

Hebrews 6 Article

Hebrews is the only book in the NT that calls Jesus the “high priest.” The author’s comparison of the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant continues. This would have been hard for the Jewish people to accept and understand. Jesus was not of the priestly tribe of Levi. However, Jesus is called “a priest” in 1:3; 2:17, 18; 3:1. In the OT the Messiah is referred to as priest in only two contexts: Ps. 110 and Zech. 4, both of which have both royal and priestly aspects.¹

Verse 14 does not say, “Let us hold fast our salvation.” The word “profession” here is really “confession—to say the same thing” (3:1; 10:23; 11:13). “Confession” has to do with the believer’s testimony of his faith in Christ and his faithfulness to live for Christ and gain the promised blessing. Read 10:34–35. The Jews who wandered in the wilderness had lost their confession even though they were still under the cloud and redeemed from Egypt. What a poor testimony they were of the power of God! God brought them out, but they would not trust Him to bring them in! Their unbelief had robbed them of God’s blessing.²

Christ came from Judah, the kingly tribe, and not from Levi, the priestly tribe. Melchizedek suddenly appears in Gen. 14 and then drops out of the story; there is no listing of his beginning or ending. Thus, he is compared to Christ’s eternal Sonship, for He too is “without beginning and ending.” Aaron died and had to be replaced; Christ will never die—His priesthood is forever. Aaron was priest over an earthly household, while Christ is Priest over a heavenly people.³

The Jews might look down upon Christ and question His deity because of the suffering He endured. These sufferings, however, are the very mark of His deity. God was preparing His Son to be the sympathetic High Priest of His people. Verse 7 refers to His prayers in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36–46). Note that Christ did not pray to be saved “from death” but “out of death.” He did not pray for the Father to rescue Him from the cross, but to raise Him from the tomb. And this prayer was answered. Certainly Christ was willing and ready to face the cross and to drink of the cup God had poured for Him (John 12:23–34).⁴

But the once-for-all sacrifice of Calvary decisively ended the Jewish priesthood, demonstrating that now no more priests or animal sacrifices are required. It is a pity that in the rubrics of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer the word ‘priest’ was kept as an Anglicization of the Greek ‘presbuteros’. Much confusion would have been saved, and the ways of church history changed, if they had simply translated it as ‘presbyter’.

With the Reformation there was a rediscovery of the ‘priesthood of all believers’, echoing Peter’s bold assertion in 1 Peter 2:9—‘you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood’. The church IS, not HAS, a priesthood, but we do have a unique high priest now at God’s right hand, bringing confidence and challenge to his people.⁵

¹ Utley, R. J. (1999). *Vol. Volume 10: The Superiority of the New Covenant: Hebrews*. Study Guide Commentary Series (48). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

^{2 3 4} Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe’s expository outlines on the New Testament* (686, 688, 689). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

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⁵ Hacking, P. H. (2006). *Opening up Hebrews*. Opening Up Commentary (29–30). Leominster: Day One Publications.