The Book to the Hebrews is clear that Jesus Christ exceeds all people, beings (or anything else), to which anyone may offer allegiance. Jesus is superior to everything.

**READ Hebrews 7 & 8**

The writer to the Hebrews now returns to a theme he introduced several chapters back **Hebrews 2:17**, namely Jesus as our High Priest and in doing so He highlights a character from the Old Testament that many might may have thought insignificant, Melchizedek. He then brings that character into real prominence.

Being from a Jewish background, these Christians would have been knowledgeable about the role and person of the high priest and now the writer is introducing Jesus as their High Priest - someone who has in effect come from nowhere to occupy the role.

This section may have been written to answer both spiritual and intellectual questions posed by the Hebrews. For a Jew, the objection to Jesus being High Priest was that He did not come from the priestly tribe of Levi, or the priestly family in that tribe, which descended from Aaron.

Possibly without answers to these issues, there had risen resistance to the gospel, which had resulted in the drifting away that has been spoken of, along with a lack of maturity of faith in Jesus and with that the temptation to return to Judaism.

As C21st Christians without Jewish blood-roots, we may struggle to appreciate what they faced, but for us there remains a risk that our growth to mature faith can be damaged if we allow ourselves to get diverted by questions relating to non-core issues, or about things that do not matter. Instead, we should resolve those issues so we can move on with Jesus.

For us, we can use this chapter to develop our thinking and knowledge of the Old Testament institutions of the priesthood and the Law, to see better the role that Jesus performs today.

As we saw last week, what we know about Melchizedek and his relation to the Aaronic priesthood is limited to **Genesis 14:18-20**, which says: **Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High 19and he blessed Abram, saying, ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. 20And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.’ Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.**

Hebrews 7 gives an overview of this passage from Genesis. It says that after he defeated the kings who took his nephew Lot captive, Abraham met with a mysterious priest named Melchizedek, who was also king over the city of Salem - the ancient name for Jerusalem.

Melchizedek was a worshipper of God and he had been given the honoured title of priest of God Most High. We are not told how Melchizedek came to know God, or anything about whether the city of Salem also worshipped God. We just need to accept this text as fact and also that God is able to speak to the lives of anyone that He wants.

Melchizedek brought bread and wine, then blessed Abraham, whilst Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe – a tenth of everything he had gained from spoils of the battle.

The name Melchizedek means ‘king of righteousness’, but he also had the title ‘king of peace’ (because the name Salem means ‘peace’). These names were important to and inspired by God.

The order is important as righteousness comes before true peace. Peace in Hebrew doesn’t mean just an absence from war, or silence, it means having an inner peace. That is something that can only truly be in place when we are righteous, or right with God – and for us, the only way we can get right before God is through faith in Jesus.

We know everything about Jesus’ genealogy, but are told nothing of Melchizedek’s. As far as the Biblical record is concerned, he has no father or mother, no beginning of days or end of life. The text also says that he resembled **the Son of God**.

Opinion is divided as to whether Melchizedek was human, a Heavenly being or even a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Himself. The NIV translates the Greek word aphomoiomenos as ‘resembling’ – whilst others translations have ‘made like’. The original is a word used nowhere else in the New Testament and it suggests ‘a copy or model’. One commentator wrote, ‘It was as if the Father could not await the day of His Son’s priestly entrance within the veil…’ (Meyer), so God revealed Jesus in the form of Melchizedek.

Some of the theological argument is based on the writer saying he remains a priest forever. Either there is a continual priestly order of Melchizedek, or Melchizedek was actually Jesus appearing in the Old Testament.

In some ways it does not matter to us. Scripture tells us that Jesus is eternal and part of a triune God. Jesus existed then, he continues to exist today and will do so into eternity. That’s the assurance for us – we have a saviour that is for all time.

The next few verses return to the superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham, as we see by Abraham both paying tithes to Melchizedek and then being blessed by him. This combination would have impressed on the readers that there were levels of superiority above Abraham – remember that Abraham was someone who was held in very high regard by the Jewish people.

Scripture has many recurring themes and one is established here – we are encouraged to voluntarily support God’s work both financially and with our abilities. We are encouraged to give a tithe (a tenth) as a minimum, with Abraham’s encounter with Melchizedek acting as an example to follow.

Later, the Israelite nation gave tithes to the priesthood of Levi as the result of a command, but here Abraham gave voluntarily. Such a voluntary payment is always going to have greater impact and significance than one that is demanded and it is significant that Abraham’s payment is from the spoils. The word translates literally as ‘the top of the heap’ – he voluntarily gave from the choicest riches.

The writer says, without doubt the lesser is blessed by the greater. If there is any doubt in the readers minds, it should be removed. ‘The blessing here is not simply wishing good to another, which may be done by an inferior to a superior; but it is the action of a person authorised by God to bestow good things on another.’ (Macknight)

Abraham accepted that through Melchizedek, he was being blessed by God Himself. We are in the same position as Abraham; to be blessed by God through Jesus. There may have been an interval of several thousand years since Melchizedek’s blessing and now, but the blessing remains constant and current.

The writer then tells his readers that there remains a need for a new priesthood as the Levitical priesthood, even when they were their closest to God, were unable to make anything perfect. Aaron, though blessed by God, was a sinner and none of his descendants were any better. It would take an intervention from God Himself, in the form of Jesus to create the perfect priesthood.

That intervention is what David wrote and prophesied about in **Psalm 110**. David writes that God allows someone to sit at His right hand and that person will be a conqueror for the Lord. But David also goes on to write that that person is **a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek**. There is something lacking in Aaron’s priesthood, which will be resolved by the one who is God’s conqueror.

Aaron was never good enough to approach God to obtain forgiveness of sins and we are in the same position. Saying to yourself that ‘you are a good person’, is not sufficient, nor is keeping to the laws and regulations that were established in the instructions given to Moses.

The only way we can approach God, is by giving everything to Jesus, who was, is and always will be perfect, then we can allow Jesus to be our access to God.

That change from Aaron to Jesus is what the writer talks about in **v12**. Under the Law of Moses, God strictly commanded that only those from the family of Aaron could serve **at the altar** in sacrifice. So, as Jesus was from the line of Judah and he is serving as our High Priest, it must be under another principle.

That principle included a priest who was totally without fault and one who was eternal. Clearly, that can never be someone who is human, but it can be Jesus as he is 100% God and 100% human and it is God that declares about Jesus, **You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.**

We are no longer under the laws that were handed down from Moses as they have been set aside as the way of establishing our relationship and access to God. Those laws had a value in that they show us God’s perfect standard, yet they were of no use when it came to saving souls. In medical terms, the Mosaic law provided a diagnosis of our sin, which is essential, but only Jesus can save us from our sin problem.

We have an assurance that as we have a better priesthood, a better High Priest and a better hope, so we are able to make our relationship right with God.

The important and central assurance for us is that Jesus was made High Priest by a promise, or oath, made by God and we know that God will not change His mind. That promise is backed up with Jesus being the guarantor.

The word guarantor used in the text describes someone who put up a security, for example on a loan or as bail for a prisoner. In our case, Jesus Himself is the guarantor of a better covenant.

From Jesus’ overwhelming superiority to angels and humans, He proves that He is worthy and able to be our guarantor and therefore, be our eternal High Priest interceding with God.

Paul writing to the **Romans 8:33-34** considered Jesus’ intercession of great importance, as he pictured Jesus continually defending us against every charge or condemnation brought against us. In those verses he said, **Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.**

In **Luke 22:31-32** we are given an example of Jesus’ intercession for His people: **‘Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.’**

The writer continues that **Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.**

We are again given reassurance and a reminder that Jesus is perfect. He doesn’t need to offer sacrifices for His own sin, which the other priests needed to do daily, His was a once-for-all and therefore, perfect, sacrifice.

As our **chapter 8** starts, the writer summarises all that he has been saying so far about Jesus;

*‘We have such a high priest…’* ***Hebrews 8:1a****. Jesus, our high priest, is ‘holy, innocent, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens’* ***Hebrews 7:26****. He is ‘seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens’* ***Hebrews 8:1b; cf. Hebrews 1:3; Hebrews 10:12; Hebrews 12:2****.*

*‘He is a minister of the sanctuary’* ***Hebrews 8:2a****. This sanctuary is the ‘true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man’* ***Hebrews 8:2b; Hebrews 9:11****. The tabernacle in the wilderness, and the Temple in Jerusalem, were erected according to the command and pattern of God: but they were only meant to serve as ‘an example and shadow of heavenly things’* ***Hebrews 8:5****.*

He is our High Priest in heaven and He is seated, meaning His work is done - He has made that ultimate and superior sacrifice by laying down His own life to atone for sin.

The writer again makes a comparison – this time in relation to the earthly tabernacle, comparing it to the Heavenly one. Again, the heavenly one is superior, firstly because it was not built by corrupt humans and secondly, because it is served by the superior heavenly priest, Jesus.

The earthly Temple at the time of Jesus was, by all accounts a magnificent structure, which was admired by the disciples **Matthew 24**. But as an earthly structure, though glorious in the eyes of man, it was at best only a copy of the superior heavenly structure **Exodus 25:40**.

It should be remembered that C1st Jews took tremendous pride in the Jerusalem Temple. In earthly terms it was spectacular, but the architecture and adornment of gold and jewels was just a veneer to the fact that it mostly built by Herod the Great – a corrupt and ungodly man, whose real desire in rebuilding the Temple was to achieve and maintain political power for himself.

Our assurance today and forever, is that Jesus presides over a superior priesthood with a better covenant and better promises, in a better tabernacle.

No earthly priest can take away sin the way Jesus did. Nor, can any earthly priest act as a mediator between us and God. Jesus is our mediator, one who stands in the middle between two parties and brings them together. He brings us as individuals together with God, to restore the relationship that was lost in the Garden of Eden.

The writer concludes by talking about the new covenant that Jesus enables us to have with God. This new covenant fulfils all of the others that God established previously – those with Abraham, Moses, David.

The writer says the fact that God mentions another covenant proves that there is something lacking in the Old Covenant; **v7 for if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another**.

Humans like to reinvent things – to come up with things that are ‘new’, but not necessarily needed. God isn’t like that. If God established a New Covenant, it means that there was something lacking in the Old Covenant and the writer explains this by quoting from **Jeremiah 31:31-34**.

**…God found fault with the people and said: ‘The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. 9It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. 10This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 11No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. 12For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’**

In the days of Jeremiah, the New Covenant as we understand it, was still in the future. Jeremiah may have been looking back to the days of King Josiah’s renewal of the covenant after Josiah found the books of the law abandoned in the Temple **2 Kings 23:3**.

Prophecy often has a fulfilment in the future and the Lord says through Jeremiah, **‘The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah’.** King Josiah’s renewal was good, but it still wasn’t good enough.

The Greek word Scripture uses for **a new covenant**, is kainos. It describes something that is not only new in terms of time, but also quality – it is not a new reproduction or copy of something old or already in existence. When God says new, He means new in the best ways of the word.

That New Covenant began with Israel but as believers in Jesus as Messiah, we also are included **Matthew 15:24**, **Acts 1:8**.

The New Covenant transforms from within – it does not intend to regulate through external law. God wants us to be obedient to this new covenant because He has put it in our minds and written it on our hearts. The promise is then completed, as God says, **I will be their God and they will be My people** – our intimacy with God will be restored and He promises to forgive and forget our sins forever.

The writer concludes by saying now that the New Covenant has been started, the Old Covenant is obsolete **v13**.

The message would have been clear to these discouraged Jewish Christians, who were thinking about returning to their former Jewish faith. The writer says, they can’t go back to an inferior covenant, one which **is obsolete and outdated** and **will soon disappear**.

Within a few years, the system of sacrifice under the Law of Moses did disappear, when the Romans destroyed the Temple and Jerusalem.

From that time on, there was only God’s New Covenant available.