

# Hebrews Chapter 4 Our Great High Priest Superior to Aaron

by A.B. Simpson

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*Our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, is superior to the Aaronic priesthood in every way, and His sacrifice is the ultimate expression of God's love and redemption for humanity.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 49:10, Hebrews 7:1-17, Hebrews 7:21, Hebrews 7:23-24, Hebrews 7:26, Hebrews 8:6, Hebrews 9:24, Hebrews 10:10, Hebrews 10:14

**Topics:** "Salvation", "Christ's Priesthood"

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## Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the superiority of Christ as our Great High Priest over Aaron and the Levitical priesthood, highlighting that Christ belongs to a higher order of priesthood, that of Melchizedek. He explains that Christ's priesthood is established by divine oath, is eternal, and is characterized by His sinlessness and ability to mediate a better covenant. Simpson illustrates how Christ's sacrifice is once for all, unlike the repeated sacrifices of Aaron's line, and that through Him, believers receive full forgiveness and eternal salvation. The sermon concludes with the call for believers to embody Christ's love and serve as bridges to others, reflecting His grace and mercy.

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## Transcript

"But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises" (Heb. 8: 6).

Having shown that our Great High Priest is divine and human, and thus able at once to sympathize with and help us, the author of this epistle next proceeds to show His superiority to Aaron and all the priests of his line. It was very difficult for a pious Hebrew to believe that anyone could succeed or supersede the imposing figure of the great high priest. And so the writer devotes several chapters to a masterly argument to prove the superiority of the Son of God as the One to whom Aaron was but the type and forerunner. In the course of this argument he brings out many points of profound interest and instructiveness, illustrating the connection between the Old and New Testament, and showing with great beauty and power the blessed character of our Advocate in the heavens.

### I. OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST BELONGS TO A SUPERIOR ORDER OR PRIESTHOOD

He is not a priest of the Levitical line, but "after the order of Melchisedek." This is expounded and expanded with great fullness in Hebrews 7: 1-17. This ancient figure looms out of the gray mists of the patriarchal age with a strange dignity and importance. He comes upon the stage of time, as the writer expresses it, "Without father, without mother, without descent" or pedigree, "having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; [He] abideth a priest continually." Perhaps it is only meant that Melchisedek's descent is unrecorded, and yet there are many who believe that he was none other than the Son of God Himself anticipating His incarnation, and as Dr. Andrew Donar once expressed it, "trying on the garments of His humanity a little in advance of the time."

His very name is typical and significant, King of Righteousness. His very office as priest of the Most High God set him forth as the forerunner of Him who came to bring in everlasting righteousness. His very capital was emblematic of his great Anti-type. King of Salem, which means peace, foreshadowed the coming Prince of Peace. Meeting Abraham on his return from a glorious campaign, he blessed him in the name of the Most High God whom he represented, and received from him tithes in acknowledgment of his high official character as God's representative on earth. The most striking feature of his priesthood was that he was both priest and king, which was true of no one else in the whole history of the priesthood, except of Jesus only, of whom it was said that He should "sit and rule a priest upon his throne." Christ as our Great High Priest is also a King with power to answer His own petitions and guarantee to us the blessings for which He intercedes. Now, this is a dignity far higher than any of the priests of Aaron's line enjoyed, and the apostle uses it to demonstrate the inferiority of Aaron to Melchisedek, for when Abraham acknowledged Melchisedek, Aaron and his sons who were then "in the loins of Abraham" virtually acknowledged him too as their superior, for as the writer well expresses it, "the less is blessed of the greater." If Aaron was inferior to Melchisedek he must, of course, be inferior to Christ, and so the apostle's argument is demonstrated by an inevitable conclusion, while at the same time the picture of our Great High Priest is exalted to the highest possible sublimity.

## II. OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST BELONGS TO A SUPERIOR TRIBE

Aaron and his sons were of the tribe of Levi, but Christ was born of the tribe of Judah, "For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood" (Heb. 7: 14). Judah was the royal tribe bearing the scepter of domination, of which it was said, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come"(Gen. 49: 10). Judah always marched first among the tribes of Israel, and Christ's peculiar preeminence is that He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. In this alone consists a distinct preeminence as well as a line of demarcation separating Him wholly from the whole line of Aaronic priesthood. Indeed, He could not lawfully belong to the Hebrew priesthood, and "if he were on earth, he should not be a priest," because they all necessarily belonged to the tribe of Levi. Therefore His priesthood is of a heavenly order and belongs to the great sanctuary in the heavens and the relations of God with sinful men of every race and time.

## III. OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST HAS A HIGHER CALLING AND APPOINTMENT

The Aaronic priests were set apart by ceremonies of peculiar sacredness, which are described in the twenty-ninth chapter of the book of Exodus. But Christ was appointed by far more sacred authority, even by the oath of Jehovah Himself. (Heb. 7:21.) Back of the work of redemption and the Gospel of salvation there is a great divine transaction known as the covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son. And this is the source and foundation of all the blessings of grace far back in the ages before angels sang or sinner fell. The Father and the Son, foreseeing the ruin of the human race, entered into an eternal

covenant by which the Son agreed to fulfill all the conditions of the broken law by His obedience and death, and the Father swore that in consideration of this He would give the Son to the people whom He redeemed, and all the blessings which He purchased by His sacrifice. Therefore when He was finishing His earthly work our Lord appealed to His Father in His final prayer, claiming the fulfillment of this covenant, "I have glorified thee on earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. . . . Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me." It was in connection with this covenant that the Father pronounced the solemn oath constituting Christ our Great High Priest. In the 110th Psalm we find David referring to this covenant and oath, saying, "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." Our Savior's priesthood and our salvation rest upon a foundation as strong and sure as the Rock of Ages and the everlasting throne.

#### IV. OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST HOLDS HIS OFFICE BY A BETTER TENURE

"They were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood" (Heb. 7: 23, 24). With every human generation there was a new family of official priests. Some like Aaron were true to God. Some like the sons of Eli were sinful men. But our High Priest remains unchanged through the eternal years. He on whose bosom John leaned is just as near to us. He whom your father and mother trusted is still as real to you. He who is your Friend today will be your Friend forever. When the sun has ceased to glow and the heavens have passed away He will remain your everlasting Friend.

#### V. OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST BEARS A HIGHER AND HOLIER CHARACTER THAN THE PRIESTS OF AARON'S LINE

"For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Heb. 7:26). He is absolutely spotless, while they were sinful men. He has no guilt to atone for, while they had to offer first for their own sin. While so perfectly human that He can fully represent us, He is so perfectly sinless that all His merits become available for our unrighteousness and sin. Not only does His death expiate our guilt, but the obedience of His perfect life is credited to our account and we become invested with His merits and righteousness and stand in the same place as if we, like Him, had kept God's holy law. At the same time His greatness adds immeasurable worth to His goodness, for He is made higher than the heavens.

#### VI. OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST MINISTERS IN A BETTER SANCTUARY

Aaron's place of service was the Tabernacle in the wilderness, but "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9: 24). That ancient Tabernacle was shifted day by day, and after awhile it perished and passed away. But the heavenly tabernacle is a greater and more perfect tabernacle "not made with hands," "eternal in the heavens." Not only so, when He brings us near He Himself becomes to each of us "a little sanctuary," and the heart of the believer becomes a holy place where God meets him as of old He met the people, and we understand the meaning of such mighty words as these: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." "Abide in me, and I in you." "I will set my tabernacle among you, . . . and I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people." In our very heart of hearts we may still come to the altar of sacrifice, the laver of cleansing, the golden lamps with their perfect light, the Living Bread, the sweet incense, nay, even the innermost chamber of the personal presence of God within the veil.

## VII. OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST IS THE MEDIATOR OF A BETTER COVENANT

This part of his argument commences at chapter 8: 6-13 and is repeated in chapter 10: 15, 16, so important does He deem it. It draws a striking contrast between the message of the old covenant and the new. Four particulars are specially emphasized. The first is the promise of sanctification. "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts." God does not demand of us external obedience merely, but He puts in us the nature, the principle, and disposition to obey. He makes His law the law of our being, and we as naturally follow it as a material body falls to the ground by the law of gravitation, or, as an acorn develops into an oak because the law of the oak is in the heart of the acorn. So He puts His will into our heart as the new constitution and impulse of our nature, and it becomes second nature for us to love it, to will it, and to do it.

The second promise of the covenant is His guarantee to give us Himself first, and then to make us His people. "I will be to them a God," He says, "and they shall be to me a people." He does not condition His relationship upon ours, but ours upon His. He takes the initiative and gives Himself to us, and in consequence we give ourselves to Him.

The third promise is His fellowship, intimacy, and the personal revelation of His will to us. "They shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest." He reveals Himself by the Holy Ghost to the simplest child, the most illiterate mind, and to the most humble saint, so that we are not dependent on earthly priesthods and secondary channels for our knowledge of His will, but we know Him for ourselves as our Father, our Teacher, and our Friend.

And finally the promise of full forgiveness, constant friendship, and deliverance from even the consciousness of sin is added; "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

## VIII. OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST BRINGS A BETTER OFFERING AND SACRIFICE

This great truth occupies a large part of the ninth and tenth chapters. (Ch. 9: 12-14; 10: 1-14.) The sacrifices of Aaron's office were dumb and soulless brutes. The sacrifices of our Great High Priest is His own precious life. The sacrifices were involuntary. They were dragged as victims to the altar. His was voluntary. "Lo, I come," was His glad cry, as He plunged from the heights of heaven to give Himself to save ruined man. His heart was in it. His love was in it. His will was in it, "By the will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10: 10). Their sacrifices had no personal merits. His was the life of the holiest Being in the universe, who had no sins of His own to atone for and whose merits are all availing for others. It was the life also of the greatest and noblest Being in the universe and it represents the infinite value which suffices to make atonement even for the sins of the whole world. "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

And finally His sacrifice was once for all completed. Theirs were constantly renewed because they never were effectual except as figures of His greater sacrifice which was to come. "But now once in the end of the [age] hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." It is final and complete and now we are going to enter into all the fullness of its glorious fruition.

## IX. FINALLY, THE EFFICACY OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE IS GREATER THAN THAT OF THE ANCIENT PRIESTHOOD

"The law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, by the which we draw nigh unto God" (Heb. 7: 19). "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are [being] sanctified" (Heb. 10: 14). Their sacrifices could not take away from the conscience the sense of sin, but His sacrifice is able to "purge [our] conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9: 14; 10: 2). Their ministrations only brought temporary blessing and needed to be constantly repeated; His priesthood brings us the promise of eternal inheritance and settles every question forevermore. (Heb. 9: 15.) There is no limit to the blessings of His priesthood, but "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." What this uttermost salvation means none of us has fully fathomed. It reaches down to the lowest depths of unworthiness, helplessness, and misery. It reaches out to the wildest range of sinful men and the farthest circle of human experience and spiritual need. It reaches on to the remotest age of eternity, and it will not have been fully interpreted until the Millennium shall have ended and the ages of glory begun to roll. It reaches to our temporal affairs, to our physical needs, to the outermost extremity of our being, and the innermost need of our heart and life. It is an infinite, everlasting, complete salvation of spirit, soul, and body for all time and all eternity. Blessed be His holy name!

Such then is an imperfect picture of the work of our Great High Priest. Saved by His death, how much more are we saved by His life! Not only did He plunge for us to the depths of death and Hades, but He has thrown His glorified life across the gulf that separated us from God and heaven.

An incident in the early life of the late Louis Agassiz, the distinguished naturalist, has been published. When he was a little boy in Switzerland his mother once sent him with a younger brother across a frozen lake to carry some message to his father on the other side of the lake. After they had started she observed that in the middle of the lake was a great crack in the ice, over which Louis might be able to leap, but which she was quite sure the little brother could never pass, and she tried in vain to call them back, but the wind was unfavorable and she could not make them hear. All she could do was to pray and watch. At length the little fellows came to the crack, and Louis took a long look at it and seemed to be measuring the distance and the ability of his little brother to get over. Then after giving some careful instructions he threw himself across the gulf on his face, forming a living bridge over which his little brother safely passed, and then he gathered himself up and leaped across.

There is One who has for us become the living Ladder that leads from earth to heaven, the living Bridge that spans the great abyss, the Way that carries us through every dark and strange and impossible place. He has saved us by His life. Let us take His uttermost salvation and let us go forth to carry it and to represent Him to the world, which so sorely needs Him, each of us in turn a living bridge over which our helpless brothers may pass to Him.

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ab-simpson/hebrews-chapter-4-our-great-high-priest-superior-to-aaron/>

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