

Types and Shadows

9

The High Priest

So far in this module, we've explored the various types found in the Old Testament – the tabernacles of Moses and of David, the sacrificial system of the Levitical code, the restoration of the Temple and of the gates of Jerusalem – each picturing aspects of fulfilled reality in Christ and his Church. We've also done an in-depth study of the prophetic picture found in the feasts of Israel and, in our last lesson, we looked at two mountains – Sinai and Zion – as symbols representing two very different covenants.

In this lesson, we return to the book of **Hebrews** for a deeper look at its main theme – the high priesthood of Christ. In many ways, all the other types of the Old Testament converge to illuminate this one great type and its fulfillment in Christ, for in this type we see the nature of the New Covenant that has been established between God and us.

Read Hebrews 9:11-12

The Message words this passage in this way:

“But when the Messiah arrived, high priest of the superior things of this new covenant, he bypassed the old tent and its trappings in this created world and went straight into heaven’s ‘tent’ – the true Holy Place – once and for all. He also bypassed the sacrifices consisting of goat and calf blood, instead using his own blood as the price to set us free once and for all.”

Something new and totally revolutionary was ushered in with the death and resurrection of Christ. The writer to the Hebrews calls it “the good things that are already here” (NIV). *The Message* renders this phrase as “the superior things of this new covenant.”

In this lesson, we will be digging deep into the “good things” that have come about simply because Christ has now received the title of “high priest.”

A Tapestry of Types**The Tabernacle of Moses****The Tabernacle of David****The Sacrificial System****The Restoration of the Temple****The Gates of Jerusalem****The Feasts of Israel****Two Mountains****The High Priest****The Torn Veil**

The Dual Ministry of Christ

Read Hebrews 3:1

As the writer to the Hebrews* begins his detailed description of Jesus' ministry, he prefaces his teaching with these words:

“Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the *apostle* and *high priest* whom we confess.”

Right from the start of **Hebrews**, the writer establishes two aspects to the ministry of Christ – his ministry as “apostle” and his ministry as “high priest.” Let's have a look at what these two words mean.

Apostle

The word “apostle” literally means “one sent forth.” An apostle, in the Greek world of the first century, was an envoy, a special delegate sent to represent another. As the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* explains:

“In earlier classical Greek there was a distinction between an *añggelos* or messenger and an *apostolos*,[†] who was not a mere messenger, but a delegate or representative of the person who sent him.”¹

This was why Paul emphasized in **Galatians 1:1** that he was an apostle “sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.” Paul was making it absolutely clear to the Galatians that his status as an apostle was as a representative sent from God on behalf of God, not from men on behalf of men.

As our Great Apostle, the Lord Jesus was sent by the Father to come to earth as his representative. This is what Jesus meant when he said in **John 8:42**:

“I have not come on my own; but [the Father] sent me.”

This apostolic nature of Jesus' earthly ministry is, however, just one side of a two-sided coin.

High Priest

The second title given to Jesus is “high priest.” Although the root meaning of the Hebrew word *kohen* (priest) is uncertain, it possibly is related to the meaning “to draw near.” This is fitting, since a priest is a person designated and authorized to “draw near” to the holy presence of God, and thus in him, the people are also able to “draw near” to God. You will find this concept of drawing near to God repeated throughout the text of **Hebrews** (note **4:16; 7:19; 10:1,22**).

* As you may recall, we cannot be 100% certain of the identity of the author of **Hebrews**. The best candidates, however, are Paul, Barnabas, Luke and Apollos. We know that the writer is a co-worker with Timothy (**13:23**) and is writing from Italy (**13:24**). The letter is also signed off in Paul's characteristic way (**13:25**). Thus if Paul wasn't the writer, it is likely that one of his co-workers was. The accepted practice, adopted by most scholars, is to refer to the author anonymously as “the writer to the Hebrews,” and we have adopted this convention.

† From these two Greek words for “messenger” – *añggelos* and *apostolos* – we derive the English words “angel” and “apostle.”

A priest is one who represents people before God (**Hebrews 5:1**). In that sense, a priest is an envoy, accepted by God to act as a representative of the people.

The *apostolic* aspect of Christ's ministry is earthward; the *priestly* aspect of Christ's ministry is heavenward. Jesus came to earth as the great Apostle – God's special envoy – to represent God to man. But then he returned to heaven as the great High Priest – mankind's special envoy – to represent man to God.

A Change of Covenant

Read Hebrews 10:9

In **Hebrews 12:24**, the writer declares that we have come “to Jesus the mediator of a *new* covenant.” As we've seen in our morning studies, **Hebrews** is a book of contrasts – the contrast between Christ and the angels, between Christ and Moses and between Christ and Aaron. But principally, **Hebrews** is the description of the contrast between the Old Covenant (instituted at Sinai under Moses) and the New Covenant (instituted at Zion under Christ).

In **Hebrews 7:12**, the writer makes a pivotal statement:

“For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law.”

What the writer is saying is that the priesthood and the covenant by which that priesthood is empowered are mutually dependent. You cannot have one without the other. If you change one, you must also change the other.

Thus when Christ became the High Priest, the covenant had to change, in the same way that when God instituted a new covenant, so the priesthood had to change. A new priesthood requires a new covenant.

But why the change in priesthood and covenant? What was wrong with the old priesthood and the old covenant?

Read Hebrews 7:18-19

The reason given for the need for a change of priesthood and covenant is described in rich variety by different Bible translations:

New International Version: “The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.”

New King James Version: “For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.”

New Living Translation: “Yes, the old requirement about the priesthood was set aside because it was weak and useless. For the law made nothing perfect, and now a better hope has taken its place. And that is how we draw near to God.”

The New Testament in Modern English: “Quite plainly, then, there is a definite cancellation of the previous commandment because of its ineffectiveness and uselessness – the Law was incapable of bringing anyone to real maturity – followed by the introduction of a better hope, through which we approach our God.”

The Message: “The former way of doing things, a system of commandments that never worked out the way it was supposed to, was set aside; the law brought nothing to maturity. Another way – Jesus! – a way that does work, that brings us right into the presence of God, is put in its place.”

The Amplified Bible: “So, a previous physical regulation and command is cancelled because of its weakness and ineffectiveness and uselessness, for the Law never made anything perfect, but instead a better hope is introduced through which we [now] come close to God.”

We see from this passage that the Old Covenant was superseded by the New Covenant* for two simple reasons:

- **It was weak** – **Romans 8:3** tells us that the Law of Moses was “powerless” because it was “weakened by the sinful nature.” The Old Covenant relied on the willpower of each individual person to reach God’s high standard of holiness, which proved impossible.
- **It was useless** – The Greek word used here conveys the meaning of “uselessness” or “profitlessness.” The underlying ineffectiveness of the Old Covenant is explained in **Hebrews 10:4**: “...it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”

Read Hebrews 8:1-13

In this passage, the writer explains further why God needed to introduce a second and better covenant. He writes:

“For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault *with the people...*”

This is the source of the problem with the Old Covenant. The flaw was in the people! It was the weakness and animosity of the old unregenerate human nature that proved to be the Achilles’ heel of the former covenant. After quoting the Old Testament prophets, predicting the coming of a brand new covenant totally different from the Sinai covenant, the writer then declares:

“By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.”

Read Hebrews 9:7-10

The Old Covenant consisted simply of “external regulations applying *until the time of the new order.*”

* As we shall see later in our in-depth study of the book of **Romans** in **Module 109**, the Covenant of Law was never intended by God to be a permanent covenant. It always was a temporary covenant, designed to prepare the way for the coming of Christ.

The Perfect Covenant

The New Covenant – what the writer to the Hebrews calls “the new order” – is not simply a replacement of the Old Covenant. It is a complete fulfillment of the Old Covenant – a fulfillment of its *form* (the structure of priesthood and sacrifice), its *purpose* (to bring people near to God) and its *hope* (the perfecting of the worshipers). In this sense it is not simply a *new* covenant; it is a *perfect* covenant.

This perfect covenant has three essential elements:

- The perfect high priest
- The perfect sacrifice
- The perfect tabernacle

Let’s look at each in turn.

The perfect high priest

Read Hebrews 5:8-10

The Son of God was only designated as High Priest after he had been “made perfect.” As we have already seen, Christ was already perfect in his character; but it was through his suffering that he became perfect in his capacity to represent mankind to God. We see this described clearly in **Hebrews 2:17-18**:

“For this reason [Jesus] had to be *made like his brothers in every way*, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God...*Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*”

It was in the act of being “made like his brothers in every way” that Jesus was made perfect – the perfect candidate for High Priest. Note that the writer explains that it was because Christ “suffered when he was tempted” he is now able to function as a perfect High Priest. Because he totally identified with our humanity, he is now able to fully represent us before God.

Read Hebrews 4:14-16

The total identification between Jesus and you is central to the New Covenant and foundational to Christ’s ability to function as High Priest. This is why **Hebrews 7:28** declares:

“For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but...[God] appointed the Son, *who has been made perfect forever.*”

The perfect sacrifice

Read Hebrews 1:3

From the opening words of **Hebrews**, the pace is set for the rest of the book.

“...After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”

This “purification for sins” was the main responsibility of any high priest. But the purification that our great High Priest made was not a temporary, “holding” solution. It was a once-for-all-time, perfect solution.

In order to see the difference between the Old Covenant solution and the New Covenant solution, contrast for a moment **Hebrews 10:1-4** and **10:14**.

- **Hebrews 10:1-4** – The blood sacrifices under the Old Covenant could not “make perfect those who draw near to worship.” Rather, because of their repetition, they were an “annual reminder of sins,” incapable within themselves of cleansing the sinner from guilt.
- **Hebrews 10:14** – In total contrast, Christ “by *one* sacrifice he has *made perfect forever* those who are being made holy.” Christ’s sacrifice was a perfect, never-to-be-repeated, eternally effective sacrifice.

Read Hebrews 9:25-28

The perfect tabernacle

Read Hebrews 9:11

The old order of priesthood not only had imperfect sacrifices, it also had an imperfect tabernacle. Not only were the sacrifices “shadows” of a *future* reality, but the tabernacle itself was a shadow of a *heavenly* reality (**Hebrews 8:5**). When Jesus entered heaven on our behalf, it wasn’t just a ceremony designed to *mimic* the real thing – it was the real thing itself!

As the *New King James Version* expresses **Hebrews 6:19-20**:

“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

Two-in-One Covenant

Read 1 John 2:1-2

In these two verses we see an unusual characteristic of the New Covenant and of the ministry of Christ:

- **Verse 1** – Christ functioning as the perfect High Priest
- **Verse 2** – Christ functioning as the perfect sacrifice

Christ fulfills the function of *both* sacrifice and sacrificer, *both* the mediation and the mediator. This is the two-in-one nature of the New Covenant. Both requirements of the covenant are met in Christ!

The Order of Melchizedek

Read Psalm 110

“This royal psalm was used at the crowning of the kings of Judah,”² but has a messianic dimension foreshadowing the coming of Christ. We find two passages from this psalm declared fulfilled in Christ:

- **Psalm 110:1 → Luke 20:41-44; Acts 2:34-36; Hebrews 1:13; 10:13**
- **Psalm 110:4 → Hebrews 5:6,10; 7:17**

The Old Testament's sole reference to the historical Melchizedek occupies just three verses – **Genesis 14:18-20**. Yet the description of Christ's fulfillment of the Melchizedek type* occupies the whole chapter of **Hebrews 7**, and is the predominant thought driving much of the book.

The Lord Jesus Christ has been specifically “designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek” (**Hebrews 5:10**). Since this designation is repeated no less than five times in the book of Hebrews, it would seem important that we understand exactly what is meant by referring to Christ as a “high priest in the order of Melchizedek.”

A permanent priesthood

Let's take another glance at **Hebrews 6:19-20**:

“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest *forever*, in the order of Melchizedek.”

Did you catch the key words in **verse 20**? The phrase “a high priest forever” is a principal attribute of the Melchizedek order of priesthood, to which Jesus lays scriptural claim.

The Aaronic order of priesthood, established at Sinai, was a hereditary priesthood, and thus each high priest only held the position temporarily, due to his pending appointment with death. But the Melchizedek order of priesthood, established on Zion, is an eternal priesthood, held forever by the Lord Jesus Christ, who has already broken the appointment with death.

Read Hebrews 7:15-17

The Lord Jesus has been declared High Priest, not because of physical ancestry, but “on the basis of the power of an indestructible life”! It is the endless nature of Christ's high priesthood that draws the parallel with the historical person of Melchizedek who, as the writer to the Hebrews points out, has no record of genealogy to which he could claim his priesthood – and since there is no record of his death, his priesthood is, in effect, an eternal one.

A royal priesthood

The Melchizedek order is also marked by something quite remarkable. It is a *royal* priesthood (a priest who is king and a king who is priest). Melchizedek was king of Salem, yet he was also priest of the Most High God.

Read Zechariah 6:12-13

* Of further interest to our study (especially in the light of the previous lesson), the Aaronic order is associated with Sinai while the Melchizedek order is associated with Zion, for Melchizedek was the priest-king of Salem, later to be called Zion.

The prophet Zechariah is speaking to his contemporary, the high priest Joshua, and announces:

“...he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.”

Such a statement would have caused quite a stir among his hearers, for there had never before been a combining of king and high priest in one person. In fact, it appeared to contravene the promise of God himself, who had declared that the coming Messiah would hail from David’s line (**2 Samuel 7:12-20**). Furthermore, the even more ancient prophecy of **Genesis 49:10** explicitly stated:

“The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.”

The kingly line came from Judah, yet the priestly line came from Levi – two different ancestors, two different tribes, two different lineages. How, possibly, could a priest “be clothed with majesty and...sit and rule on his throne”? How could “there be harmony between [priest and king]”?

The answer to this enigma is found in a passage of Scripture that we looked at earlier in this module. In **Zechariah 3:8**, the prophet explains that Joshua is “symbolic of things to come” – symbolic, in fact, of the coming Messiah himself. Thus Zechariah’s words are actually a prophecy describing Christ not only as High Priest, but also as King. This is why **Hebrews 1:3** tells us:

“...After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”

The Anointing of the High Priest

The inauguration of Aaron as high priest involved an anointing of his head with oil (**Leviticus 8:12**). We see a beautiful description of this anointing ceremony in **Psalms 133:2**, where unity in Zion is described as being “like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes.”

And what of the anointing of Christ as High Priest? In **Hebrews 1:9**, we discover that the Lord Jesus has been anointed “with the oil of joy.” This joy is described in **Hebrews 12:2** as “the joy set before him,” for which Christ endured the Cross.

But the inauguration of Aaron as high priest involved more than just the anointing of oil, and in Aaron’s inaugural ceremony we see a further picture of Christ’s high priesthood. In **Leviticus 8:23**, we learn that the blood of the sacrifice was applied to three parts of Aaron’s body:

- **His right ear lobe** – prophetic of Christ’s ability to hear the voice of God
- **His right thumb** – prophetic of Christ’s ability to do God’s will
- **His right big toe** – prophetic of Christ’s ability to walk in God’s ways

What Does This Mean for Me?

Since Christ is the perfect High Priest *and* the perfect sacrifice, the writer to the Hebrews encourages you to do a number of things:

- Fix your thoughts on Jesus, your Apostle and High Priest (**3:1; 12:2**)
- Make every effort to enter into the rest of Christ's finished work (**4:11**)
- Hold firmly to the faith you profess (**4:14; 10:23**)
- Approach the throne of grace with confidence (**4:16; 10:19**)
- Ask for mercy and grace in time of need (**4:16**)
- Go on to maturity (**6:1**)
- Imitate the faith and endurance of those who have gone before you (**6:12**)
- Draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith (**10:22**)
- Meet with and encourage other Christians (**10:24-25**)
- Throw off everything that hinders and entangles (**12:1**)
- Run with perseverance the race marked out for you (**10:35-39; 12:1**)
- Do not grow weary or lose heart (**12:3-13**)
- Make every effort to live in love and peace (**12:14; 13:1-3**)
- Make sure you don't miss the grace of God (**12:15-17**)
- Be thankful and worship God acceptably (**12:28; 13:15-16**)
- Join your High Priest "outside the camp" of this world (**13:11-14**)

The doxology pronounced in **Hebrews 13:20-21** perhaps sums up best the significance that Christ's eternal high priesthood holds for your life:

"May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

¹ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

² *Disciple's Study Bible*, Psalm 110, excerpted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.

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