

Levi's Blues

Jesus and the Priestly Covenant

- ⁹ One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham,
- ¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.
- ¹¹ Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?
- ¹² For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.
- ¹³ For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar.
- ¹⁴ For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.
- ¹⁵ This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek,
- ¹⁶ who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.
- ¹⁷ For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."
- ¹⁸ For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness
- ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better

hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

²⁰ And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath,

²¹ but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever.'"

²² This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

²³ The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office,

²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.

²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

²⁶ For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

²⁸ For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever."

Hebrews 7:9-25 28

A Priest-King?

ONE OF THE GREAT PROBLEMS for the Christian claim that Jesus is the Messiah is often simply taken for granted by Christians. In fact, we don't seem to think that it is a problem at all. Maybe many of us have never thought about it. The astonishing claim is that **Jesus Christ was both king and priest**. A Rabbi puts the problem this way:

This stunning assertion that Jesus was high priest further undermines the Church's claim that Jesus was a Davidic king. Simply put, the same man can never be both high priest and king. The high priest must be a descendant of Aaron (the brother of Moses), who was a descendant from the tribe of Levi. A Davidic king, on the other hand, has to trace his lineage from the House of David, descended from the tribe of Judah. It is impossible for the same person to be both a member of the tribe of Levi and Judah.

It isn't difficult to understand why the Book of Hebrews repeatedly insists that Jesus served as high priest – the notion that Jesus provided the ultimate sin sacrifice for the human

race was vital to the core theology of this Pauline author. This astonishing claim, however, completely sabotages the missionary contention that Jesus was eligible to sit on David's throne.¹

So simply put, Jesus can't be both a **priest** and a **king**. You can't have your cake and eat it too. At least, that is what the Jews say. And, of course, as the Rabbi has demonstrated, this problem hits at the very heart of our faith, for if he is right, then either Jesus is not King and therefore is not Ruler of anything or he is not the Priest who takes away our sins. Either way, it strips him of everything that is vital not only to our salvation, but to his authority and divinity. This is serious business.

In ancient times, **others were aware of this problem**. Curiously, prior to the writing of the NT, the **Testament of Simeon** says, “**And now, my children, be obedient to Levi and to Judah. Do not exalt yourselves above these two tribes, [because from them will arise the Savior come from God]**.”² For the Lord will raise up from Levi someone as high

¹ Rabbi Tovia Singer, “Why Doesn't Judaism Have a King? Where is our Messiah?” *Outreach Judaism*, <http://outreachjudaism.org/why-doesnt-judaism-have-a-king/>, last accessed 3-1-2016.

priest and from Judah someone as king [God and man]. He will save all the gentiles and the tribe of Israel. (TSim 7:1). And the Testament of Levi says, “Through you [Levi] and Judah the Lord will be seen by men, [by himself saving every race of humankind].” (TLevi 2:11). So someone was trying to figure out a way that the Messiah could come through two different lines.² But the Bible has a different solution, and it is one that the Rabbi seems to have completely missed, even though he quotes from the very book the argument is used.

Jesus’ Ancestry

To understand the argument and how very important it is, we have to understand something of our Lord’s ancestry. The Gospel of Matthew begins in a most interesting way. “The book of the genealogy of Jesus, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1). Luke also has a genealogy of Jesus that is traced back to Abraham (Luke 3). These both refer to what Paul calls “the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen” (Rom 9:5 NIV).

² Another solution was that there would actually be two Messiahs.

When you look at the third name from Abraham in those lists, you find that **Judah** is Jesus' ancestor. Judah was the fourth born son of Jacob and Leah. He is called the **lion** and his symbol has always been a lion (**Gen 49:9; Hos 5:14**). Thus, Jesus is called the **lion of the tribe of Judah** (**Rev 5:5**). Jesus being born from Judah was in accordance with prophecy (**Gen 49:10**).

Hebrews is the book that the Rabbi quotes in a mocking way, for some reason (perhaps he has not actually read it?) thinking that the letter is completely unaware of this problem and is actually guilty of perpetuating an error that any Jewish boy prior to his Bar Mitzvah could have spotted. But of course, Hebrews is acutely aware of the problem and even points out in an explicit way in the middle of our passage today: “**For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests**” (**Heb 7:14**). This comes in the middle of a discussion about Levi. He knows full well that Jesus is **not descended from Levi**.

Yet (and here is the problem), for the next several chapters we will actually see **Jesus obeying Levitical law as a priest**. He enters into the tabernacle, something only

Levitical priests were supposed to do. He offers a sacrifice for sin, something only the priests could do. He makes unclean things clean, something only the priests could do. You get the picture. Hopefully you are beginning to see how important this is to our Faith. How is it that Hebrews could be so acutely aware that Jesus is from the tribe of Judah and yet so oblivious to the fact that only a Levite could do these things? He must have been an absolute religious dolt. Or was he?

Hebrews 7 begins with a discussion on [the Mystery Man named Melchizedek](#). He is the priest-king of Salem, that is Jerusalem, in the days of Abraham. Abraham was born 250 years before his descendant [Levi](#), who is brought up next. Let's learn something from the OT about this man named Levi.

Levi was the [third born](#) of Jacob and Leah. Along with his brother [Simeon](#) (the second born), he was responsible for leading the city of [Shechem](#) into a trap for taking their sister [Dinah](#). The trap was to make the entire city become Jews in order for the prince to marry their sister. This meant that the entire city of men had to be [circumcised](#). On the day the trap was sprung and all the men were in serious pain, the two

warriors of Jacob swooped in and put them all to the sword, thus freeing their sister and incurring the wrath of their father.

For their actions, Jacob cursed both brothers on his deathbed. They were both to be scattered in Israel, given no inheritance among the sons of Jacob (**Gen 49:7**). This prophecy came true for both tribes, but in different ways. Simeon was absorbed into the tribe of Judah and basically ceased to exist. But Levi was given a different fate. Through him, God would call both Moses and Aaron, his descendants. Aaron would become the mouthpiece for Moses, but even more, through him would come the covenant of the priesthood.

A Covenant with Levi

Yahweh told 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” (**Num 18:20**). “I am your...” language is covenantal language. God told Abraham on the day he gave him a covenant, “I am your shield; your reward shall be very great

... on that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram” (Gen 15:1, 18). Thus we read in the verse prior to this with Aaron, “All the Holy contributions that the people of Israel present to the LORD I give to you, and to your sons and daughters with you, as a perpetual due. It is a covenant ... for you and for your [seed] with you” (Num 18:19).

Aaron had a grandson. His name was Phinehas. One day, something terrible happened outside the tabernacle entrance. The people were inviting prostitutes from Moab to the sacred center and were sacrificing to their gods (Num 25:1ff.). It was one of the early instances of Baal worship. The LORD was furious and commanded Moses to hang the chiefs of the people in the sun so that his wrath might be appeased. As the command was going out, one brazen fellow brought a Midianite woman before the site of the entire congregation, defying Moses and Yahweh. When Phinehas saw this, he rose with a spear in hand. When this evil man and women were in the chamber together, and in an act not that different from his grandfather Levi, Phinehas took the spear and pierced them both straight through with one stroke. The plague sent by the LORD was stopped, and

Phinehas had **the covenant of Aaron confirmed** through him.

“Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy. Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace, and it shall be to him and to his descendants after him the covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel’” (**Num 25:11-13**). Later in the Bible, this will be called the “covenant with the Levitical priests” (**Jer 33:21**) or the “covenant with Levi” (**Mal 2:4, 8**) or the “covenant of the priesthood and the Levites” (**Neh 13:29**).

This is a covenant that you rarely find discussed in books on covenant theology, even though Jeremiah puts it **on par with the Davidic covenant** and the creation covenant which always are discussed. It is a terribly important covenant that **we will see more of as Hebrews moves along**. It is important for this reason. What Jesus is doing in the next few chapters is not fulfilling moral law (he does that elsewhere), but Levitical-ceremonial law. What is in view here is Jesus as the

great priest, not the great prophet (as he is in, say, the Sermon on the Mount).

The Covenant of Hebrews 7-10

I bring up the idea of covenant here because for the first time in Hebrews, the word is used in our passage today. “This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant” (Heb 7:22). A better covenant? Better than what? We have to remember that the OT has several different covenants in it. Paedobaptists fuse them all into one covenant called the “covenant of grace” (and from this, their doctrine of infant baptism emerges), but biblically speaking (and as Reformed Baptists argue, theologically speaking), the OT covenants are separate from the covenant of grace, which is only made with Jesus Christ. I call them typological covenants.

Most people think Hebrews is talking here about the Mosaic covenant. But this isn't at all what Hebrews has in mind. What is the Mosaic covenant? God made a covenant with Israel through Moses. “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel’” (Ex 34:27).

What were these words specifically? It says, “He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments” (Ex 34:28) and “He declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone” (Deut 4:13).³

So, the Ten Commandments form the basis of the **Mosaic covenant**. The Ten Commandments are objective, universal **moral law**. Everyone has their requirements written on their heart (Rom 2:15). You all know that it is wrong to murder, to steal, to cheat on your wife, to disobey your parents, to worship something other than God. I can remind you of these things, but I can't tell you these things for the first time. That is what God does directly through your conscience.

Now, the outworking (or case law) of the moral law for the civil nation of Israel is different than it might be for you and I. For example, you probably don't have a lot of oxen that fall into pits and don't put fences on your roofs). These Ten Commandments and their case law are put into a long form in the book of **Deuteronomy** which is literally the

³ Taken from my book *Covenant Theology: A Reformed Baptist Primer*, 92.

“Second Law.” This is the Mosaic covenant treaty document written after Moses destroyed the first tablets at the foot of Mt. Sinai in the sin of the golden calf. On the whole, Deuteronomy deals with the Mosaic covenant.

But there is another book that deals mostly with the Levitical covenant. It is even named after it: [Leviticus](#). This is a very different kind of book that deals with very different kinds of rules and regulations for a very specific class of people. It talks about sacrifices, cleanliness, offerings, tithes, religious ceremonies, and other things. This is very different from the Ten Commandments. This is the covenant that Hebrews has in mind, because it is immediately apparent, reading the middle of this letter, that he isn't talking about not disobeying your parents, but about Jesus dying for sin.

In my view, the [Levitical covenant](#) (the priestly covenant) and the [Davidic covenant](#) (the kingly covenant) are guardian covenants to the Mosaic covenant (the prophetic covenant). The job of these guardians is to make sure that the people don't break the Law, but that if they do, they have a means by which they can be made right before God. As such, they are kind of like the role of the woman to the man in the Garden of Eden. They are [helpmates](#), of equal

status in terms of their covenant essence, but of different function in the role God gives them in people's lives. While all of the OT covenants are "lesser" to the greater "**new covenant**" (i.e. the covenant of grace) in Jeremiah and Hebrews, in mind in our chapter is clearly the Levitical covenant. Let's see how.

Levi in the Loins of Abraham

I'm starting in **Hebrews 7:9-10**, even though that really forms the ending of the previous section on Melchizedek. But I wanted to talk about it in the context we are doing today. These are some strange verses and have led to discussions that are probably not really the point of why it is brought up. "**One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.**" The question arises, what does he mean that **Levi was in the loins of Abraham?** This question is worth comment, but not really worth pursuing much here, as it is far afield of the purpose for which it is given.

The question has to do with **the origin of the human soul**. There are two main views on this. The first is called “**creationism**.” This is the idea that at the moment of conception, God **immediately** (i.e. its creation is not mediated) **creates a soul out of nothing** and ties it together with the human body. Most of the latter Early Church, medieval church, and Calvinist branch of the Reformation has taken this view. The other view is called “**traducionism**” (from the Latin *traducianus*, from *tradux* -- “a shoot for propagation”). This is the view that both the body and the soul are **inherited from one’s parents**. God only mediately gives us each a soul—he mediates the soul through the act of intercourse and fertilization. This view has been held by the likes of Tertullian and perhaps Augustine as well as quite a few Early Fathers in the East. Martin Luther was a big proponent of it, as have been later Reformed theologians such as Shedd, Reymond, Augustus Strong, and Millard Erickson. Shedd has a very long treatment of it and is quite verbose in his insistence, but it seems at the root that he wants to have a good way to explain how we can inherit Adam’s sinful nature, and traducianism does do the job quite well.

The question is interesting. Both views are within the pale of orthodoxy.⁴ Both have their advocates. But I do think that the question is mostly besides the point. One can easily take the language “One might even say” (literally “so to speak”) as meaning that this is purely a metaphor and thus is not intended to answer such a question. On the other hand, you could pretty easily come to the conclusion that Hebrews is quite seriously contemplating that Levi literally was there in Abraham, and it seems in some ways like if that isn’t true that the verses become totally pointless. However a person decides (if they even care to), this is one of those speculative questions we talked about a couple of weeks ago and needs to be kept in that context.

So what is the point? Hebrews is comparing the priestly line of Levi with the priesthood of Melchizedek. In the law, the Levites were to receive tithes (a tenth) from all the people, and this made them special among the people (though not superior). But here, Levi’s ancestor, the mighty

⁴ A third view is much closer to heresy. It is called *pre-existentism*. It teaches that the souls of people exist in heaven long before their bodies are conceived in the wombs of their mothers, and that God then brings the soul to earth to be joined with the baby’s body as he or she grows in the womb. (Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* [Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004], 484). This view is too close to eastern ideas of reincarnation for me.

Abraham, is paying tithes to Melchizedek. So that we will understand that this isn't about Abraham, but about the Hebrew priests, he tells us that if Levi's ancestor (who was greater than Levi) paid tithes because he was "inferior" to Melchizedek, then Levi himself is inferior. (I admit, he could have just said it like this, and because he didn't but instead uses this strange language of being in the loins of Abraham, this verse at least makes me lean towards traducianism).

This is really quite important, because it sets the stage for the remaining discussion. If Levi and his descendants the Levites are inferior to Melchizedek, what does that mean exactly regarding these guys and Jesus? Since Jesus is not from the order of Levi, but from Judah, and since his priesthood is not Levitical but Melchizedekian in origin, it means that **Christ's priesthood is above the Levitical priesthood**. This is close to a blasphemous thought to the Pharisees, yet it is there in their own Bible. It also solves the problem of how Christ can be both king and priest. Therefore, it is absolutely vital to understand.

From the rest of our text, Luther gives us five reasons why this makes Christ superior. "First, because He is another (Heb 7:12–14); secondly, because He is eternal (Heb

7:15–19); thirdly, because He is bound by an oath (Heb 7:20–22); fourthly, because He is the one and only (Heb 7:23–25); fifthly, because He is perfect (Heb 7:26–28).”⁵ I think this is basically correct and it puts on full display the great glory of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Perfection Not Attainable through the Levitical Priesthood and Covenant

Luther’s first point is that **Jesus is greater than another**. We’ve just seen how this is true simply because his priesthood is greater than Levi’s and because Jesus is not a Levite, but from the tribe of Judah. But Hebrews’ makes an observation here that Luther’s first point does not, and it is very important. “**Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?**”⁶ (Heb

⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 29: Lectures on Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 29 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 191.

⁶ Notice how it is now “Aaron” rather than “Levi.” This simply shows that Aaron is the recipient of the Levitical covenant.

7:11). The very fact that the sacrifices of the OT were repeated was enough to tell anyone that this priesthood and this covenant were not enough to make someone perfect.

It is bad enough that so many of the Jewish leaders gave the impression that they were morally superior to everyone else. It is worse that they looked at their own priesthood as the end-all of redemptive history. But they would not be the ones to usher in God's final plan of salvation. Indeed, they could not, because their persons and their priesthood was [imperfect](#). Something more was needed. That something was promised in Psalm 110 as a priest who would come after a different order, the order of Melchizedek instead of the order of Aaron.

Now, we could immediately see that the opposite of an imperfect Levitical priesthood and priest would be something astonishing and earth-shattering and Hebrews will go there in a moment. But first, it wants you to see that what Jesus brought about in this new priesthood was a change in the priesthood. The Jews who were speculating that the Messiah would somehow be attached to Levi (however they worked that out in their heads I don't know) were simply wrong. There had to be a new priesthood. But

this brought about a change in the law as well. This is also related to the imperfection of the Levitical covenant.

A little later it adds, “For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God” (7:18-19). Again, when people read “law” here, they often think Moses. But where has he been talking about the Ten Commandments? Nowhere. **This is not the law of Moses**, because he isn’t talking about that covenant here. This is about the laws of the Levites and the priests. It is through them that a person draws near to God, not through the Ten Commandments!

The Levitical covenant is the covenant that is being compared to Jesus’ new covenant. This is important because no where in the NT does it ever argue that moral law “changes.” Can you imagine someone arguing, for instance, that murder is now OK, because the sixth commandment was inferior and weak and useless and has been set aside? But it does regularly argue that Levitical priestly ceremonial law changes. The former can’t possibly change, because it is eternal, objective, and universal. But the latter most

certainly can. Now we can begin to see why. Something better was needed. Better laws, a better sacrifice, a better priest, a better priesthood, based on a better covenant.

An Eternal Priest

After explaining to us that Jesus was spoken to in the Psalm (**Heb 7:13**) and that he is not in fact a Levite (**13-14**), and that Moses said nothing whatsoever regarding those from Judah serving as priests (**14**), Hebrews brings us to Luther's **second point. Jesus is eternal.** Christians coming along centuries after the fact did not make up these things about Jesus. They get it from the Bible. We saw some of this last week, and what is amazing to me is how this is argued in Hebrews.

Jesus is once more said to be “**in the likeness of Melchizedek**” (**7:15**). But how so? How is Jesus like Melchizedek? It is **on the basis of how he became a priest.** For a Jew, there were certain biological requirements that had to take place, as we have seen (and as the verse says). They had to be from the tribe of Levi. They had to be physically spotless. They had to reach a certain age. Etc. But

Jesus receives his priesthood “by the power of an indestructible life” (16). In *this* way, he is like Melchizedek. *He is somehow eternal*, and seemingly, in a way that is not true of Abraham. This may mean that Melchizedek was the Angel of the LORD, and Jesus is “like” him in this respect. Indeed, Jesus was the Angel of the LORD as Jude puts it (Jude 5), but the Angel was not a human being, hence, he could be said to be “like” Jesus who is the God-man.

Whether Hebrews is making this point about Melchizedek or not, it is certainly curious how it puts all this, to say the least. Jesus is eternal. He has neither beginning of days nor end of life. “For it is witnessed of him, ‘You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek” (7:17), now *the fourth time* (cf. 5:6; 6:20; 7:3) he has cited this verse! And again, “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever’” (21), the fifth time he cites it. And again, “He holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever” (24). Obviously, this is a very, very important point. In fact, this may be the most concentrated section of re-quotes from the same passage in the entire Bible. Though he was put to death, he was resurrected and so lives now forever. This is

surely a high priest that is far superior to any OT Levite, and it is beyond sad that our Rabbi friend at the beginning of this sermon can't see it. But we are all blinded by our sin and hatred of God until God opens our eyes to see the glories of Christ.

Bound by an Oath

Luther's **third point** is that Jesus is better than Levi because he is **bound by an oath**. The Levitical ceremonies, regulations, and laws could not make anyone perfect and thus a better hope had to be introduced. But this hope was not a Johnny-Come-Lately. This is no Plan-B. It was exactly what God swore in the OT. **“And it was not without an oath” (Heb 7:20)**. As we have seen in the past, the oath *is* the covenant. When it says, **“The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind” (Ps 110:4)**, this is the swearing of a covenant.

This is a **priestly covenant** (**You are a priest forever...**). But it is not the Levitical covenant. **“For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath” (20)**. He does not mean that they were not given a covenant. He

means that most of the OT priests were not given a direct covenant via a direct oath swearing from God to each individual priest. Yes, God swore a covenant to Aaron. Yes, he swore a covenant (I believe, ratified the previous covenant) to Phinehas. But other than this, the Levites inherited the oath sworn to someone else. This is how it is “without an oath.” God didn’t come to them personally.

But this is not true of the Lord Jesus. “**But this one [Jesus] was made a priest with an oath by the one [God the Father] who said to him: ‘The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever’” (21). Back in the first verse of Psalm 110, we saw two divine beings: **Yahweh and Adonai**. Both are David’s Lord(!), both are living then (the Son of God was not “created”), but Adonai is somehow under Yahweh in this verse. This is a revelation of the Father and Son in the OT, and Jesus says as much. What **Psalm 110:4** thus says is that **the Father is swearing**, right then and there, that he will make his only begotten Son a priest forever. In other words, God comes to our High Priest personally and makes a covenant with him. And this is why it concludes that “**This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant**” (**Heb 7:22**).**

This oath is what was discussed at the end of ch. 6 where we learned that **it is impossible for God to lie** about such a thing. In fact, **he cannot lie about anything**. It is against his nature. It is impossible for God to lie because he is utterly holy. If God swears a covenant to Jesus, even if it is 1,000 years before he comes to earth, he is certain to make good on his promise. The Son had to wait a millennium for that oath to be confirmed, but it finally was, and because of it, and because of him and who he is, Jesus is the guarantor of a better covenant.

What is a “**guarantor?**” This is related to the oath. It is the word *egguos*. Though only used here in the NT, this word is common in ancient Greek as a person who would accept legal obligation for payments in a bond. Often times, **“The ἔγγυος may have to guarantee the pledge with his life.”**⁷ **“Do not forget all the kindness of your surety, for he has given his life for you. A sinner will overthrow the prosperity of his surety, and one who does not feel grateful will abandon his rescuer” (Sirach 29:15).** Sound familiar? We get a hint of this in the next section of our passage.

⁷ Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 329.

The Only One

Using the *egguos*, let's think about Luther's **fourth point**. Christ is the "**one and only**." The one and only what? Well, if he is like Melchizedek, then he isn't the only and only who lives forever, because Melchizedek in some way does that. Instead, he is **the only and only surety or guarantor**. **F. F. Bruce** makes the fascinating observation, "The old covenant had a mediator (cf. **Gal 3:19**) but no surety; there was no one to guarantee the fulfilment of the people's undertaking: 'All that Yahweh hath spoken will we do, and be obedient' (**Ex 24:7**)." This is a main difference between Jesus and Melchizedek. And it is a vital one, because if by chance Melchizedek is the Angel, it shows that something more was needed for the Son of God to do than simply be a Mediator of the old covenant.

Bruce continues, "But Jesus guarantees the perpetual fulfilment of the covenant which he mediates, on the manward side as well as on the Godward side. As the Son of God, he confirms God's eternal covenant with his people; as his people's representative, he satisfies its terms with perfect

acceptance in God's sight."⁸ It was Jesus's humanity that allowed him to die (Angels don't die). It was his death that allowed him to enter into the Most Holy Place. There is another word to help us think about this as it concerns the Surety.

Egguos is related to the word *eggizo* (vs. 19) which is the words "draw near" to God. Thus, the guarantor is "the one who ensures permanently near relations with God."⁹ Hebrews has told us that we may draw near to God with utmost confidence entering into the throne of grace (Heb 4:16). Later (9:12, 24), it will tell us that we can do this because Jesus has gone before us in death to this very same place to make the way permanently opened to us. But in doing that, it means that he has saved us (if we are granted the faith to believe). "Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (25).

Beloved, there is none other than Jesus who fulfills this task. A person only draws near to God through Jesus,

⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990).

⁹ David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 428, n. 662.

because only Jesus has gone into heaven before us. This happened through his sacrificial death, and it had to be done so that we might have life, because our sins mandate the punishment of death. So Jesus had to become a man in order to not only die but to be our surety, to ensure that our life and his own priesthood would be forever. There is a great mystery here, because Jesus' death was not only for us, but for himself. It involved his priesthood and the oath God swore to him that he would live forever, and it gave him the right to be raised from the dead. How so?

Jesus is Perfect

This leads to Luther's last point and the last point of our passage today. **Jesus is perfect**, and thus his priesthood and covenant are better. The reason that only Jesus could do this is because only Jesus is perfect, and his moral perfection was not confirmed as a man until he died, for it was in obedience that he went to his death. Unlike you and I who die because we are sinners, Jesus' death was done because he was perfect. That's how he can end up dying for sinners like us.

“For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens” (vs. 26). This one verse could be a sermon in itself for what it teaches us about our Savior. Jesus is holy. What does that mean? The next three words explain it. He is innocent. He did no wrong even though he was put to death. He was perfect. He was unstained. Again, he is morally perfect. He is separated from sinners. This word gets at “holiness” in a way that the other two do not. For, while it also says that he is perfect, it gives the idea that he is separate. To be holy is to be separate. This is what it means to be sanctified. You are “set apart” as holy.

“He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself” (27). Again, this could be a whole sermon, but Hebrews will deal with it more in later verses (“once for all” appears three more times in the letter). But our focus here is on his perfection. His death is once for all, meaning that it is one death that can cover every single sin ever committed, because it is the death of someone who has committed no sin. His perfection and his person makes this death of infinite

value in the eyes of God. There isn't a sin that has been committed that cannot be covered by the blood of Jesus, should a person trust in his death by faith alone.

Finally, “For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever” (28). The final verse of the chapter is a summary of all we have said. Jesus is better than Levi in all ways. His perfection overthrows the need for Levitical laws that appoint sinful priests who try to act as mediators between God and man. Surely, in his sinful condition, compared to our Lord Jesus, Levi sang the blues. But now that Christ has come and perfection has been attained by the God-man who was raised to life as vindication that death cannot hold him down, as have a better high priest.

Yes, Jesus is both a priest and a king. This is still thought to be impossible by Jews today. Yet, Hebrews and the OT answered this question millennia ago. Not in the way some wanted, through Levi. But by being in the line of Melchizedek by having an indestructible life and all of the things that go along with that for the Lord Jesus. And now, he has gone before us into heaven in order that we might

draw near to God. Let us set aside all cares and worries, all sins and things that entangle us. Let us set them aside and worship the only person who has done these things and become these things so that we might be saved. What a blessed message that is only told in the Bible. This is the good news of our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.