

Week 5 Devotionary™ Reading

A Daily Devotional on the Book of Hebrews

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An Anchor for the Soul

For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. – Hebrew 6:13-20 ESV

Living as a believer in this fallen world requires hope. Hope in something far greater to come. Hope in the reality of heaven and hope in God's promise to His children that He will one day make our eternity a reality. To emphasize the faithfulness of God and the reliability of His promise, the author used Abraham as a case in point. He reminds his readers that Abraham had been given a promise by God to bless and multiply him. But Abraham had to wait a long time for that promise to be fulfilled. It would be 25 years before Isaac was born, and all during that time, Abraham had to deal with the very real fact that he and his wife were not getting any younger and she was no less barren than when the promise was made. When the promise of God was finally fulfilled and Isaac was born, Abraham rejoiced in the faithfulness of God. He had come through for them. He had done the impossible and given Abraham and Sarah a son and heir, in spite of their old age and her barrenness. But not too many years later, God commanded Abraham to take his son, the very one he had so long waited for, and offer him up as a sacrifice. And Abraham obeyed. How? Why? Because he had faith in God. When Isaac asked his father, "where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" (Genesis 22:7 NLT), Abraham was able to confidently answer, "God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son" (Genesis 22:8 NLT). His answer did not necessarily mean he believed God was going to provide a replacement or stand-in for his son, but that he trusted God fully and completely in what He was asking him to do. Later on, in this same letter, in chapter 11, the Great Hall of Faith, the author will explain more fully what was going on in Abraham's mind at that moment.

It was by faith that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice when God was testing him. Abraham, who had received God's promises, was ready to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, even though God had told him, "Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted." Abraham reasoned that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again. And in a sense, Abraham did receive his son back from the dead. – Hebrews 11:17-19 NLT

Abraham trusted in the character of God. He knew he could trust God and that even if he had to go through with the sacrifice of Isaac, God was powerful enough to raise his son from the dead. God was going to fulfill His promise and Isaac was key to that happening. When Abraham

had shown God that he was willing to obey His command fully, God intervened. He sent an angel to stop Abraham from killing Isaac and provided a ram as a substitute sacrifice. Then God said to Abraham, “Because you have obeyed me and have not withheld even your son, your only son, I swear by my own name that I will certainly bless you. I will multiply your descendants beyond number, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will conquer the cities of their enemies. And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—all because you have obeyed me” (Genesis 22:16-18 NLT). In swearing by His own name, God was emphasizing that His promises were based on His very nature or character. He is trustworthy, faithful, unchanging, powerful, and loving. He can be trusted. “God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?” (Numbers 23:19 NLT). “If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny who he is.” (2 Timothy 2:13 NLT).

God had made a promise and an oath. These two unchangeable things were the basis of Abraham’s hope. He kept waiting and relying upon the promise of God that had been sealed with the oath of God. He knew His God could be trusted to fulfill all that He had promised. And that is the author’s message to us. Because it is impossible for God to lie, “we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls.” (Hebrews 6:18-19 NLT). We have been promised eternal life through Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. We have placed our hope and faith in Him as the means by which we can inherit eternal life. But we must maintain our confidence even in times of testing. We must keep hoping in the promise made to us by God through His Son. Periods of spiritual barrenness should not defeat us. Delays as to His return should not demoralize us. God has promised and He can be trusted, because He does not lie. We have a firm anchor for our souls, even in the storms of life. Jesus, our high priest, has gone on ahead of us and He intercedes for us with God the Father on a daily basis. He is the anchor to which our souls must hold firm, no matter what happens around us. He not only saved us, He is sanctifying us, and one day He will return to redeem and glorify us.

This passage always brings to mind the words of an old hymn. It sums up well the message found in this passage.

In times like these you need a Savior
 In times like these you need an anchor;
 Be very sure, be very sure
 Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!
 This Rock is Jesus, Yes, He's the One;
 This Rock is Jesus, the only One!
 Be very sure, be very sure
 Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!

King of Righteousness and Peace

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever. See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. 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.
– Hebrews 7:1-10 ESV

The author continues his comparison between Jesus and Melchizedek, begun all the way back in chapter two when he declared Jesus as “a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God” (Hebrews 2:17 ESV). Jesus was and is a high priest, but He was not a descendant of Aaron, the original high priest appointed by God. Jesus’ priesthood was not of an earthly order. His was a divine priesthood, commissioned by God. He was the Savior of the world, the Messiah sent from God to act as King and ushering in a new Kingdom, but also as priest, offering up a better sacrifice for the sins of men. His priesthood was not based on an earthly, human genealogy, but a heavenly one. On one of the many occasions when Jesus found Himself confronted by the Pharisees, He asked them, “What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?” (Matthew 22:42 NLT). They replied, “He is the son of David” (Matthew 22:42 NLT). Then quoting from Psalm 110, Jesus replies, “Then why does David, speaking under the inspiration of the Spirit, call the Messiah ‘my Lord’? For David said, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit in the place of honor at my right hand until I humble your enemies beneath your feet.’ Since David called the Messiah ‘my Lord,’ how can the Messiah be his son?” (Matthew 22:43-45 NLT). His point was that He was the Son of God. Yes, He was an earthly descendant of David, but His kingship was of a different sort than that of David. He was to be the King of kings and the Lord of lords. And in that very same Psalm of David, it reads:

*The LORD said to my Lord,
“Sit in the place of honor at my right hand
until I humble your enemies,
making them a footstool under your feet.”*

*The LORD will extend your powerful kingdom from Jerusalem;
you will rule over your enemies.
When you go to war,*

*your people will serve you willingly.
You are arrayed in holy garments,
and your strength will be renewed each day like the morning dew.*

*The LORD has taken an oath and will not break his vow:
“You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.” – Psalm 110:1-4 NLT*

This passage was not referring to David, but to the coming Messiah. It was a prophecy concerning Jesus, outlining His God-ordained role as both king and priest. The author used the story of Abraham and Melchizedek to prove the superiority of Jesus as both king and priest. In the story, Melchizedek blessed Abraham and Abraham offered a tenth of all his spoils in return. Melchizedek was a king and a priest, and as such, he was Abraham's superior. The real point seems to be that the descendants of Abraham would eventually offer tithes to God through the Levites, their own brothers. That's why the author writes, "those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham" (Hebrews 7:5 ESV). When Abraham offered his tithe to Melchizedek, the tribe of Levi did not yet exist. So, in a sense, the author says, Levi and his sons offered a tithe to Melchizedek through their forefather, Abraham. The whole issue here is one of superiority. Jesus, as a high priest of the order of Melchizedek, is superior to any earthly high priest. Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek, the inferior was blessed by the superior. And we are blessed by Jesus. We are blessed by the King of peace and righteousness. And it is interesting to note that Melchizedek blessed Abraham for no apparent reason. If you read the story in Genesis 14, it says that the kings of Shinar, Ellasar, Elam and Goiim made war with the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela. Melchizedek, the king of Salem, is not even mentioned. He had no dog in this hunt. When the battle took place "the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions and went their way" (Genesis 14:11-12 ESV). Abraham stepped in, defeated the kings of Shinar, Ellasar, Elam and Goiim, rescuing Lot and taking a great deal of plunder. And that's when Melchizedek shows up on the scene. His country of Salem had not been attacked and yet he appears to Abraham and blesses him. Abraham had not done anything to deserve Melchizedek's blessing. He had not rescued any of his citizens. He had not returned any of Melchizedek's spoil. The king of righteousness and peace blessed Abraham.

Those of us who are in Christ, have been blessed by the King. And that blessing had nothing to do with any merit on our part. We have done nothing to earn His blessing. When Melchizedek blessed Abraham, he said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who has defeated your enemies for you" (Genesis 14:19-20 NLT). And the blessing we have received is similar. We have been given victory over sin and death by God through the sacrificial death of His Son. We have been blessed by God through the Son of God.

Even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him. And God designated him to be a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek. – Hebrews 5:8-10 NLT

We have been given perfect righteousness through Christ. And we now enjoy peace with God, having been made right in His eyes because of the substitutionary death of His Son.

A Better Hope

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? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

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. And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, 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.'" This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. – Hebrews 7:11-22 ESV

A better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. What better summary statement could there be for this section of Hebrews? The author has been establishing the high priesthood of Jesus and setting up his defense of the superior nature of Jesus' sacrifice. There was no need for the Jews in his audience to fall back on or revert back to their old Judaic rituals or customs. He has already warned them about drifting away and neglecting such a great salvation found in Jesus. He has reminded them that Jesus "had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17 ESV). With His incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, Jesus has done something new, better, more effective, and totally permanent when it comes to man's damaged relationship with God. As Paul stated in his letter to the Romans, "For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God" (Romans 6:10 ESV). Peter fully concurred with Paul when he wrote, "Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18 NLT).

The author's whole point is that God sent Jesus because the law of Moses, the Levitical priesthood and the sacrificial system were never meant to be a permanent solution to man's sin problem. The author will elaborate on this fact in chapter ten.

The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect

cleansing for those who came to worship. If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time, and their feelings of guilt would have disappeared. – Hebrews 10:1-2 NLT

He will even take it one step further: “But instead, those sacrifices actually reminded them of their sins year after year. For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:3-4 NLT). Which is why he infers that the high priesthood of Jesus would never have been necessary if “perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood” (Hebrews 7:11 ESV). If men could have been made right (justified) with God through the law, there would have been no need for Jesus to come to earth. But He did, because the law could convict, but it couldn’t save. It was temporary, a shadow of something greater to come. Jesus became our permanent high priest. He cannot die, therefore His priesthood has no end. The author says that the old system of the law has been “set aside.” The Greek word he used is *athetēsis* and it means “to annul, abolish, reject.” This word has powerful implications and he uses it for a reason. He wants his readers to know that there is no reason whatsoever for them to fall back to their old way of life as Jews, because “a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect)” (Hebrews 7:18-19 ESV).

They now have a “better hope” (Hebrews 7:19 ESV). Jesus, the new and improved high priest, provides a way for sinful man to made right with and draw near to God. And when God made His Son our high priest, He swore an oath that His priesthood would last forever. Which makes Jesus “the guarantor of a better covenant” (Hebrews 7:22 ESV). Aaron, the original high priest, eventually died. Every Levite who served as a priest in the tabernacle of God also died. And even while they were alive, their sacrifices were temporary at best. Again, the author will elaborate on this issue in chapter ten.

Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God’s right hand. – Hebrews 10:11-12 NLT

He is the better high priest who offered a better sacrifice and provides us with a better hope. His sacrifice will never have to be repeated. His death left God the Father fully propitiated or satisfied. Those who are in Christ have had their sins forgiven completely and permanently. They are in the right with God. There is nothing more they need to do to earn God’s favor or remain in His good graces. Which is why the author calls it “such a great salvation.”

Once for All

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. 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. For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. 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. 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 7:23-28 ESV

The sacrificial systems of the Jews (and the priests who administered it) was designed to be temporary or impermanent, not only in its duration, but in its efficaciousness. As the author clarifies in chapter ten, “The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but **they were never able to provide perfect cleansing** for those who came to worship” (Hebrews 10:1 NLT). Why? “For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4 NLT). He goes on to say that God never really wanted and was never pleased or satisfied by the sacrifices that consisted of the blood of bulls and goats – even though they were required by the law of Moses (Hebrews 10:12). They were intended to be a foreshadowing of something far greater to come. The blood offerings were meant to demonstrate the costliness of sin. Which is why the author says, “under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22 ESV).

Even the priests who ministered under the old covenant, the covenant of law, were impermanent, hampered by the reality of their own mortality. And as long as they lived, they had to continually offer sacrifices for their own sins before they could come into God’s presence on behalf of the people. Their own susceptibility to sin and vulnerability to death made them less-than-perfect representatives for the people. They couldn’t stop sinning and they couldn’t keep from dying. And eventually, with the destruction of the Jerusalem and the captivity of the people in Babylon, the temple would become non-existent and the priesthood, non-essential.

So back to chapter seven. Jesus is a better high priest. And while there were many priests under the old covenant, there was only one necessary under the new. Jesus was enough. He was sufficient. And the sacrifice He made was a one-time sacrifice, never needing to be repeated. His offering, the spilling of His own blood, completely appeased or propitiated the requirements of a holy God. “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” (Hebrews 7:27 ESV). His sacrifice was efficacious or effective. It

accomplished exactly what was intended, paying the penalty for man's sin and securing a verdict of "not guilty" from the lips of the Judge of the universe.

Jesus did not need to offer a sacrifice on His own behalf, because He was without sin. And the sacrifice He made was His own life. He was both the priest and the offering. He gave His life so that we might live and never die. Peter tells us, "Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18 NLT). The bulls, goats and lambs that were sacrificed on behalf of the people of Israel died permanent deaths. But Jesus died only to be raised again to life by the power of the Spirit of God. Paul would remind us, "Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault" (Colossians 1:22 NLT). Now that's a better high priest. He has done what no other priest before Him had ever done. He has reconciled sinful men to a righteous, holy God. He made fellowship with a sinless God possible for sinful people. No more trying to earn our way into God's good graces. No more striving to keep the law in an attempt to keep God satisfied. "Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him." (Hebrews 7:25 NLT). But there's the rub. We have to come to God *through* Him. It has to be based on His efforts, not our own. Salvation is the result of the work of Christ, not our human effort. As Jesus told Thomas, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6 NLT). Jesus is our high priest. He has offered Himself as the perfect, sinless sacrifice. He has paid the debt we owed. And as John so clearly reminds us, "We also know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know the true God. We are in union with the one who is true, his Son Jesus the Messiah, who is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20 ISV). We need no other priest. God requires no other sacrifice. There is no debt still owed. Jesus has taken care of our sin problem, once for all.