborn children of God the Father through our faith in His Son (Gal.3:26; 1Jn.3:1).

For Christ is the fulfillment (lit., "end") of the Law, resulting in righteousness for everyone who believes [in Him].

Romans 10:4

Then the One sitting upon the Throne said to me, "Behold! I am making everything new."

Revelation 21:5a

### **Verses Thirteen through Sixteen**

(13) After all, the One about whom these things are said, [Jesus Christ], came from a different tribe, one which never had a share in the altar. (14) For it is crystal clear that our Lord stemmed from the tribe of Judah, a tribe about which Moses never said anything about priests. (15) And this [need for a change of Law] is even more clear if another Priest arises who is fundamentally similar to Melchizedek (i.e., in the two main points of comparison: eternity and superiority to Abraham), (16) namely, One who becomes [Priest] not on the basis of the Law's commandment, but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life [which brings with it an unchanging priesthood].  
Hebrews 7:13-16

**Judah:** Our Lord's descent from the tribe of Judah is a further proof that the Law has been rendered obsolete. Descent from Levi, and specifically also from Aaron, was absolutely necessary in order to be appointed to the priesthood under the Law. If even Levites who were not of Aaron's line could not be considered for the priesthood, how much more anyone who was not even of that tribe? But our Lord Jesus Christ received His appointment directly from God the Father, irrespective of lacking this prerequisite under the Law.

The Lord has sworn and He will not recant, "You are a priest forever in the manner of Melchizedek."  
Psalm 110:4

One important reason in the selection of the tribe of Judah for our Lord's genealogy is the membership of David in that tribe.

*Of David.* A psalm. The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit down at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."  
Psalm 110:1

(41) While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, (42) saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They said to Him, "The Son of David." (43) He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying: (44) 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool" ' ? (45) If David then calls Him 'Lord', how is He his Son?" (46) And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.  
Matthew 22:41-46 NKJV

The answer to our Lord's question above is, of course, that only by being God Himself could our Lord rate the title of "Lord", outranking king David absolutely, even though He is, in His human nature, David's son. And it is in that very context of the Psalm quoted above by our Lord, three verses later, where the Father appoints Him "a priest forever in the manner of Melchizedek" (Ps.110:4). Thus our Lord Jesus' high priesthood is freed from any putative limitations on the basis of biological descent by the direct overriding of these concerns through the overruling will of God the Father – in the same way that Jesus Christ is David's Lord in spite of being his descendent.

Our Lord Jesus Christ thus is, of course, David's greater Son, and in the mentions of our Lord's lineage it is usually His descent from David which is the point that is emphasized rather than His tribal affiliation per se (e.g., Matt.1:1; 9:27; 22:42; Lk.1:32; 1:69; Rom.1:3; 2Tim.2:8; Rev.22:16; cf. also Rev.5:5 where "from the tribe of Judah" is immediately reinforced by "[from] the root of David"). For Jesus is the "Son of David", the One who fulfills the covenant to that great believer wherein he was promised a Son who would reign forever, the Branch who would spring from his root, namely, the Messiah (cf. 2Sam.7:12-16; Is.9:6-7; Jer.23:5-6).

Therefore the first and technical reason for Jesus' descent from Judah is the important fact that Jesus is *the* "First-born" unique and only Son of the Father (Rom.8:29; Col.1:15; 1:18; Heb.1:6; Rev.1:5; cf. Jn.1:14; 1:18; 3:16 3:18; 1Jn.4:9), and Judah is the tribe of the first-born – by assignment. For although Reuben was technically Jacob's first-born son, he forfeited the double-portion rights of inheritance that would otherwise have accrued thereto through misconduct – and he lost them to Judah (cf. Gen.49:3-4; 1Chron.5:1). It is for this that reason the "ruler's scepter" belongs to Judah (Gen.49:10; cf. Num.24:17), who forever after receives the privileges of the first-born. While we are not specifically told why it is that Simeon and Levi, Judah's older brothers, were disqualified from taking Reuben's place (even though they were elder to Judah), it no doubt has to do with the incident in Genesis chapter 34:1ff., where the two brothers deceived and slaughtered the citizens of Shechem as retaliation for the violation of their sister, Dinah (cf. 1Chron.22:8).

Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I am few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I."  
Genesis 34:30 NKJV

(5) "Simeon and Levi are brothers;  
Instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place.  
(6) Let not my soul enter their council;  
Let not my honor be united to their assembly;  
For in their anger they slew a man,  
And in their self-will they hamstrung an ox.  
(7) Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce;  
And their wrath, for it is cruel!  
I will divide them in Jacob  
And scatter them in Israel.  
Genesis 49:5-7 NKJV

Just as the three brothers ahead of Judah were disqualified for misconduct, so we have a reverse parallel in the case of David who was promoted for extraordinary conduct (specifically, his exceptional love for the Lord: 1Sam.13:14; Ps.78:70-72; 89:3-4; 89:19-38). David, of course, far from being the eldest was the youngest of the eight sons of Jesse, and yet because of his heart for God and his dedication to the Lord which put all of his brethren in the shade, he was exalted as no one before him, becoming, in effect, the first-born (for God looks on the heart: 1Sam.16:7).

So on this point of "primogenitor", it is important to remember that God is not only capable of but also inclined to exalt the humble and humble the proud, considering the true "first-born" to be him or her who puts the Lord first in their hearts, demonstrating that faith and dedication in lives of faithfulness (cf., "and the older will serve the younger"; Gen.25:23). And it is only in carrying our crosses daily in this way that we emulate Him who is *the Firstborn* of all creation, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the One who earned that privilege through His victory on Calvary's cross.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.  
Romans 8:29 NKJV

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.  
Colossians 1:15 NKJV

And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.  
Colossians 1:18 NKJV

But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: "Let all the angels of God worship Him".  
Hebrews 1:6 NKJV

. . . and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth.  
Revelation 1:5a NKJV

**The Melchizedek Paradigm Applied:** Given that Christ has been appointed High Priest by God the Father Himself (Ps.110:4), His priesthood outranks all others. His priesthood is "in the manner" of that of Melchizedek, a fact that establishes this superiority beyond all argument. Far from being descended from Levi, Melchizedek has no recorded genealogy, so our Lord's priesthood does not depend upon this earthly requirement. And in fact, since Abraham, the original ancestor of Levi (and thus superior to his later offspring), paid tithes to Melchizedek and was blessed by Melchizedek rather than the other way around, this position of superiority for Christ's priesthood is even more clear.

Our Lord's priesthood is not dependent upon what the Law commanded (Heb.7:16); to the contrary, His priesthood was given to Him completely apart from the Law, not "on the basis of the Law's commandment", but "according to the order of Melchizedek" who was not even Jewish – and more than that, blessed and received tithes from the father of all Jews. And while all of the Levitical priests served only as long as life endured, our Lord's appointment was given to Him "on the basis of the power of an indestructible life" (Heb.7:16). Melchizedek's lack of genealogy and chronology in scripture foreshadows our Lord's resurrection wherein "death no longer has any power over Him" (Rom.6:9). Thus Jesus' new high priesthood is eternal because Christ in His humanity is no longer subject to death, having been resurrected from the dead, and so can

and will continue as "priest forever in the manner of Melchizedek" (Ps.110:4). These things being so, Paul might well ask his readers, "how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world (*ta stoicheia*, referring to the precepts of the Law), whose slaves you want to be once more?" (Gal.4:9 ESV).

### Verses Seventeen through Nineteen

(17) For [the Father] testifies that "You are a Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek". (18) Herein we have then a revoking of the prior commandment (i.e., the Law) on account of it being weak and ineffectual (i.e., unable to bring fulfillment to the plan of salvation), (19) – for the Law fulfilled nothing – and instead the bringing in of a better hope through which we [actually do] draw near to God.  
Hebrews 7:17-19

The new high priesthood which Jesus Christ has been given – which He has earned through His sacrifice on the cross – is eternal because Christ in His humanity is no longer subject to death, having been resurrected from the dead (Rom.6:9; cf. Rev.20:6). Thus, since the time of His resurrection, ascension and session at the Father's right hand, He is advocating for us (Rom.8:34; 1Jn.2:1; cf. 1Tim.2:5); since He lives forever, unlike earthly high priests, He is always able now and forever more to be "making intercession" for us who belong to Him (Heb.7:25).

**Revocation of the "Prior Commandment":** The "prior commandment" (Gk. *entole* fr. *entellomai*, meaning "to command") is used by Paul as shorthand for the Law, usually expressed in the plural ("the commandments": Matt.5:19; 19:17; Mk.10:19; Lk.1:6; 18:20; Eph.2:15; cf. Rom.13:9-10), but occasionally also singular as we have it here (Matt.15:3; Rom.7:8-13; Heb.9:19). It is this Law which has been revoked, replaced, "set aside" (Gk. *athetesis* fr. *atithemi*, meaning to "re-place"). And specifically, it is the Levitical priesthood which has been replaced by the high priesthood of Jesus Christ, our new High Priest, who will occupy that position forever.

Since the entire Mosaic Law rests upon the Levitical priesthood, of necessity, as Paul has already shown and we have seen (Heb.7:12), the Law itself has been rendered obsolete by our Lord's sacrifice on the cross and appointment by the Father as "priest forever in the order of Melchizedek" (Ps.110:4). For the Law "fulfilled nothing" (Heb.7:19), being "weak and ineffectual" (Heb.7:18): the Mosaic Law and its priesthood merely foreshadowed – through the ministrations of priests with sin natures sacrificing animals – the effectual sacrifice of Jesus Christ which fulfilled the entire plan of the Father for the salvation of those who belong to Him through faith.

Unlike the [other] high priests, [Jesus] has no need of making sacrifice day by day, first on behalf of His own sins, and then for the sins of the people. For this [latter] He did once and for all when He offered Himself [as a sacrifice].  
Hebrews 7:27

He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy

Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.  
Hebrews 9:12 NIV

And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus  
Christ once for all.  
Hebrews 10:10 NIV

### **The Mosaic Law:**

(9b) We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. (10) Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! (11a) And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.  
Romans 4:9b-11a NIV

(16) The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. (17) What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. (18) For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.  
Galatians 3:16-18 NIV

Abraham is the father of all Israel, but, as these passages assure us, Abraham never lived under the Law, nor did he receive God's promises on the basis of the Law, not even on the basis of circumcision which followed rather than preceded his faith and served as a sign of that faith rather than as a basis for it. And the Mosaic Law in its totality was only given over four centuries later. Therefore it cannot and does not invalidate the promises to Abraham which were given to him on the basis of faith, not on the basis of following any sort of written code.

Now [Abraham] had *believed* in the Lord, and [the Lord] considered him righteous because of it.  
Genesis 15:6

(6) . . . just as Abraham "*believed* God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."  
(7) Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.  
Galatians 3:6-7 NKJV (cf. Rom.4:1; Heb.2:16)

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to *the promise*.  
Galatians 3:29 NKJV

One cannot read our context passage (Heb.7:18-19), nor the other passages in Hebrews where the Law is specifically said to have been replaced (Heb.7:12; 8:13), nor the book of Hebrews in general (where the theme of the replacement of the old with the new and with "better things" permeates the book), nor the Pauline epistles generally (especially Romans and Galatians),

without recognizing that with the coming of the Messiah, His spiritual death on the cross, and His resurrection and exaltation, a major change has taken place regarding the applicability of the Mosaic Law to we who believe. In place of the Old Covenant, we now have a "New Covenant", one which is all about the reality of Jesus Christ replacing the shadows of the Law (Matt.26:28; Mk.13:24; 2Cor.3:6; Heb.8:6; 8:8; 8:12; 9:15; 12:24).

"This cup is *the new covenant* [ratified] by My blood which is shed on your behalf."  
Luke 22:20b

And in the same way [after eating] He took the cup, saying, "This cup is *the new covenant* [made] by my blood. Keep on doing this as often as you drink [it] in order to remember Me".  
1st Corinthians 11:25

Given how much abuse today, how much legalism (that is, Pharisaical allegiance to false tenets putatively based on the Law) on the one hand, and antinomianism (literally, anti-Law-ism, meaning, essentially, libertinism) on the other, and the fact that antichrist's religion will make use of both of these extremes, a brief consideration of the Mosaic Law and what it means for Spirit-filled believers today seems in order.

#### 1. Definition of the Law:

(7) "You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: (8) 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. (9) They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules' (Is.29:13)."  
Matthew 15:7-9 NIV

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."  
Matthew 23:23 NIV

The first passage above illustrates the difference between the actual Law of Moses and how it was being applied by the unbelieving religious establishment of our Lord's day – analogous to the misapplication of scripture (often from the Old Testament) by legalistic groups today. The second passage illustrates how that even if the "letter of the law" is followed in some instance, even with hyper-scrupulosity (to the point of even tithing the small herbs of one's garden), all such fastidiousness is pointless when such individuals ignore and neglect the power and true purpose of the truth contained in the Law. Important to note here is that there may be – and usually is – a huge gulf between what Law-keeping groups and individuals teach and do and what the actual Law of Moses really meant and means.

They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.



## 1st Timothy 1:7 NIV

The term Law in the New Testament is a translation of the Greek word *nomos*, itself a translation of the Hebrew word *torah*, which means "teaching". "The Law" most often refers to the first five books of the Bible written by Moses, otherwise known as the Pentateuch (e.g., Matt.5:17; 7:12; 22:40; Lk.16:16; 22:44; Jn.1:17; 1:45; 7:19; 8:5; Acts 13:15; 15:5), but may also sometimes refer to the entire Old Testament (e.g., Matt.23:33; Lk.5:17; Jn.10:34), and sometimes to the ten commandments specifically (e.g., Lk.10:26; Rom.7:7). Regardless of the specific reference, there is in truth complete unanimity in God's message throughout the Old Testament: in scripture itself, no conflict is assumed to exist between the ten commandments, the Pentateuch, and the rest of the Old Testament canon (the "Prophets" and the "Writings", as they are commonly called), and none in fact does.

The ten commandments are often referred to as "the covenant" or "the testimony" (e.g., Ex.34:28-29), because they sum up the entire teaching of the Law. As such, the ten commandments, rightly understood, stand as an intermediary between the simple law of love and the entire written code of the Law, giving us a solid basis for a correct spiritual, moral, and legal approach to living righteously before the Lord. This, of course, is not possible to do with fleshly effort alone. Inherent in every teaching and every commandment found in the Law, therefore, is the demonstration of our need for God's help in order live the way He commands us to do, help that is foreshadowed in one way or another in every one of the Law's rituals and symbols: namely, a Savior who alone can deliver us from sin and impart life instead. Jesus Christ and our need for Him has always been the fundamental meaning and message behind the "teaching" or Torah.

(17) Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; (18) if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; (19) if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, (20) an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth – (21a) you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself?

Romans 2:17-21a NIV

The Law is indeed "the embodiment of knowledge and truth", but only if that essential message and meaning is understood and accepted. The point of the Law is not the mastery of all manner of rules and regulations and the scrupulous adherence to them. That approach is the most common one taken by those who attempt the impossible task of "keeping the Law", whether they try to do so a little or a lot (i.e., with the temple gone, huge sections of the Law cannot possibly be complied with, and the majority of legalistic "Christian" groups are highly selective about which portions of the Law they acknowledge as necessary to follow). But that approach is exactly backwards. It is not the observance of the vast array of mandates which are to be found in the Old Testament which is important (traditional Judaism finds 613 in the Pentateuch alone), but instead the fundamental principle of the love of God found therein which draws those willing to listen close to Him.

(35) One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: (36) "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (37) Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' (38) This is the first and greatest commandment. (39) And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (40) All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."  
Matthew 22:35-40 NIV

## 2. The purpose of the Law:

(19) We know that however many things the Law says it says to those under [the authority of] the Law, [and it does so] in order that every mouth may be shut and that the entire world may be [revealed] as guilty in God's eyes. (20) Therefore no flesh shall be considered righteous before Him through the works of the Law, ***for it is through the Law that we come to acknowledge [our] sin.***  
Romans 3:19-20

(12) So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. (13) Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, ***in order that sin might be recognized as sin***, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.  
Romans 7:12-13 NIV

As these passages make clear, the fundamental purpose of the Law was ***not*** to justify anyone before God through adherence to it, but rather by demonstrating the inability of anyone to fully comply with it to bring about a recognition of the need for justification ***through faith***. That was the pattern of Abraham (Gen.15:6), so that faith in God's Substitute, God's solution to sin and death, was always the means of salvation, and the Law, coming 430 years after God's promise to Abraham "does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise" (Gal.3:17 NIV). Salvation has always been given by God to sinful man on a grace basis, the price for that salvation being paid by Jesus Christ, prospectively before the cross (and foreshadowed in every animal sacrifice under the Law), and retrospectively after the cross (Rom.3:25-26).

For [even] before the Law [was handed down], there was [indeed] sin in the world, but, when there was no Law, sin was not being taken into account [by us as it was after the Law].  
Romans 5:13

But the Law came in so that the [recognition of] transgressions might increase.  
Romans 5:20a

I used to be alive once without the Law, but when the commandment came [to my attention (i.e., not to covet: cf. Rom.7:7)], sin sprang to life again and I died.  
Romans 7:9

Paul's personal experience, related in the verse immediately above, illustrates the other two passages cited. The Law brings recognition of sin (Rom.3:20; 7:12-13); that is its initial purpose, in order to demolish the deadly dangerous legalistic notion that a person who is "good" (by human reckoning) is somehow not subject to condemnation. As someone who did his best to be upright as an unbeliever, Paul was under this false impression (as so many people are). But the Law destroyed this unstable edifice and brought it crashing to the ground (cf. Matt.7:24-29; Lk.6:47-49). This revelation, i.e., of his essential sinfulness in spite of human effort, did not produce salvation for Paul immediately (as the rest of Romans chapter seven makes clear; that would require direct, divine intervention: compare Rom.7:24 with Rom.7:25), but it did remove the obstacle of comfortable (and completely misplaced) self-righteousness which has proven to be such a stumbling block for so many.

(30) What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by [lit., "from"] *faith*; (31) but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. (32) Why not? Because they pursued it not by [lit., "from"] faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. (33) As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame" (Is.8:13; 28:16).  
Romans 9:30-33 NIV

That is first and foremost what the Law was designed to do, namely, prepare the hearts of all who hear it for salvation "by grace through *faith*" (Eph.2:8-9; cf. Rom.1:16-17), by demonstrating our utter sinfulness and complete need of help from God in the form of a Substitute to bear our sins, a Substitute whom only He could ever provide, the Messiah. He is the Rock in which all believers have put their trust; and the "stone of stumbling" over which all who refuse to rely on Him instead of themselves and their own works have stumbled. The Law is true in every way, and "if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law" (Gal.3:21b NIV). But the Law's purpose is *not* to justify those who keep it; to the contrary, its purpose is to demonstrate to any and all who seek salvation from their own efforts the impossibility of all such arrogant efforts. The Law shows us that we are sinners in need of grace (Rom.7:7-13), and so the Law is our "teacher" who leads us to saving faith – if we are willing to be led.

(22) But scripture has locked everything up under [the power of] sin, so that the promise which is fulfilled through faith in Christ might be given to those who believe. (23) Before faith arrived, we were being guarded under the Law[*'s* protection], shut in [in anticipation of] our faith which was destined to be revealed. (24) So the Law acts as a guardian to us [who leads us] to Christ so that we might be justified by faith.  
Galatians 3:22-24

### 3. The true meaning of the Law:

What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I did not come to know sin except through the Law.

Romans 7:7

Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.

Galatians 3:21 NIV

The Law points out the problem: we are sinners; and the Law also points to the solution: God's Substitute for our sins, received by faith.

(5) Moses writes about the righteousness that comes through the law, "The person who does them will live in it" (Lev.18:5). (6) But the righteousness that comes *through faith* says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend to heaven?' " – that is, to bring Christ down – (7) "or 'Who will descend into the Abyss?' " – that is, to bring Christ up from the dead. (8) But what does it say? "The word is near you: [it is] in your mouth and in your heart." That is the word of faith that we proclaim. (9) For if you acknowledge with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:5-9

No one can "do" everything the Law requires, not perfectly. And we know of a certainty that "whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (Jas.2:10 NIV). So while the Law does demand "doing", it is the "believing" part which produced salvation, with the "doing" part meant to follow faith *not* to precede it or far less to replace it (as legalism does). That, after all, is precisely the way the New Testament puts things in explaining the Christian way of life. *First* we need to turn away from ourselves and toward Jesus Christ, believing in Him; *then* we need to pick up that cross and follow Him (Matt.16:24; Mk.8:34; Lk.9:23): faith comes first; then comes faithfulness.

(16) For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power whereby God may save everyone who believes (whether the Jew first, or the Greek). (17) Because in it the righteousness of God is revealed *from faith to faith*, as it is written, "[it is he who is] righteous *on account of his faith* [who] shall live [*on account of his faith*]".

Romans 1:16-17

We are saved "by grace through faith" (Eph.2:8-9); we live thereafter through that faith (Gal.3:11; Heb.10:38; cf. 2Tim.2:11-13). But legalism reverses this God-given mandate; legalism "does" and then expects salvation as a result. To the unpracticed eye the two approaches may perhaps seem similar – so that Leviticus 18:15 and Deuteronomy 30:11-14 may seem inherently contradictory. But there is no conflict between these two passages when they are rightly understood: *believers* are obligated to follow the Lord and His commands; *unbelievers* gain nothing by substituting supposed obedience (in following rules and regulations, often largely of their own making and choosing), and expecting God to be pleased when they have no genuine faith in Him whatsoever. And no amount of zeal can alter this essential fact.

It is dangerous to have zeal without knowledge.  
Proverbs 19:2a NET

For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge (*epignosis*: "full-knowledge" which acknowledges the truth **through faith**).  
Romans 10:2 NIV

So while Psalm 119, for example, sings the praises of the Law, it does not do so in a vacuum of legalism. Valid appreciation for the Law of the Lord cannot be divorced from the foundation of truth upon which it is actually based (e.g., Ps.119:105). By demonstrating our sinfulness – and informing us of God's great mercy and grace, along with the way of salvation – the Law is truly worthy of praise. The Law is indeed good in every way – "**if** one uses it properly" (1Tim.1:8) – giving those who hear it correctly an understanding of the truth which looks to the Lord for deliverance from sin and death and then loves Him with all one's heart, recognizing that it is not strict adherence to ritual but faith and faithful obedience to Him and to the truth which are the bedrock of the Law. This distinction, while puzzling to some, makes all the difference in the world to believers. Neither antinomianism (i.e., libertinism) nor legalism (i.e., Phariseeism) are legitimate approaches because the latter abandons the truth contained in the Law for the sake of mere "rules taught by men" (Is.29:13; Matt.15:9), while the former throws off all restraint to follow its own desires (cf. Rom.6:15-16).

(11) "Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. (12) It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, 'Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' (13) Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, 'Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' (14) No, the word is very near you; it is in **your mouth** and in **your heart** so you may obey it."  
Deuteronomy 30:11-14 NIV

Paul in Romans explains the passage above as a gospel appeal, for, as he points out, scripture also affirms that "Whoever **believes** in Him will not be put to shame" (Is.28:16; belief from **the heart**); and "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Joel 2:32; faith expressed with **the mouth**). These are two manifestations of the same saving faith which cannot be split up either in Deuteronomy or in Romans, because one cannot express what one does not believe and all who believe express that faith to God in prayer at salvation at least.

(16) "See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. (16) For I command you today **to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws**; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess."  
Deuteronomy 30:15-16 NIV

This passage is the immediate follow-on to the verses quoted just previously. Herein we see the essence of the Law: those who **have** expressed faith having put their trust in the Lord are saved (Deut.30:11-14); then, **as believers**, loving the Lord was (and is) the prerequisite for walking in obedience to Him and the essence of keeping the Law – not perfection in ritualistic behavior, but

understanding and believing and behaving according to the truth behind it.

(35) One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: (36) "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (37) Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' (38) This is the first and greatest commandment. (39) And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (40) All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."  
Matthew 22:35-40 NIV

(8) Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. (9) The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (10) Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.  
Romans 13:8-10 NIV

For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."  
Galatians 5:14 NIV

This, loving the Lord and our fellow believers, was how to follow and keep the Law in truth then, and the same is true today. This, the principle of love, is something only believers can adhere to, and only effectively through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (e.g., 1Cor.12:3; Gal.5:22-23; Eph.5:9). But for unbelievers, the Law's purpose is not strict adherence to rituals which cannot save, but the demonstration of the need for salvation, *and* the teaching of the Way of salvation. Rightly understood, the Law, like all other scripture, is all about Jesus Christ.

(25) He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! (26) Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" (27) And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.  
Luke 24:25-27 NIV

"You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me."  
John 5:39 NIV

(45) "But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. (46) If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. (47) But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"  
John 5:45-47 NIV

Preferring one's own *parti pris* interpretation of the Mosaic Law is, therefore, as the passage

directly above in particular makes clear, in truth opposing the *actual* Law which is at its base entirely about Jesus Christ. That is what the *Torah*, "the teaching", was always meant to be, namely, a guide to the one Way of salvation, to Him who is the truth, to Him whom all the sacrifices and rituals of the Law actually represent.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*"

John 1:29 NIV

(16) So don't let anyone judge you in regard to food or drink, or in the category of festival observances, be it of new moons or Sabbaths. (17) All these things are *shadows* of what was to come, *but the reality has to do with Christ*.

Colossians 2:16-17

4. The fulfillment of the Law: The Law, as we have seen, was meant to be our guide to lead us to Jesus Christ (Gal.3:24). In so doing, it was important for it to convict all of being sinners (Rom.3:9-10; 3:19; 3:23; 5:12; 11:32; Gal.3:22), to demonstrate that no one can attain the righteousness of God which is necessary to be saved by following the Law (Rom.3:21; Gal.2:16-17; 3:9; 5:24), and then to offer salvation through the provision of God's Substitute, the One represented in all of the rituals and sacrifices of the Law, the One who alone could take away sins (Acts 4:12).

Once saved, once having put faith and trust in the Lord, then indeed the Law provided a model for sanctified behavior, being partially very direct and universally applicable even today (e.g., the ten commandments, if the fourth be correctly understood), and partially applicable only to the unique situation of the people and nation of Israel who, before the fulfillment of the Law by Jesus Christ, constituted God's special witness, Israel itself being a "type of Christ":

And He said, "It is too small a thing for you to be My servant, to establish the tribes of Jacob and to restore the sanctified ones of Israel. Therefore I have appointed you as a Light for the nations, to be My [instrument of] salvation to the ends of the earth."

Isaiah 49:6 (cf. Is.41:8)

Once the Law's demands had been fulfilled by the blood of Christ which takes away sin, and once the Law's symbolic meaning had been fulfilled through the coming and the sacrifice of the Messiah, that second category of the Law, namely, the ritual part, the shadows of the Law, the "food and drink", the "festival observances", the "new moons or Sabbaths", as Paul presents these things in schematic at Colossians 2:16-17, has been rendered obsolete. These regulations, while symbolically illustrative of the truth (specifically, holy Israel's separation from the profane world), are now unnecessary for believers today to follow. Indeed, now that Jesus has paid for all of our sins, including all of the trespasses and violations incurred under the Law (whose forgiveness was represented by their being covered by the blood of animal sacrifices), continuing in the rituals which represented Christ's sacrifice is tantamount to rejecting that actual sacrifice which the rituals merely represented – precisely what the Jerusalem congregation was guilty of doing. This, in short, is the problem with all legalism. Whenever the following of rules and

regulations is preferred to the grace won for us at the cross by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, anyone involved in so doing is guilty of attempting to be justified by works.

(2) For if Abraham really was considered righteous as a result of the works [he did], then he has something to boast about – but not in front of God! (3) What does the scripture actually say? [It actually says that] "Abraham *believed* in God, and [so *his faith*] was attributed to him for righteousness."

Romans 4:2-3

No one can be justified before God except through faith in Jesus Christ. Not through following the Law, and certainly not through partial following of the Law (i.e., the temple no longer exists so that many of the Law's stipulations are impossible to comply with at present), and most emphatically *not* through following some system of legalistic behavior which is selectively and only tangentially related to the actual Law of Moses.

(11) But Christ has already arrived [in heaven] as High Priest of the good things to come, [having passed] through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, that is, the one which is not of this creation. (12) Nor was it through the blood of goats and bullocks, but through His own blood (i.e., His spiritual death) that He entered once and for all into the holy of holies, having wrought eternal redemption. (13) For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of the heifer sprinkled upon the unclean render a person holy in respect to bodily cleansing, (14) how much more will the blood of Christ, who offered Himself without defect to God through the eternal Spirit, cleanse our conscience from dead works so that we may serve the living God? (15) And it is for this reason that He is the Mediator of a New Covenant, so that those who have been called might receive their eternal inheritance on the basis of the death He suffered to redeem us from the transgressions [committed] under the first Covenant.

Hebrews 9:11-15 (cf. Heb.12:24)

Animal blood, which must be shed according to the Law, did nothing to take away sin. Instead, this physical blood represented the coming work of Jesus Christ on the cross in paying the penalty for all of sins.<sup>12</sup> Now that all such shadows have actually been fulfilled by the coming of Christ and by His death on the cross, it is no longer necessary for believers to participate in these rituals which merely represented what our Lord would do for us in the future. The shadows have all been fulfilled. The Law has been fulfilled, for its purpose was to point to the Messiah not yet come. Therefore all of the other aspects of the Law have been fulfilled as well – because Jesus Christ has now come and died for us all.

(17) "Do not assume that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets: I did not come to abolish but *to fulfill*. (18) For what I say to you is the truth: Until heaven and earth pass away, not one iota or one serif will pass away from the Law – until everything has come to pass (i.e., the shadows of the Law fulfilled on the cross)."

Matthew 5:17-18

---

<sup>12</sup> See BB 4A: Christology, section II.4, "The Blood of Christ".



For Christ is *the fulfillment* (lit., "end": *telos*) of the Law, resulting in *righteousness* for everyone who *believes* [in Him].

Romans 10:4

(28) After [all] this (i.e., our Lord's physical suffering and His spiritual death for the sins of the world), when Jesus knew that everything had now been accomplished (*tetelestai* <*telos*) in order for the [prophecy of salvation found in] scripture *to be fulfilled*, He said, "I am thirsty". (29) Now a jar of wine-vinegar lay there, so they placed a sponge full of the wine-vinegar on a hyssop [stalk] and brought it to His mouth. (30) So when He had taken the wine-vinegar, Jesus said, "It (i.e., salvation) has [now] been accomplished!" (*tetelestai* <*telos*), and having thrown back His head, He gave up His spirit.

John 19:28-30

Believers have thus, through Christ's sacrifice, been released from slavery to the Law (Rom.7:6), in order to serve our new Master, Jesus Christ (Rom.7:4). No one can serve two masters (Matt.6:24; Lk.16:13). So either a person belongs to the Law (seeking salvation through works), or to the Lord Jesus Christ (seeking to be saved by grace through faith). Not both.

Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another – to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.

Romans 7:4 NKJV

It is for this reason, namely, our being dead to sin and to the Law through having been "baptized", that is, made one with Jesus at salvation by being entered into union with Him by the Holy Spirit (e.g., Jn.14:20; 15:1ff.; Rom.16:7; 2Cor.5:17; Eph.2:6; 2:10; Heb.3:14; 1Pet.5:14)<sup>13</sup>, that we believers have been given a new commandment: to love one another – for love is the true essence of and the only way to truly carry out the underlying meaning and teaching of the Law (Jn.13:34; 1Jn.2:7-8; 3:22-23; 4:21; 2Jn.1:5; Rev.12:17; 14:12); and we have also for that reason been given a New Covenant (Matt.26:28; Mk.14:24; Lk.22:20; 1Cor.11:25; 2Cor.3:6; Heb.8:6; 8:8; 8:13; 9:15; 12:24).

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

John 1:17 NIV

Our Lord instituted the "New Covenant *in My blood*" (Lk.22:20; 1Cor.11:25) thereby replacing the Old Covenant in animal blood which was a mere symbol of what our Lord would do for us in actually paying the price for all of our sins (e.g., Heb.9:7-14; see under vv.22-25 below).<sup>14</sup> Nothing could be more important. Indeed, nothing *is* more important in the history of the world – from the true divine point of view – than the cross.

---

<sup>13</sup> See BB 4B: Soteriology, section III.2.j, "Union with Christ", and BB 5: Pneumatology, section II.B.2.b.1.c.1, "in Christ".

<sup>14</sup> See BB 4A: Christology, section II.4, "The Blood of Christ".

(6) But the fact is that the ministry which [Jesus] has received is a more excellent one to the same degree that the [New] Covenant of which He is the mediator is better [than the Old]. For this [New Covenant] has been instituted on the basis of better promises. (7) For if that first [covenant] had been perfect, an occasion for the second would not have been sought.

Hebrews 8:6-7

And it is for this reason that He is the Mediator of a New Covenant, so that those who have been called might receive their eternal inheritance on the basis of the death He suffered to redeem us from the transgressions [committed] under the first Covenant.

Hebrews 9:15

In terms of those who have trusted Him, the Old Covenant chronicles the calling out of a special people who were to demonstrate their holiness through collectively following a perfect standard which differentiated them from the other nations of the world; the New Covenant shows that all peoples may come to the Father through Jesus Christ, and transforms that perfect standard of rules into one of power in the Holy Spirit. Both covenants have rules; both have the Spirit; but the emphasis has shifted just as in the case of the emphasis shift after the revelation of Christ on the issue of salvation. Misunderstanding or misusing either side of these equations is what causes the trouble. So if anyone wants to be saved by keeping the Law, they are misunderstanding it and not using it properly. If anyone wants to achieve holiness through the Law, the same thing applies (Gal.2:21): we can only pursue sanctification effectively through the Spirit. In the end, you either follow Moses or Christ (Jn.1:17), and only Christ can save.

For there is no salvation through any other person, nor has any other name on earth been given by which we must be saved.

Acts 4:12

Now that the Law has been fulfilled by the life and spiritual death of Jesus Christ, now that the old has been replaced by the new, any desire to "keep the Law" today is virtually impossible to disaggregate from an essential rejection of the person and work of Jesus Christ, the One of whom the Law spoke, the One who has fulfilled its requirements, the One who has given us the new commandment to love one another and the New Covenant whereby we are genuinely saved (rather than anticipating the eventual propitiation of sins: Rom.3:25-26). In short, seeking to be justified by one's own efforts in following the Law (or, more accurately, any manner of false appraisals and/or selective uses of it) constitutes in fact a rejection of the One who has fulfilled and replaced it.

You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

Galatians 5:4 NKJV

5. The present use of the Law: Though we who believe, we who have been justified by faith, are "dead to the Law" (Rom.7:4), so as to be "alive to Christ" (Rom.6:11), that does not mean that the Old Testament is pointless or useless. Far from it. But the Law itself has to be properly

understood and properly employed by believers today, not in "the oldness of the letter" but in "the newness of the Spirit" (Rom.7:6).

He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

Matthew 13:52 NIV

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

Romans 15:4 NIV

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.

1st Timothy 1:8 NIV

In short, there is a great difference between what legalism does in wrongly applying the Law through completely (and usually willfully) misunderstanding it on the one hand, and proper interpretation of Old Testament passages in light of the revelation of all of the mysteries of God through the New Testament on the other.

(25) Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, (26) but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith – (27) to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Romans 16:25-27 NIV

We greatly value the Old Testament, just as Paul did, that great defender of grace, the author of Hebrews and of the passage above. But we read it in the power of the Spirit as those who belong to Jesus Christ, the now revealed Messiah who has fulfilled the requirements of the Law and dispelled its shadows through His advent, His death on the cross, and His resurrection. Failure to interpret the Old in light of the New Testament's unveiling of these mysteries (which the Old contains in shadow form) is part of the problem, whether that false perspective comes through ignorance or confusion or willfulness. Prior misuse of the Old Testament, going back as far as the Pharisees in our Lord's time, is another part. The rituals of the Old Testament have now been replaced by the reality of Jesus Christ, so that today the contrast between walking in grace and legalistic adherence to the letter of the Law (and mere human interpretations of it) – without regard for the underlying power of the truth it contains – could not be more stark.

Our capability comes from God, who has made us capable ministers of a new covenant – not the one of the letter (i.e., the Law), but one of the Spirit. That is because the letter (i.e., the Law) puts us to death, but the Spirit brings us to [eternal] life.

2nd Corinthians 3:6 (cf. Rom.2:29; 8:10; Gal.4:29)

Failure to view, interpret and make use of the Law and the entire Old Testament in light of the revelation of Jesus Christ can lead to misguided legalism of the sort the Jerusalem congregation had fallen into. But an overly zealous application of that same principle can lead to the false impression that the Law and the Old Testament are now without value for Christians in the Church Age. As noted above, that is also far from being true. But the value for us in the Old Testament scriptures is to be found in the underlying truths they contain. Before the coming of Jesus Christ, before the coming of the Holy Spirit, much of that truth was taught by way of symbolism through rituals which are no longer valid because Christ has fulfilled them. Focusing on the rituals without regard for their underlying truth – focusing on the letter rather than the Spirit who wrote and empowers them – is what legalism of any stripe essentially is, and it turns God's purpose completely upside down, substituting works for grace. Embracing the grace in which we now stand (Rom.5:1-2), moreover, does not invalidate the truth the Law imparted; rather, it illuminates it.

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

Paul's approach to his treatment of the Law (seen above but also in all of his writings) gives us the perfect example and the correct perspective. No one did more in the Spirit to prove that the Law has been fulfilled and replaced by grace . . . and no one quoted and made use of the Law and the Old Testament more in his teaching than the apostle Paul did – in the Spirit (e.g., just in the book of Romans: Rom.1:17; 2:24; 3:4; 3:10; 4:17; 8:36; 9:13; 9:33; 10:15; 11:8; 11:26; 14:11; 15:3; 15:9; 15:21).

But now we have been freed from the Law by having died to that ["first husband"] by which we were being constrained, so that we may [now] serve [the Lord] in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written [code] (i.e., the Law).  
Romans 7:6

Since the Spirit has replaced the letter, since love has replaced the details of the Law, since the New Covenant has replaced the Old . . . since Jesus Christ has replaced the rituals, symbols and shadows which looked forward to Him and His coming, we believers today not only have the right but also the duty to serve our Lord "not in the old way of the written code" but "in the new way of the Spirit". Our liberation from the Law, both in how we are to live our lives and how we are to view and interpret scriptures, has not come about so that we may be derelict in our duty but so that we may bear fruit for our Savior more bountifully than was or could ever have been the case under the Law's restraint and without the revelations of the New Testament, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

So then, my brothers, you also (i.e., like a woman free to remarry on account of her husband's death) have been put to death in respect to the Law through the body of Christ in order to belong to Another, even to One who has been raised from the dead, ***so that you may bear fruit to God.***  
Romans 7:4

At 1st Timothy 5:18, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 25:4 ("You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain": NKJV) to demonstrate the need for congregations to provide financial support for their pastors. He introduces the quote by saying "for the scripture says". Clearly, therefore, the entire Old Testament was in Paul's spirit-filled view still "scripture", the Word of God, and still spiritually useful, despite the fact that "Christ is the end of the Law for all who believe" (Rom.10:4). Furthermore, Paul also tells us that "all scripture [clearly including the Old Testament] is God-breathed" (2Tim.3:16), and, in commenting upon another Old Testament passage he is using for support (Ps.69:9), he says that "everything written in the past was written for instruction in order that through perseverance [in reading it] and encouragement which the [clearly Old Testament] scriptures provide we might have hope" (Rom.15:4). Thus in Paul's inspired view, the Old Testament never stopped being the Word of God in spite of the fact that we Church Age believers are no longer subject to the shadows of the Law therein. Everything in the Bible is true; and everything in the Old Testament which is prescriptive and proscriptive is still valid when one takes into account its fulfillment by Jesus Christ and its illumination in the New Testament, transforming ritual into a new and more powerful reality through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

#### 6. The transformation of the Law:

Therefore I entreat you by God's mercy, brothers, to dedicate your bodies as a living sacrifice, well-pleasing to God – [*this* is] your "priestly-service" spiritually performed.  
Romans 12:1

The above passage explains this essential transformation we have been discussing of the Old Covenant to the New. No longer do believers have any need of animal sacrifice since "Christ, our [true] Passover was sacrificed for us [already]" (1Cor.5:7). No longer do we need Levitical priests to officiate on our behalf since Jesus Christ is the new High Priest (Heb.2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:1; 5:5; 5:10; 6:20; 7:26; 9:11; 10:21), and we are all priests with Him by virtue of our union with Him (1Pet.2:5; 2:9; Rev.1:6; 5:10; 20:6). Instead, the sacrifices we are to offer are not the bodies of animals but our own bodies, not offering them for slaughter on an altar, but offering them up to the Lord to be used by Him and for Him for the purpose of building up His Church. This is our "priestly service" as Church Age believers indwelt by the Holy Spirit, service which is spiritual, real and powerful (as opposed to the sacrifices of the Law which were physical, merely symbolic and lacking in any true inherent value).

Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.  
Romans 6:13 NIV

The Law represented the truth. We believers who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit are to live the truth. Instead of offering animals which represented the coming sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we believers today are to offer ourselves up, our bodies, as "instruments of righteousness", to be made use of by the Lord, who sacrificed Himself for us, in accomplishing the mission He has for us here in the world to be carried out in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the fundamental

transformation of the symbolism of the Law of the letter, which taught holiness through diet and many other regulations, into the actual demonstration of God's holiness and love in the lives of individual believers in Jesus Christ empowered by the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

(19) Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you (whom you have from God), and that you don't belong to yourselves? (20) You were bought at a [precious] price. So glorify God with your body.  
1st Corinthians 6:19-20

Instead of worshiping at the old, physical temple, the Jerusalem believers should have realized the above: we, the Church of Jesus Christ collective and individually, are the new, true temple where God resides (Jn.14:23), and it is the spiritual sacrifices of growth, progress and production, rather than animal sacrifices, which are now well-pleasing to God.

(4) [It is Jesus] to whom you have come, a Living Stone, rejected by men, but, in the eyes of God [the Father], elect and highly honored. (5) And you yourselves [too] are being built up (i.e., by the Holy Spirit) into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood for the offering of spiritual sacrifices well-pleasing to God through Jesus Christ.  
1st Peter 2:4-5

This transformation of the Law of the letter into the law of the Spirit applies across the board in the "newness of life" we have in Jesus Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Rom.6:4; 7:6; 8:4; 2Cor.3:5; cf. 1Cor.5:7; Phil.2:17; 4:18; Heb.13:15).

For if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. Prior things have passed away. Look! New things have come.  
2nd Corinthians 5:17

Breathing the Spirit of life into the dead letter of the Law – and revealing the powerful truths shaded by its symbols – is what the New Covenant is all about. "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and tomorrow" (Heb.13:8), but **now** we see Him clearly since His incarnation, first advent, victory on the cross and resurrection. That is the essence of the transformation of that we are discussing, and it is perhaps seen most clearly in the following three examples:

a) The 4th Commandment:

(9) Six days you shall labor and do all your work, (10) but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. (11) For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.  
Exodus 20:9-11 NIV

(1) At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were

hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. (2) When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath." (3) He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? (4) He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread – which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. (5) Or haven't you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? (6) I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. (7) If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. (8) For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Matthew 12:1-8 NIV

(16) So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. (17) In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." (18) For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

John 5:16-18 NIV (cf. Jn.9:1-14)

The fourth commandment is the only one not repeated as a command anywhere in the New Testament, and we see from our Lord's words above part of the reason for this. The Sabbath was never meant to be a burden, but a time of rest – to seek the Lord. And when doing His work is at issue, then, even under the Law, overly literal observation in the manner of the Pharisees was never God's intent (i.e., overlooking the fact that mercy is superior to sacrifice: Hos.6:6; Matt.12:7). Now that the Holy Spirit has come, the literal seventh day rest has been replaced by a continual rest of faith wherein believers, through the Spirit, have ceased from their works not physically but spiritually, trusting the Lord in the Spirit to accomplish all we need to accomplish in this world.

(8) Now if Joshua had given [the exodus generation and their children this] rest, [God] would not be speaking about any other "day" [of rest, so long] after those [earlier] events. (9) So [then] there does remain a "Sabbath day's rest" for the people of God. (10) For he who has entered into [God's] rest has himself ceased from his works just as God did from His own. (11) Let us therefore be eager to enter into that [continual and spiritual] rest, lest anyone fall [from grace] following the same pattern of disobedience [exhibited by the exodus generation].

Hebrews 4:8-10

We have covered this passage in detail in our treatment of Hebrews chapter four. Sufficient here is to remember that under the Spirit we are dealing with spiritual realities rather than rituals which merely symbolize them. Physically resting one day a week is a beautiful picture of the rest we enjoy by trusting the Lord (looking forward to eternal peace and rest on the other side of this grim world), but more dynamic and powerful is actually entering into that peace and rest **at all times**, even in the midst of the noise and churn of this present world, through trusting the Lord after salvation in a manner similar to the way in which we entered into that salvation in the first place: moving "from faith to faith" in the power of the Holy Spirit so that we "live by faith",

trusting and resting in Jesus Christ continuously (Rom.1:17).

That is the New Covenant fulfillment of the fourth commandment, and it is illustrative of the transformation from Law to grace which we are discussing in this section. Instead of ritual observance symbolizing spiritual reality, under the regime of the Holy Spirit we are now actually experiencing the spiritual reality to which the Law merely pointed. Going backwards, retreating into the Law (as many of the Jerusalem believers were doing and is sadly all too prevalent in our own day), is a spiritual tragedy, albeit one which is always self-inflicted and completely unnecessary.

(1) So now, there [awaits] no judgment of condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (2) For *the law of the Spirit of life* in Christ Jesus has freed you from *the Law of sin and death*.

Romans 8:1-2

b) The Greatest Commandment:

(35) One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: (36) "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (37) Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' (38) This is the first and greatest commandment. (39) And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (40) All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Matthew 22:35-40 NIV

Love, as our Lord solemnly affirms above, is the essence of the Law, rightly understood. In fact, love fulfills the Law, that is to say, its actual, underlying requirements as opposed to its legalistic application by unbelievers.

(8) Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. (9) The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (10) Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore *love is the fulfillment of the law*.

Romans 13:8-10 NIV

*For the entire law is fulfilled* in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Galatians 5:14 NIV

Love is the highest Christian virtue (1Cor.13:1-13; cf. Rom.12:10; 1Cor.16:14; Gal.5:6; 5:22; Eph.4:2; 4:15-16; 5:2; Phil.1:9; 2:2; Col.1:5; 3:14; 1Thes.3:12; 4:9-10; 5:8; Heb.12:24; Jas.2:8; 1Pet.1:22; 2:17; 4:8; 1Jn.3:11; 3:23; 4:7; 4:21; 2Jn.1:5). If we are truly walking in love, then the purpose of the Law has been fulfilled in us and we are fulfilling that underlying truth in the power of the Holy Spirit.



c) The New Commandment:

"(34) A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (35) By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 13:34-35 NKJV

"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

John 15:12 NKJV

The commandment is "new", because while it is embodied in the Law (as being the counterpart commandment to loving the Lord), it is given here by our Lord as special, standing apart from all of the other commandments of the Law.

(7) Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. (8) Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. (9) He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. (10) He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. (11) But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

1st John 2:7-11 NKJV

And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another.

2nd John 1:5

At its most fundamental, love is the transformation of the Law for us who have been given the means of fulfilling it: the Holy Spirit. That is the essence of the New Covenant versus the Old, namely, spiritual reality replacing the ritual of the letter through the actual victory of Jesus Christ, God the Father's genuine sacrifice for our sin, through whom we have been given the Holy Spirit that we might walk like Him and with Him in this world to His glory: for, "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked." (1Jn.2:6 NKJV; cf. 2Cor.3:18; Col 3:10).

Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, ***because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.***

John 18:28 NIV

While often overlooked, the above highlights most eloquently the difference between the truth underlying the Law and its mere ritual observance. The Jewish leaders who orchestrated our Lord's crucifixion wanted to be done with Him as soon as possible so that His elimination might not interfere with their enjoyment of a ritual which spoke entirely of Him! The Law is ***all*** about

God the Father's love for us in Jesus Christ, sacrificed for us, which the Passover represents.

Legalism is just so. It always ignores, overlooks and denies the underlying truth which the commandments of the Old Covenant contained, truths which the New Covenant brings to light for any and all who are willing to accept the truth. To go back to the old in willful rejection of the truth explained by the new is to be no different from the Jewish leaders in the passage above, embracing their hypocrisy and blindness in trading Jesus Christ for a false and legalistic interpretation of rituals which, rightly understood, were all about Him in the first place. That is precisely the opposite of embracing the transformation from Law to grace, from the letter to the Spirit, which the New Covenant commands us to do. But that is what the Jerusalem believers were doing, and this is what Paul is trying to cure them of with this epistle, turning them back to Jesus Christ who has already fulfilled the Law, turning them back to Him who is the truth behind the Law.

And I fell before his feet to worship him. And he said to me, "See that you don't [do that]! I am a fellow servant of you and of your brothers who hold [fast] the testimony about Jesus. Worship God! *For the testimony about Jesus* is the essence (lit., "spirit") of [all divine] prophecy".

Revelation 19:10

#### 7. Conclusion:

But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Matthew 9:13 NIV

As our Lord's words indicate, the same truths were always present in the Word of God, Old Testament as well as New. The Law has been replaced. With the advent of our new High Priest, there has been a "change of Law" (Heb.7:12), with the old being now "obsolete" (Heb.8:13). We believers are no longer under the Law but under grace: in Christ we have been redeemed from our sins and from the concomitant curse of the Law so that we now find ourselves instead under the grace of God through faith in our Savior (Rom.6:14-15; Gal.3:10-13; 3:23-25; 4:1-7; 5:18; Eph.2:1-10; cf. 1Cor.9:20-21).

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!

Romans 6:15 NKJV

Just because we believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and are no longer under the Law does *not* mean that we are not responsible to the Lord to pursue a sanctified life-style; we certainly are (Heb.12:14; 1Pet.1:15-16; 1Jn.3:2-3). But there are two ways to look at how God wants us to behave, namely, the old and the new. The old is characterized by prohibitions and specific ordinances. In other words, it is largely negative in its formulation. The new, on the other hand, is characterized by its appeal to virtuous behavior, love being the prime and preeminent virtue. In other words, it is largely positive in its formulation.

In actuality, these two are not in conflict at all, when everything is rightly and positively understood (indeed, in truth both have always been present and necessary for the dedicated believer). As a practical matter, the two approaches complement one another. For while it is true that if a person carried out every single command and injunction of scripture perfectly, adhering to the spirit as well as to the letter of the Law, that person would not be sinning, at least in respect to that part of sin which the Law addresses (sin being much more extensive than any law could catalog; cf. Rom.5:13; Gal.5:19-21).<sup>15</sup> But of course none of us is capable of avoiding sin entirely (let alone understanding the Law perfectly in every respect including the underlying spiritual meaning of every single statute). And it is also true that if a person acted in perfect love, love of God and love to all others, that person would not be sinning. But of course none of us is capable of perfect love, being imperfect and steeped in sin. What we can say is that when we are following the Spirit whom all believers have now been blessed to have within us, we are carrying out all of the requirements of the Law, something that was never possible by fleshly efforts alone.

(1) So now, there [awaits] no judgment of condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the Law of sin and death. (3) ***For what the Law could not accomplish*** (i.e., solving the sin problem) because it was weak on account of [its dependence on sinful human] flesh, God [did accomplish]: having sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for the purpose of [expiating] sin, [God] rendered summary judgement on [all] sin in [Christ's] flesh, (4) so that the [perfect] righteousness which the Law demands might be fulfilled in us – we who walk not according to the [sinful] flesh, but according to the Spirit (i.e., believers).  
Romans 8:1-4

But I tell you, walk in the Spirit and you will not carry out what the flesh lusts for.  
Galatians 5:16

Prudent believers attempt to stay away from what God prohibits and embrace all that God commands of a positive nature. By striving to live in love, we will avoid much sin and will be better able to understand and interpret the true meaning of all of the Bible's commandments. And by striving to adhere to the prohibitions and strictures of scripture, we will be less likely to fall into sin so as to compromise our love and confuse our spiritual approach.

So we Christians accept the whole Bible and that includes the entire Old Testament and the Law; but we are careful to note that, when it comes to the sacrifices and festivals of the Law and all other such regulations which only applied to the nation Israel before Christ's coming, His victory, and the gift of the Spirit, these have now been superseded by the cross (Rom.10:4), the very Sacrifice these rituals and regulations anticipated, now fulfilled by Christ's death on our behalf. Indeed, it would for that very reason be wrong for us to continue in these rituals, on account of the lack of faith inherent in so doing – as if Christ had ***not*** fulfilled them. And in fact, since no temple now stands it is presently impossible to do so in anything like complete compliance with the entire Law. And that is the same as non-compliance.

---

<sup>15</sup> See BB 3B: Hamartiology, section II, "The Nature of Sin".

For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble *in one point*, he is guilty of all.  
James 2:10 NKJV

Correctly understood, the underlying truth of all of the *behavioral* regulations of the Law (as opposed to ritual regulations) points to perfect and perfectly loving behavior (Rom.13:8-10), which is why our Lord summarized the entire Law as loving God and loving our neighbors (i.e., fellow believers; Matt.22:36-40). Against such things there is no law (Gal.5:23). This is also what John means when he speaks of "an old commandment" and a "new commandment": they are one and the same correctly understood. If a person lives in perfect love, there will be no violation of any of the still operative parts of the Law, while the Law, correctly understood, will point to the perfect and loving way to live our lives. This is what Paul is trying to get his brethren in Jerusalem to see and do, namely, to eschew the rituals which had been fulfilled, even as he and they continued to embrace the inherent truths the Law contains, transformed now after the cross into a blessed and possible reality in the Spirit.

- Now we have a New Covenant in place of the Old one (Matt.26:28; 1Cor.11:25; 2Cor.3:6; Heb.8:13; 9:15; 12:24).
- Now we have the symbolic Blood of Christ in place of literal animal blood (1Cor.10:16; Eph.2:13; Heb.9:14; 1Pet.1:2; 1:19; 1Jn.1:7; Rev.1:5).
- Now we have the life-giving Holy Spirit empowering the truth in place of the dead letter of the Law (Rom.2:29; 7:6; 2Cor.3:6).
- Now we have the true "Passover" in Jesus Christ in place of the previous ritual (1Cor.5:6-8)
- Now we have been made priests with Jesus Christ and no longer have need of Levitical intermediaries (1Pet.2:5; 2:9; Rev.1:6; 5:10; 20:6).
- Now we have the ability in the Spirit to fulfill God's commandments in place of mere symbolic adherence (1Cor.7:19).
- Now we have a new Husband who loved us enough to die for us in place of the old tyrannical one (Rom.7:1-6).
- Now we have become a temple of the Holy Spirit individually and collectively in place of the physical temple which has now been destroyed (1Cor.3:16-17; 6:19; 2Cor.6:16; 1Pet.2:6).

Why then was there ever a Law given in the first place? Scripture tells us that it was implemented as a bulwark against sin for those who did not yet have the Holy Spirit (Gal.3:19; cf. Rom.4:15; 5:20). Now that we believers do have this blessing of His indwelling, it behooves us to follow Him in the light, not turn back to the misapplied and now unauthorized use of a law which could never save.

(16) But I tell you, walk in the Spirit and you will not carry out what the flesh lusts for.  
(17) For what the flesh lusts for is contrary to the Spirit's will, and the Spirit is opposed to what the flesh lusts for. Since these are diametrically opposed to each other in this way, what you are doing is not what you yourself choose. (18) But *if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.*  
Galatians 5:16-18

We are not under the Law, its rituals and shadows which have all been fulfilled by Jesus Christ, but, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, we all benefit from learning the truth which the Law teaches. For as also noted about, that is what "Law" means in Hebrew: *teaching*.

(1) Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers, (2) but in the Law (*torah*: "teaching") of the Lord is his delight, and in His teaching (*torah*: "Law") he meditates day and night.  
Psalm 1:1-2

Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law (*torah*: "teaching") of the Lord.  
Psalm 119:1 NIV

(20b) To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. (21) To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.  
1st Corinthians 9:20b-21 NIV

But for those who have not accepted Christ, the true meaning of the Law of Moses – which is in fact all about Jesus Christ – remains obscure.

(12) Since we have such a confident expectation of success [based on the support from the Spirit's ministry], we speak the truth unreservedly – (13) and not like the previous situation where Moses had to put a veil over his face so that the Israelites could not see that temporary glory fading out; (14) now their hearts became hard, and until today at the reading of the Old Covenant there is still a [similar sort of] veil remaining in place [one which hides the true glory]; and [this "veil" which obscures the truth] is not being taken off because only in Christ is it done away with; (15) so until this present day, whenever Moses is read, this veil [of sorts] lies over their hearts, (16) but whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is removed – (17) for the Lord and the Spirit are one, and wherever the Lord's Spirit is, there is also freedom (i.e. the opportunity and power to do God's will). (18) And every one of us, when we reflect [like a mirror] the Lord's glory with no "veil" obscuring our faces (i.e., with unsullied Christian witness), is being transformed into the same image (i.e., becomes more Christ-like) so as to reflect an ever greater degree of glory – exactly what is to be expected with the Lord's Spirit as the agent of our transformation.  
2nd Corinthians 3:12-18

Believers in Jerusalem who were turning back to the Law were in danger of re-veiling their hearts, shutting out the light that they had received in the face of Jesus Christ.

For God who said, "Let light shine forth from the darkness!", is He who has shone forth [His light] into our hearts to illuminate our knowledge of God's glory in the person of

Jesus Christ.  
2nd Corinthians 4:6

### The Better Hope:

(17) For [the Father] testifies that "You are a Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek". (18) Herein we have then a revoking of the prior commandment (i.e., the Law) on account of it being weak and ineffectual (i.e., unable to bring fulfillment to the plan of salvation), (19) – for the Law fulfilled nothing – and instead the bringing in of *a better hope* through which we [actually do] draw near to God.  
Hebrews 7:17-19

The hope in our context is the hope of salvation, resurrection and reward, namely, everything we Christians are looking forward to today (Rom.8:24-25; cf. Rom.5:3-4; Tit.2:13; Heb.10:23; 11:1-2). That is assuredly "better" by far.

(21) For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (22) If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! (23) I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is *better by far*.  
Philippians 1:21-23 NIV

The rituals of the Law could never bring about salvation; only the actual sacrifice of Jesus Christ could do that (cf. Rom.3:20; Gal.2:16). "Keeping the Law" could never save in the first place nor bring a person closer to God in the second; only the truth, accepting it and applying it, has ever done that (cf. Heb.4:16; 10:22; Jas.4:8). Salvation and spiritual growth have always been the same, but now, instead of having to see the truth through the shadows of the Old Testament, we are blessed to have the Son of God revealed in the glorious light of the New Testament. And we can understand and appreciate the Old better now that we have the New. That is also "better by far" than anything the Law had ever been able to provide.

(11) So remember that you were once gentiles in the flesh, called "un-circumcised" by those of the so-called circumcision which is fleshly and man-made. (12) Remember that you were without Christ, alienated from the polity of Israel and strangers to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. (13) But now, in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been *brought near* by the blood of Christ.  
Ephesians 2:11-13

Everything about belonging to Jesus Christ, being saved and baptized with the Holy Spirit, is "better" than everything which went before. This state of being "better" and having things "better" is, as we have noted before, a particular theme of Paul's in this letter as he reminds his readers that they should appreciate what they've been given as believers in Jesus Christ, abundant gifts and blessing, all of which are "better" than what they had under the Law – and certainly not worthy of being traded for what is clearly inferior by returning to it.

[And at His session (v.3), Jesus] became [manifestly] superior to the angels to the degree

that He received as [a part of] His inheritance a Name so *much more* glorious than theirs.  
Hebrews 1:4

Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of *better things* in your case – the things that have to do with salvation.  
Hebrews 6:9 NIV

. . . (for the law made nothing perfect), and a *better hope* is introduced, by which we draw near to God.  
Hebrews 7:19 NIV

Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a *better covenant*.  
Hebrews 7:22 NIV

But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on *better promises*.  
Hebrews 8:6 NIV

It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with *better sacrifices* than these.  
Hebrews 9:23 NIV

You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had *better and lasting possessions*.  
Hebrews 10:34 NIV

By faith Abel brought God *a better offering* than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.  
Hebrews 11:4 NIV

Instead, they were longing for *a better country* – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.  
Hebrews 11:16 NIV

Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain *an even better resurrection*.  
Hebrews 11:35 NIV

. . . since God had planned *something better* for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.  
Hebrews 11:40 NIV

. . . to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks *a*

*better word* than the blood of Abel.  
Hebrews 12:24 NIV

Keeping our eyes on the "better hope" of our context, looking forward to our resurrection and reward, to the time when we will be together with the Lord we love so much along with all of our brothers and sisters in Christ, is an essential means of "drawing closer to God" (Heb.7:19). That is to say, focusing on the eternity our Lord has promised us is a key element of spiritual growth, providing ever greater results as we apply the truth in the crucible of this life, learning to set our focus and our desire on the Lord and His evaluation of us on that great day to come. The Law spoke of judgment, revealing the sin which separates us from God, but the Spirit of Jesus Christ cries out "Abba! Our Father!" as we respond to the truth illuminated by the Spirit's ministry (Rom.8:15; Gal.4:6). The Spirit leaves us in no doubt that we belong to the Father and to His Son our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ forever . . . and nothing could be "better" than that (1Jn.3:2; 5:19).

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.  
James 4:8a NKJV

Given the great blessings, the "better things" in every way of drawing closer to the Lord, why would any believer turn away and go off to "a far country" instead (Lk.15:11-32)? Since what is "new" is better than what is "old", the "old" is, by definition, "worse" than the "new". In fact, since Jesus Christ has now fulfilled the shadows of the Law, going back is not only "worse"; it is mutually exclusive with what is "better". Turning away from the Lord and His truth is always dangerous for any believer. Left unchecked, such a posture will eventually lead to the sin unto death or, even worse, to the death of faith entirely, namely, to apostasy. Nothing is worth that. But the draw of tradition is strong, and for those who are not solid in their faith, can often quench any inclination or desire for the truth: inevitably, lies and truth are incompatible.

(36) He told them this parable: "No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. (37) And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. (38) No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. (39) And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.' "  
Luke 5:36-39 NKJV

### **Verses Twenty through Twenty One**

(20) And indeed this has not occurred without an oath! For while [the Levites] became priests without [God's] oath, [Jesus Christ] became Priest through the oath of the One who said to Him, (21) "The Lord has sworn, and will not change His mind: 'You are a Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek' ".  
Hebrews 7:20-21



We have discussed God's oath confirming His promise to Abraham in the previous chapter.<sup>16</sup> Oaths were important under the Law, as we have seen, and Paul's readers exulted in God's oath to Abraham, for nothing is more certain than God's word – how much more so when confirmed by oath (Gen.22:17)! That being the case, Paul points out none too subtly that accepting God's oath as sufficient to overrule all other considerations in the case of Abraham – so that the covenants to him about the blessings on his progeny and eternal possession of the land of Israel may never be revoked – means that they must also accept with even stronger reason the oath to Jesus Christ.

What are the implications of that? As we have seen, and as Paul has already affirmed more than once, having a new High Priest means that the Levitical high priest in Jerusalem is no longer authorized to serve as such. So any high priest besides Jesus Christ is a usurper. By definition that means that such a high priest is now, after the cross and resurrection, not working for God. And if he is not working for God, if he is opposing God and Christ, then he is working for the devil instead. And since there is now a new priesthood, as indeed there must be with a new High Priest who has been directly appointed by God the Father according to His promise, on the basis of His oath, in an order that is eternal rather than temporary, then the entire present order of Levitical priests has also been removed as legitimate – having been replaced by those who belong to Jesus Christ.

Indeed, we believers *are* the new priesthood (1Pet.2:5; 2:9; Rev.1:6; 5:10; 20:6), serving our High Priest in the new way of the Spirit rather than the old way of the stipulations of the written code. By definition that means that these priests of the old order are not working for God but for the evil one, and that their false priesthood is now diametrically opposed to our new, true one. And since there is now a new High Priest and a new priesthood of believers, this means of necessity that the prior regulations, the Law of Moses, have to have been replaced and rendered no longer valid, because they cannot be divorced from or in any way stand apart from the Levitical priesthood.

For when there is a change of priesthood, of necessity there must also be a change of law.  
Hebrews 7:12

In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.  
Hebrews 8:13 NKJV

Continuing with a law that has been rendered invalid and has been replaced, continuing with a priesthood and mortal high priests who have been divested of their authority, is the height of arrogance, that is, for a believer in Jesus Christ. Continuing to pretend as if the cross, the resurrection, the ascension and session of Christ had not happened, as if Pentecost and coming of the Spirit had not happened, as if there were no apostles commissioned to write the New Testament and guide the Church, is to act as if a person had no faith in the truth whatsoever. So while it was "traditional", and while these things had been valid previously, Paul is right to be distressed about the spiritual status of his countrymen.

---

<sup>16</sup> See "The Oath of Guarantee" in Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews: Chapter Six.

Given how easy it is for gentile believers today to fall into legalism, we should understand that it was even easier for those who had grown up with this system to fall back into that comfort zone, especially given the unique pressures of that time which were prompting them to do so, a time when not belonging to the state religion was to become, essentially, a "non-person" with little or no rights, an open target for persecution. But we who have chosen for Jesus Christ love Him more than our lives and are willing to suffer the loss of everything rather than to lose our relationship with Him (Phil.3:8). At least we should be. Attempting to compromise on this point can never work. Attempting to compromise only results in completely compromising one's faith.

Believers in the soon-to-come Tribulation will face a very similar test when the pressure builds to take the mark of the beast. In both cases, standing fast with the truth and *without* compromise was and will be the only truly safe course – for those who value life eternal more than the incredibly temporary poison pottage of this ephemeral world.

(11) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; (12) If we persevere, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; (13) If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.  
2nd Timothy 2:11-13

### **Verses Twenty Two through Twenty Five**

(22) To such a superior degree then has Jesus become our Guarantor of an even better Covenant (i.e., the New replacing the Old). (23) Now the others who have become priests are [of necessity] many since they are prevented from remaining [in office] because of their mortality. (24) But He, [Jesus Christ], because He abides forever, possesses the priesthood irrevocably. (25) For this reason He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, since He lives forever making intercession for them.  
Hebrews 7:22-25

**Guarantor:** It is the promise confirmed by oath in the previous verses which gives absolute proof of Jesus Christ being the Guarantor of a new covenant of promise far better than the old one which has now been replaced. This new covenant, testament or agreement under which we believers now stand in our relationship with God is new and better because it is not merely symbolic, looking forward to the eventual forgiveness of our sins (which the Law only foreshadowed), but is genuine, real, fulfilled and presently effective, having been actualized by the blood of Jesus Christ, His victory on the cross.

(25) God made Him a means of atonement [achieved] by His blood [and claimed] through faith, to give proof of His justice in leaving unpunished in divine forbearance [all] previously committed sins, (26) so as to prove His justice *in the present*, namely, so that He would be [shown to be] just [in this] and [justified] in justifying the one who has faith in Jesus.  
Romans 3:25-26

The Greek word *engyos*, translated here as "Guarantor", is often used of physical pledges and

sureties. Jesus Christ is our "deposit", so to speak, guaranteeing the so great salvation that means more to us than anything in this temporary world. The Holy Spirit is said to fulfill a similar role, being our *arabbon* or the "security deposit", whose indwelling of us likewise gives us perfect assurance that we have been saved (2Cor.1:21-22; 5:5; Eph.1:13-14). These two words are synonymous, the latter being Hebrew, the former Greek. We have the Holy Spirit because of Christ's victory on the cross, His resurrection, ascension and session at the Father's right hand, the events that made possible the baptism of the Spirit and His indwelling and gifting of us (Jn.7:39; 14:16-17; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7; Eph.4:7-10).<sup>17</sup> The presence of the Godhead within believers following our union with Christ through the baptism of the Spirit is a blessed reassurance that just as we belong to God now, so we always shall.

Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."  
John 14:23 NKJV

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, *which is Christ in you*, the hope of glory.  
Colossians 1:27 NIV

This security we have in Jesus Christ, the One who guarantees our salvation through indwelling us (just as we are "in Christ" following the Spirit's placing of us in union with Him<sup>18</sup>; e.g., Rom.8:1-2; 2Cor.5:17), is real. It is not merely a foreshadowing of future realities through the rites and rituals of the Law but is based upon the actual forgiveness of our sins accomplished by *the* High Priest, Jesus Christ our Lord, who now occupies that position eternally in session before the Father instead of only temporarily on this earth.

### **The New Covenant versus the Old Covenant:**

To such a superior degree then has Jesus become our Guarantor of an even better Covenant (i.e., the New replacing the Old).  
Hebrews 7:22

We have discussed covenants previously in this series<sup>19</sup>, and we will have occasion to go into more detail on this topic in chapter eight. As mentioned before, the English words "covenant" and "testament" are synonyms when used in the Bible, both being used to translate *beriyth* in Hebrew and *diatheke* in Greek. A covenant (or a testament) is, essentially, an agreement between two parties. In terms of biblical covenants, God is one party and human beings are the other party. This is a fundamental difference from agreements or treaties or wills between

---

<sup>17</sup> See BB 5: Pneumatology: section II.B.2.b.1.b, "Victory at the Cross: The Basis of the Spirit's Baptism of Believers into Christ".

<sup>18</sup> See BB 5: Pneumatology: section II.B.2.b, "Baptism".

<sup>19</sup> See Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews: Chapter One: section I.d, "Covenants".

humans and humans for the obvious reason that God is our Creator. The agreement He offers us is one of salvation paid for by Him and accepted by us on a completely non-meritorious basis, that is, by believing in Him and His sacrificial Substitute for us. God has bound Himself to save us through paying the price for our salvation, a price that was only dimly seen in the animal sacrifices of the past, but which has now been fulfilled and fully revealed in the person and work of our Savior Jesus Christ.

And having taken the bread and blessed it, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is being given on your behalf. Be doing this *to remember Me*. (20) And in the same way after the meal [He took] the cup, saying, "This cup is the *new covenant* [ratified] by My blood which is shed on your behalf."  
Luke 22:19-20 (cf. Matt.26:26; Mk.14:22; Jn.6:51-59; 1Cor.11:23-25)

For [on this matter] I received [directly] from the Lord what I passed on to you, namely that on the night on which He was betrayed He took bread and having blessed it He broke it and said, "This is my body which is [offered up] on your behalf. Keep on doing this in order *to remember Me*". And in the same way [after eating] He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the *new covenant* [made] by my blood. Keep on doing this as often as you drink [it] in order to remember Me".  
1st Corinthians 11:23-25

Instead of all the various rituals of the Law, believers after the cross, after the coming of the Holy Spirit, are given one, single, special ritual which replaces all others, namely, the communion ceremony. Often misunderstood and often abused, the communion ritual is meant "to remember" Jesus Christ, with the bread representing His perfect person, God but also man following the incarnation, true humanity taken on by Him in order to be able to bear our sins in that perfect body, and with the wine representing His perfect work, His "blood", that is, His spiritual death whereby He paid the entire fiery price for the sins of the world that we might be saved.<sup>20</sup> Beyond all argument, this is a "better agreement" than was the case in Old Testament times, when salvation had not yet been accomplished (Rom.3:25-26), and when the depiction of it required following many regulations and rules from which we believers today have now been liberated.

And it is for this reason that He is the Mediator of a New Covenant, so that those who have been called might receive their eternal inheritance on the basis of the death He suffered to redeem us from the transgressions [committed] under the first Covenant.  
Hebrews 9:15

And the most blessed difference of all: under the New Covenant/Testament we now see our salvation face to face in the person of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

But we do now see Jesus crowned with glory and honor on account of the death He suffered, even Him who became "a little lower than the angels" [for a brief span] so that

---

<sup>20</sup> See in BB 4A: Christology, section II.5.f.3, "The Meaning of the Communion Memorial"; and section II.4, "The Blood of Christ".

by the grace of God He might taste death on behalf of us all.  
Hebrews 2:9

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."  
John 11:25b NKJV

**He is Able to Save Completely:** Whereas under the Old Covenant, sacrifices had to continue to be offered, and yet were never able to provide salvation (since their purpose was to look forward to the cross: Heb.10:2; cf. Heb.9:14), our Lord's sacrifice on the cross has produced a salvation which is complete and valid for all time, i.e., a deliverance from sin and death which He has accomplished "once and for all" so as to save all who are willing to come to Him in faith.

"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."  
John 3:18 NKJV

Moreover, now that salvation is an accomplished fact (i.e., *tetelestai*: Jn.19:28-30; cf. Ps.22:31), for the Jerusalem believers to continue to participate in the ritual sacrifice of animals which merely foreshadowed our Lord's spiritual death on our behalf was not only unnecessary – it was also a great affront to our Lord, implying that what He had actually done in dying for our sins was somehow insufficient (so that animal sacrifices still needed to be offered).

It is impossible to restore them to [true] repentance after having fallen away [into sin] as long as they keep crucifying the Son of God afresh and exposing Him to open shame.  
Hebrews 6:6

### **Intercession:**

For this reason (i.e., being our eternal High Priest) [Jesus] is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, since He lives forever making intercession for them.  
Hebrews 7:25

One of the many great and blessed advantages of having Jesus Christ as our High Priest is His ministry of interceding with the Father for us. We believers have no need of any human priest to pray for us. Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, is the One who is Himself advocating for us before the Father.

My children, I am writing these things to you so that you won't sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate to [approach] the Father [on our behalf], Jesus Christ the righteous.  
1st John 2:1

This is the essential meaning of what a "priest" is, biblically speaking,<sup>21</sup> namely, a man who acts as a go-between, a mediator between God and man, a "daysman", in the language of the King James version of the Bible.

(33) "If only there were someone to mediate between us (KJV: "daysman"), someone to bring us together, (34) someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more."  
Job 9:33-34 NIV

The Father dwells in unapproachable light (1Tim.6:16), but Jesus Christ has entered into the presence of the Father, and from that heavenly seat He ministers for us as our High Priest.

For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God *for us*.  
Hebrews 9:24 NKJV

Only Jesus Christ could be our Intercessor, our Daysman, our Mediator, our Advocate, the One who ministers on our behalf before the Father as our High Priest – because only Jesus Christ could take away the sins of the world by being judged in our place.

Who is he that condemns [us]? Christ Jesus is the One who died [condemned in our place], and the One, moreover, who was raised from the dead [for us], who is [seated] at the right hand of God, who is also *making petitions on our behalf*.  
Romans 8:34

(5) For as God is One, so there is [only] *One Mediator* between God and Man, Christ Jesus in His humanity, (6a) who gave Himself as a ransom for all [mankind] . . .  
1st Timothy 2:5-6a

### **Verses Twenty Six through Twenty Eight**

(26) This is just the sort of High Priest we needed, holy, without fault, without imperfection, completely separated from sinners, and having ascended higher than the heavens [into God's presence]. (27) Unlike the [other] high priests, [Jesus] has no need of making sacrifice day by day, first on behalf of His own sins, and then for the sins of the people. For this [latter] He did once and for all when He offered Himself [as a sacrifice]. (28) So while the Law appoints mortal priests beset by physical weakness, the word of God's [own] oath which succeeds the Law appoints a Son who has been fulfilled forever.  
Hebrews 7:26-28

**The Qualifications of our High Priest:** Jesus Christ is the "Lamb without spot or blemish" (1Pet.1:19). Under the Law, the Passover lamb (and indeed all sacrificial animals) had to be

---

<sup>21</sup> As we have seen: Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews: Chapter 5, in section I, "The Aaronic Priesthood versus the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ".

perfect in their appearance (Ex.12:5). Just as the lamb represented our Lord (Jn.1:29; 1:36; Rev.5:5; 7:17; 14:10; 15:3; 19:9; 21:23; 22:1; 22:3; cf. Gen.22:8), so the perfect appearance of the animal represented the actual sinlessness of our Lord who possessed a body uninfected by sin from His birth (by reason of the virgin conception/birth<sup>22</sup>), and who maintained His sinlessness all the way to the end (e.g., Jn.8:46), even to the point of His sacrifice of Himself for us on the cross, bearing our sins in a way acceptable to the Father as only One who was sinless could do. This is why our Lord Jesus Christ is the only High Priest who could ever possibly "meet our needs", for only He was fit to stand judgment for our sins, the ultimate priestly service whereby we are reconciled to the Father on account of the price our Savior paid for us on Calvary's cross.

(8) But God commends His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (9) So how much more is it not true now, after we have been rendered righteous [through faith] in His blood, that we shall be saved from the [coming] wrath through Him? (10) For if when we were His enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, how much more is it not true [now], since we have been reconciled [to Him through Jesus' death], that we will be saved by His life? (11) And not only that, but we even flaunt [our new relationship] with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained this reconciliation.

Romans 5:8-11

And all things come from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

2nd Corinthians 5:18

(14) For [Jesus] Himself is our peace, for He has made both [Jews and gentiles] one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition, that is, the enmity, (15) by discharging the Law of the commandments and its requirements with His [own] body, so that He might re-create the two into one new Man by making [this] peace, (16) and might reconcile both in one Body to God through His cross, having by means of it abolished the enmity [between God and mankind]. (17) For when He had come (i.e., the 1st advent), He proclaimed the gospel of peace to you who were far away [from God], and peace to those who were near. (18) For it is through Him that we both have our access to the Father by means of one Spirit.

Ephesians 2:14-18

Any believer with any serious instruction in basic Bible doctrines understands that our Lord Jesus Christ was born sinless and remained sinless throughout His entire earthly life, and that this was necessary for Him to be our perfect sacrifice so as to reconcile sinful mankind to the Father by paying the price for all of our sins.<sup>23</sup> The five characteristics listed here, however, are designed to contrast our perfect High Priest with the Levitical priests whom He has once and for all

---

<sup>22</sup> See BB 4A: Christology, section I.5.f, "The Incarnation and Virgin Birth".

<sup>23</sup> These teachings are covered in BB 4A: Christology: the study of Christ.

replaced, and, in so doing, fulfilled and perfectly carried out the plan of God to its ultimate completion.

(8b) [God] in all wisdom and understanding has made known to us the mystery He has willed according to His own benevolent purpose which He determined in [Christ] for administering this [present] fulfillment of the epochs: namely the incorporation of all things in Christ, things in heaven, and things on earth.  
Ephesians 1:8b-10

No Levitical priest could bring about our salvation, and that salvation *is* the Plan of God, so that Jesus Christ *is* the Logos, the Plan of God incarnate (Jn.1:1-4; Col.1:25; Tit.1:3; 1Jn.1:1). As sinners, Levitical priests were not "holy", separate from all that is profane – but our Savior is. As sinners, Levitical priests were not "without fault", innocent of all wrongdoing, but our Savior is. As sinners, Levitical priests were not "without imperfection", undefiled by the world, but our Savior is. As sinners, Levitical priests were not "completely separated from sinners" being sinners themselves and having involved themselves in this world, but our Savior is completely uncompromised in this regard. And as sinners, Levitical priests were certainly not qualified to be raised from the dead as the firstfruits of eternal life, but our Savior has been, "having ascended higher than the heavens" and having been seated in glory at the Father's right hand whence He makes intercession for us all, awaiting the great day of His return when He will rescue us and render justice for all.

The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit down at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."  
Psalm 110:1

Christ Jesus is the One who died [condemned in our place], and the One, moreover, who was raised from the dead [for us], who is [seated] at the right hand of God, who is also making petitions on our behalf.  
Romans 8:34b

And most significantly of all, as sinners, Levitical priests were in no way qualified to bear a single sin – nor would they have been willing or able to do so even if they were. Only our perfect Savior could do that. Only the God-man Jesus Christ could have done that. And so He did, "once and for all when He offered Himself [as a sacrifice] for the sins of the world" (Heb.7:27). Such a High Priest indeed "meets our needs" (Heb.7:26), not merely in symbolizing the redemption of sinful mankind and our reconciliation to the Father through blood sacrifice as the Levitical priests had done, but in actually paying the entire price for every single sin we have ever committed or will, whereby alone we could ever be delivered from the darkness of the grave, death and condemnation.

"This is My blood of the covenant which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins concerning many people."  
Matthew 26:28



And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

1st John 2:2 NKJV

To the One who loves us and has released us from our sins by His blood – and He has made us a kingdom, priests of His God and Father – to Him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 1:6

### **The End of the Matter:**

So while the Law appoints mortal priests beset by physical weakness, the word of God's [own] oath which succeeds (i.e., follows and replaces) the Law appoints a Son who has been fulfilled (i.e., completed as the Logos, the plan of God) forever.

Hebrews 7:28

The difference between the Law on the one hand and God the Father's promise confirmed by His oath on the other could not be made more clear. The former only pointed to the latter. In place of weak, mortal men, such as we all are, the Father has sent His own dear Son into the world to rescue us from sin and death. This promise and oath of God has thus replaced the Law of Moses, with Him who is the very Word of God, the Logos, the Plan of God incarnate, the Son of God Himself, Jesus Christ, succeeding and replacing all other priests along with the Law on the basis of which they served. Their purpose, and the purpose of the Law, was to point to the One who would come into the world and do what they and it could not do, namely, save us from our sins.

(1) So now, there [awaits] no judgment of condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the Law of sin and death. (3) ***For what the Law could not accomplish*** (i.e., solving the sin problem) because it was weak on account of [its dependence on sinful human] flesh, God [did accomplish]: ***having sent His own Son*** in the likeness of sinful flesh and for the purpose of [expiating] sin, [God] rendered summary judgement on [all] sin in [Christ's] flesh, (4) so that the [perfect] righteousness which the Law demands might be fulfilled in us – we who walk not according to the [sinful] flesh, but according to the Spirit (i.e., believers).  
Romans 8:1-4

The Son is said in our context to be "completed", "fulfilled", with Paul making use of the verb *teleioo* whose significance in this epistle we have covered above (see the Introduction, under "Fulfillment; Completion; Perfection").

(9) And, once He was ***perfected*** (i.e., had perfectly completed His course: *teleioo*), He became the source of eternal salvation for all who are obedient to Him (i.e., believers), (10) having been previously proclaimed by God [the Father Himself] High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 5:9-10

Jesus Christ *is* God's Plan, the One who carries out the salvation of all mankind willing to accept His sacrifice on their behalf, thus winning the victory in the conflict between God and the devil which has been raging long before human beings were ever created on this earth.<sup>24</sup> Through His victory on the cross, through His successful propitiation of all human sin, Jesus Christ has completed the plan of God which plan He Himself embodies; and having fulfilled the great mission upon which He was sent, it is completely appropriate for scripture to describe Him as having been Himself "fulfilled" – for He is the very Plan of God through whom all of the Father's enemies are put to shame, while all we who have sought refuge in Jesus Christ have been delivered to await the sure and certain resurrection at our Lord's glorious return.

(23) But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits. Next [will be] those belonging to Christ at His coming (i.e., the 2nd Advent). (24) Then the end, when He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, after He has brought an end to all rule, all power, and all authority. (25) For He must rule until He has placed all His enemies under His feet – (26) and death is the final enemy to be done away with.  
1st Corinthians 15:23-26

(13) And though you were [spiritually] dead in your transgressions and in the un-circumcised state of your flesh, [God the Father] made you alive together with [Christ], having forgiven you all your transgressions. (14) [God] has erased the charge against us along with its particulars (i.e., our sinful nature and personal sins) which opposed our [relationship with Him], and He removed it [as an obstacle] between us by nailing it to the cross. (15) [For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ].  
Colossians 2:13-15

Meanwhile, the benefits we enjoy through having Jesus Christ as our High Priest, His continual intercession for us and the forgiveness we have through His once-and-for-all sacrifice, are "forever" just as He is "forever". Praise God for the blessed day soon to come when we shall enjoy His company in person along with each other and the entire family of God in glory forever!

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.  
1st Corinthians 13:12a KJV

For at the present time our perception [of heavenly things] is like [viewing] a dim reflection in a mirror. But then [when we meet the Lord] we will see [Him] face to face.  
1st Corinthians 13:12

(16) For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. (17) After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with

---

<sup>24</sup> These matters are covered in detail in the Satanic Rebellion series. See also BB 4B, section I, "God's Plan to Save You".

them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.  
1st Thessalonians 4:16-17 NIV

(22) But you have come [not to Mount Sinai which stands for the present Jerusalem (Gal.4:21-31), but] to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, [that is, you have come to] the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of [elect] angels in assembly [before God], (23) and to the Church of the firstborn enrolled [as its citizens] in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of justified [believers] [who have now] completed [their tasks], (24) and to Jesus, the Mediator of a better covenant, and to sprinkled blood (i.e., the work of Christ in bearing our sins) which speaks [far] more powerfully than that of Abel[’s sacrifice].

Hebrews 12:22-24

And the Spirit and the bride say "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.  
Revelation 22:17