



Ministry of the Word

*Sunday 03<sup>rd</sup> February 2019*

by Vincent Gannon

**Scripture:** Hebrews 7:11-19

**Subject:** Part 19: The New Priesthood

Chapter 7 is the pivotal point of Hebrews. It focuses us on two central and important parts of Judaism which are the priesthood and the sacrificial system. No sacrifice could be made except by the priest and no forgiveness of sins could be obtained apart from the sacrifices. Obedience to the law was exceedingly important, but the offering of sacrifices was more so because it covered their sin. The priesthood was essential because only they could offer them hence why the priesthood was exalted in Judaism.

In the Book of Exodus you can read about the start of the Aaronic priesthood. The High Priest could only come from the line of Aaron. More insight is given in the book of Leviticus, regarding the Levitical priesthood, who were from the tribe of Levi only. In both Exodus and Leviticus, we can read about the High Priests and Levitical Priests' functions, ordinances, clothes, their life in the community, how long they served and their family life. In both of these books we can also read about the Law of God which included the boundaries, consequences and judgements. These books stipulate the manner in which all ceremonies and sacrifices were to be made in precise detail.

These sacrifices and laws kept by the people of Israel, were in relation to the covering of their sins. It did not necessarily draw them close to God, for only the High Priest could actually enter into the Holies of Holies, and not without atonement for his own sin, and the sin of the nation. He could only enter in once a year, on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month. This day was considered as a Sabbath day, it was called Yom-Kapoor, the day of Atonement, therefore the rules around the Sabbath applied to it.

While there are many examples in the Old testament of people who had a personal encounter and relationship with God, the general population of Israel did not. Remember what happened on Mountain Sinai, Let's just turn to Exodus chapter 19 and start from verse 10

*“Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. <sup>11</sup> And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. <sup>12</sup> You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. <sup>13</sup> Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast, he shall not live.’ When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain.”*

In Exodus 20, just after God starts to give the law, in verses 18 and 19 we see the People's response to God's presence,

*Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. <sup>19</sup> Then they said to Moses, “You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die. <sup>20</sup> And Moses said to the people, “Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.” <sup>21</sup> So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.*

In Exodus 24, we see this separation again;

*Then the Lord said to Moses, “Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance,<sup>2</sup> but Moses alone is to approach the Lord; the others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him.”*

The law God gave Israel was Holy and good, but because the Israelites, as all men, were sinful by nature, they could not keep the law perfectly. When they broke the law, fellowship with God was also broken. The only way of restoring fellowship was to remove sin that was

committed, and the only way to do that was through a blood sacrifice. Yet sometimes, even a sacrifice was not enough and God dealt with them straight away. Remember God's judgement on the sons of Aaron? Turn with me please to Leviticus 10, starting in verse 1 –

*Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. <sup>2</sup>So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. <sup>3</sup>And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me, I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.' So Aaron held his peace.*

*<sup>4</sup>Then Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp." <sup>5</sup>So they went near and carried them by their tunics out of the camp, as Moses had said. <sup>6</sup>And Moses said to Aaron, and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons, "Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the people. But let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord has kindled. <sup>7</sup>You shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses.*

Aaron, could not mourn them and neither could the priests. They could not bury them because they had the anointing oil of the Lord upon them, therefore, Moses had to call two other men to remove them outside the camp of Israel. Why? Because the two lads, the sons of Aaron, had offered up strange fire, therefore desecrating the Holy Place, going against the will of God. God is a Holy God, and He does not change. Often in this day and age, we can overlook this fact, but He is still a Holy God. We must live our lives reflecting this and not live our lives seeking to bring Him down to our level, but to live reverently before Him. It would also make us think about this strange offering that was made. Many strange things go on in modern churches, don't they? When you think of all the reports about the certain church worship service and some of the sermons. And yet, perhaps one of the most noticeable things today is the lack of reverence for God when we come into His presence. When we come to a church meeting it seems that we don't always be aware that we are coming into the presence of a Holy God to worship. Maybe we don't understand the term worship, which is giving God is rightful place for all of who He is and all that He does, do we worship Him in truth and spirit? Do we spend time preparing our hearts before coming into the presence of God, or is it just a

rush or it is a routine thing that we do? I know that some people do prepare their hearts and their purpose of coming is to give to God and not just take. But it is worth considering! We need to remember God told His people multiple times to be Holy, Leviticus 19 verse 1 and 2

*The Lord said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.’*

This is not just an old Testament idea or theme but even in the New Testament we are reminded time and time again, for example in 1 Peter 1:16 it says –

*because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.”*

Sin is very serious. It is a stench to the nostrils of our very Most High and Holy God. It separates us from God and his perfect peace. There is nothing we can do to amend the wide void, and allow us to cross from where we are, over to God. Nothing!! We cannot save ourselves. Under the Old covenant, when a person repented and made a proper offering through the priest, his sacrifice was meant to show the genuineness of his penitence by obedience to God’s requirements. God accepted that faithful act and granted forgiveness. These sacrifices had to be repeated and repeated and repeated continually. These sacrifices provided no permanent forgiveness, no permanent righteousness, no permanent peace. They were still at a distance because of the barriers that were in the way. Remember that within the Tabernacle there were barriers put up from the start. Any person could go into the entrance court and to the altar of sacrifice, but no further. The Levitical priest could go from the altar of sacrifice, to the Holy Place but no further. Only the High Priest could go beyond the veil, into the Holy of Holies, into the presence of God, and only once a year.

All this background would have been very well known to the readers of the Book of Hebrews. Throughout the book, so far, there has been a built up of discussion around the superiority of Christ as High Priest, not after the order of Aaron or the order of Levi, but after the universal and royal order of Melchizedek. It is here in the next few verses from 11 onwards, the explanation is made of why Jesus is Superior.

Let’s read again verses 11 and 12 –

*Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of*

***Aaron? <sup>12</sup> For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.***

Nowhere in Scripture is it taught that the Levitical Priesthood was perfect. God never intended for the Levitical priesthood to remain forever. In fact, we can find references in the Old Testament that a new order was anticipated. Just to underline this fact, turn to Zechariah 6:13 –

***Yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, And shall sit and rule on His throne; So He shall be a priest on His throne, And the counsel of peace shall be between them both.***

God's prediction of another priesthood coming, even without further revelation, would have been reasonable to assume, that the new one would be better and would replace the old. Israel was told that a greater priesthood was to come, of which the Messiah would be the Priest (Psalm 110:4). If the Aaronic priesthood had been perfect, another would have been unnecessary. Or, if God had intended the Aaronic priesthood somehow to improve and one day introduce the age of perfect access to Him, why would He have planned for the Messiah to be a priest of a different order?

It was no accident or mistake that God set aside the Israelite priesthood. He had planned it that way from the beginning. That is obvious because soon after He called Abraham, before He actually made the covenant with him, God introduced him to Melchizedek, a priest of a higher order than the one that would come from Abraham's descendants.

As we know, perfection means having all the required or desirable elements, qualities, or characteristics; as good as it is possible to be. It also means absolute; complete. And as a verb, it means to make (something) completely free from faults or defects. So, as we have already seen from Scripture, the Levitical priesthood was not perfect because this priesthood could only picture, only typify, the actual reconciliation, because it could only symbolize cleansing of sin. It was therefore imperfect, in that, it could not give men direct access to God. Recall, back in Genesis 4 when we read about Cain and Abel, we see that man had direct access to make perfect personal sacrifices to God. Then in Genesis 6 we see the

total moral collapse of mankind, and in Genesis 7 we see it go from personal to family or community sacrifices before God. Then we get to Genesis 14, we see something unique and different in that Melchizedek is the first priest, royal and universal. Throughout the rest of Genesis, we see it is the head of the tribe or family, making the sacrifice. Then in Exodus, we are unsure what took place when the Israelites were in slavery, but God brought the nation to birth by freeing them from slavery after the first communal sacrifice of the Passover lamb. He brought them out of the Land of Egypt, and as they move from territory to territory, as God moved them towards the promised land, God implemented the centrality of the Priesthood, the ceremonies and sacrifices, and also the law that all should obey. What made the Priesthood itself imperfect was the corruptibility of the heart of man, not the imperfection of the Law. Paul reasoned in Romans 4 verses 14 and 15 –

*For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, <sup>15</sup> because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.*

This is why there was a necessity to change the priesthood, which would also effect the law. Change means to make or become different, take or use another instead of. It is not blending one thing into another, but becoming completely different. The new priesthood was not an add on to Aaron's, but now replaced it. The Aaronic priesthood and the Mosaic laws were closely tied to one another, a changed (replaced) priesthood also meant a changed law. Is the law of God, therefore, also done away with? Did Christ do away with the Law? We find the answer from Jesus Himself in Matthew 5 verses 17 to 20 -

*“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. <sup>18</sup> For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. <sup>19</sup> Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*

God's moral law is reflected not only in the Ten Commandments but throughout the Old Testament. It is part of His very nature, and therefore cannot possibly change. In the New Testament, God's standards of righteousness for His people are reaffirmed, not decreased,

much less done away with. If adultery, stealing, lying, and coveting were wrong under the Old Testament, they are also under the New. Far from setting aside His moral law in the New Covenant, He has strengthened it as far as standards for His people are concerned. The New Testament demands a greater judgment on disobedience (cross reference Acts 17:30-31).

Aaron's priesthood now has no validity at all, not even as a picture of salvation or as a temporary covering of sin. It is defunct, totally abrogated. So, what was the new priesthood? It is Christ, Himself! Let us take up again verses 13 to 17 –

*For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. <sup>14</sup> For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. <sup>15</sup> And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest <sup>16</sup> who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. <sup>17</sup> For He testifies: "You are a priest forever. According to the order of Melchizedek."*

The Greek language has two words for Another. The first is - Alios, meaning an additional one of the same kind, and the second word is heteros meaning of a different kind. The first indicates a quantitative difference, the second a qualitative difference. If I traded in my small French car for another French imported car, I would be getting another car that was alios, of the same kind. But if I traded it for a large American car, I would be getting another car that was heteros, of a different kind, a different quality. It is the heteros which is used in verses 13 and 15.

In verse 13, it starts off with *For He of whom these things are spoken...* This is speaking of non-other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus did not come from the tribe of Levi, which was the only priestly tribe as I've already mentioned. Jesus, was from another tribe, the tribe of Judah, a royal tribe, which had nothing to do with priestly service at the altar. In Christ we do not have another priest just like those who ministered in the Tabernacle and the Temple. He is heteros, of a completely different kind and order. Under the Old Covenant there were many priests, and they were all alios. Under the New there is but one Priest, and He is heteros.

Like Melchizedek's priesthood, however, Jesus' was first and last based on who He is. It had nothing to do with the physical body, but everything to do with eternal power, the power of an indestructible life. In the case of the Levitical priesthood, the law made him a priest because of the family into which he was born and because of certain physical requirements he had to meet. The Levitical Priests had outward obligations but for Jesus Christ, priesthood is because of who He is. He became, and He

continues, a priest by eternal power, a power that can do what no priest could ever do: completely atone for sin, give us direct access to God and more.

The evidence and the logic are overwhelming that the Levitical priesthood is now obsolete and that the new priesthood that God had long predicted could not be Levitical. Beginning with Genesis 49:10 which states –

*The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.*

The Old Testament is clear that the Messiah would come from Judah. In many passages, such as Psalm 110:4, it is also clear that the Messiah will be both priest and king. It is also clear, that His priesthood would not be hereditary and temporary but would be based on personal qualification and would be eternal.

Jesus Christ can do what Aaron, the other High Priests or any of the Levitical Priests could not do. He takes us into the presence of God and He anchors us there eternally.

As we come to verses 18 and 19, we read...

*For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and un-profitableness, <sup>19</sup> 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.*

Aaron's priests could never bring a man fully to God. There was always a barrier in between. The barriers could not be removed because sin had not been fully done away with. The fact that the Messiah is God, the perfect sacrifice and the eternal High priest opened the way for us. When Jesus died on the cross, what happened in the Temple? The Veil in the Temple tore in two, from the top to the bottom.. yes, God wanted to ensure His message was clear. Man did not tear the veil, for if he did, it would have been from the bottom to the top. God didn't just move some of the barriers and obstacles when the ground shook and split open when Jesus died, imagine if the altar of sacrifice which represents the sin offering was thrown over, or the waters of cleansing and purification of the laver before the holy place being spilt, or the candle sticks which was only source of light in the holy place, which spoke of the Spirit of God being moved, the table of show bread which represented fellowship with God and altar of incense represented the communion with God both were moved, but these were not

spoken off... No, God tore what separated man from direct access with Him. For when Jesus cried IT IS FINISHED, that veil, that heavenly adorned curtain, was torn in two and it was only God who had the power to do it!

He could remove the veil because firstly it was His to put up in the beginning and He completely atoned for sin, and made way. His perfect plan for Jew and Gentile to enter in was complete, once and for all. He actually bore our sin; the Levitical sacrifices only symbolically anticipated its cancellation, which was its weakness and hence why it was unprofitable. The law made nothing perfect and as Paul once said in Galatians 3 verse 24 and 25 –

*“Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”*

Sin had actually been dealt with, the Levitical priesthood was no longer necessary, and God set it aside. You do not need a symbol when you have the real thing. Now that the perfect had come, the imperfect passed away.

Hence the most wonderful highlight .. when it says in verse 19 -

*“on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.”*

God’s ultimate desire for all men is for them to come to Him. It’s always been that way, even from the start. Genesis 3 verse 8 and 9 –

*And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?”*

Yes God wanted to be in relationship with man, but because of the fall, came separation between God and man, and a void was made were man could not willingly nor freely pass by himself. No man-made work or man-made devotion or man-made sacrifice could built a sufficient bridge to cross over. Only the Cross of Jesus Christ would do. God continued to call men and women to Himself. From the Old Testament –

Isaiah 55:6 *“Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.”*

Zechariah 1:3 *“Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: “Return to Me,” says the Lord of hosts, “and I will return to you,” says the Lord of hosts.”*

Then in the New Testament –

James 4 verse 8 - *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

2 Corinthians 6:18 - *“I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty.”*

Now, through Christ Jesus, we can draw near to Him!! Hallalujah! What a privilege!

His ultimate desire for believers is that they continue to draw nearer to Him. God’s goal in all that He does on behalf of men is that they might come into His presence. Drawing near to God is the essence of Christianity. Drawing near to God is the Christian’s highest experience, and should be his highest purpose. The design of God for Christianity is access to His presence, coming into His presence with nothing between. Sometimes we forget this, and sometimes we take this for granted.

The Old testament saints, The old Testament Israelites, seen the foreshadows of the things to come. There were many prophecies regarding the office of the Messiah, about his priesthood, about his Kingship, about his Lordship and about his ability to atone for the sins of the people completely, for Jew and Gentile.

Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:10 to 12,

*“As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-things into which angels long to look.”*

In other words, those Old Testament saints only saw salvation from a distance. They had faith in the Word of God, looking ahead for a conscience freed from sin. Now we have seen the fulfilment of the prophecies, now we are able to profit from the strength and power of Christ. We can go into God’s presence and we can sit down before Him and, with the apostle Paul, say, “Abba, Father.” We have access to God.

Now that we have looked into the historical background and read this portion of the book of Hebrews, we can see the amazing evidence for the need of the new Priesthood as

well as Jesus's superiority over all. Surely those who read it, could not look back into Judaism, back to the old ritual system. For they knew the scriptures! And before you judge those who did, we need to look around at the different religions today, who have taken a sowing needle to the veil and used their own threads, sown it back up, so that they can continue to offer transubstantiation, believing the bread and wine when blessed change into the substance of Christ's body, continually sacrificing him, or those who try to do works to thread up the veil. Or whatever, this is contra to what God has ordained.

I wonder do we sometimes also undermine the work of Christ's redemption. I wonder do we sometimes undermine the Holy privileges that He has bestowed upon us. When we look back at the old way, surely we have much to be thankful for. The whole purpose in salvation is that God's people can draw near to Him, and the blessed hope that one day we will be in His presence. Surely this should give us a Holy hunger after the things of God, and to spend time with Him in His presence.

*Amen.*