Hebrews 7:11-12 Commentary

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DOCTRINE	DUTY
DATE WRITTEN: ca. 64-68AD	

See ESV Study Bible "Introduction to Hebrews"
(See also MacArthur's Introduction to Hebrews)

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Hebrews 7:11 Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? (NASB: Lockman)

Greek: Ei men oun teleiosis dia tes Leuitikes hierosunes en. (3SIAI) o laos gar ep' autes nenomothetetai. (3SRPI) tis eti chreia kata ten taxin Melchisedek heteron anistasthai (PMN) hierea kai ou kata ten taxin Aaron legesthai? (PPN)

Amplified: Now if perfection (a perfect fellowship between God and the worshiper) had been attainable by the Levitical priesthood—for under it the people were given the Law—why was it further necessary that there should arise another and different kind of Priest, one after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one appointed after the order and rank of Aaron? (Amplified Bible - Lockman)

KJV: If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?

NLT: And finally, if the priesthood of Levi could have achieved God's purposes—and it was that priesthood on which the law was based—why did God need to send a different priest from the line of Melchizedek, instead of from the line of Levi and Aaron? (NLT - Tyndale House)

Wuest: If indeed, therefore, completeness were through the Levitical priesthood, for the people upon its basis had the law laid down [to them], what need after that should there be of a priest of a different kind arising according to the order of Melchisedec and not being called after the order of Aaron? For there being a transfer of the priesthood [to another order], of necessity also of the law there is a transfer, for He concerning whom these things are being spoken pertained to a different kind of a tribe from which no one gave attendance at the altar. (Eerdmans)

Young's Literal: If indeed, then, perfection were through the Levitical priesthood--for the people under it had received law--what further need, according to the order of Melchisedek, for another priest to arise, and not to be called according to the order of Aaron?

NOW IF PERFECTION WAS THROUGH THE LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD: ei men oun teleiosis dia tes leuitikes hierosunes en (3SIAI):

- Heb 7:18,19; 8:7,10-13; 10:1-4; Galatians 2:21; 4:3,9; Colossians 2:10-17

Ray Stedman explains that "The argument of Hebrews 7:11-19 constitutes a bold, and even radical, declaration by the writer. This section asserts unequivocally that the death and resurrection of Jesus has introduced a new and permanent priesthood that brings the Levitical priesthood to an end and, with it, the demise of the law of Moses. It is important to note in Hebrews 7:11-12 that the law was originally given to support the priesthood, not the other way around. The priesthood and the tabernacle with its sacrifices were the means God employed to render the sinful people acceptable to himself. They constituted the shadow of Jesus in the Old Testament. Then the law was given with its sharp demands to awaken the people to their true condition so that they might avail themselves of the sacrifices. This agrees fully with Paul's state ment in Romans 5:20 and Galatians 3:19-23 that the law was a teacher to lead to Christ (represented in Israel by the tabernacle and its priesthood). To suggest that either of these venerable institutions (the priesthood and the law) were inadequate and needed change was to assault Judaism in its most sacred and revered

precincts. But that this was the teaching of Christians from the beginning is seen in the savage charges hurled at Stephen, and later Paul, when they engaged certain Jewish leaders in religious dialog. See, for instance, Acts 6:14, where Stephen's opponents testified, "We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place [the temple] and change the customs Moses handed down to us." (Hebrews 7:11-19 Aaronic Priesthood and Law Replaced)

Perfection - in context means to put someone in the position in which he can come before God.

Perfection (5050)(**teleiosis** from **teleioo** = to complete) is used only in Luke 1:45 and Heb 7:11 and refers to (the act) completion, i.e. (of prophecy) verification, thus perfection or performance. It can mean to put someone in the position in which he can come before God.

Friberg on **teleiosis** - as designating an action; (1) as actualization of a promise fulfillment, accomplishment (Lk 1.45); (2) as a completion of spiritual preparation perfection (Heb 7.11)

An institution is **perfect** or complete when it effects the purpose for which it was instituted, and produces a result that corresponds to the idea of it. The purpose of the priesthood was to remove the obstacle, sin, which kept man from God, and make a way of access for man to God. The Levitical priesthood could do that in a typical but not in an actual (perfect) way. The priesthood and the sacrifices were an index finger pointing to the Messiah and His substitutionary death on the Cross.

The purpose of the priesthood was to reconcile men to God through sacrificing for their sins. But this priesthood could only picture the actual reconciliation, because it could only typify cleansing of sin. The OT system was not able to take away sin. It was therefore imperfect. The Levitical priesthood failed to give men a perfectly adequate relation to God and failed to give men access to God, which is the goal for men who are created in God's image.

Spurgeon - The priesthood of Aaron and his successors was intended to be temporary. God did not confirm the priests of old in their offices, because He held in reserve the right to set them aside when He pleased. He from the first intended that their functions should be abolished when the fullness of time should come for another and better priest to take their place. They were candles for the darkness, but the sun was to rise, and then they would not be needed. They were pictorial representations, but when the substance was come they would not be required. He allowed their priesthood to be one of imperfect men, because He intended by-and-by to supersede it by a perfect and enduring priesthood; hence no oath of God attended the ordination of the sons of Aaron.

FOR ON THE BASIS OF IT THE PEOPLE RECEIVED THE LAW: o laos gar ep aute nenomotheteto

John MacArthur - What the old economy could not do, Christ did. The old priesthood had its place in God's plan. But it was inferior and ineffective. It only pictured perfection. Similarly, the law had its place in God's plan. It represented God's truth and righteousness. It demanded perfection. For on the basis of it [that is, perfection] the people received the Law. But neither the sacrifice that pictured it nor the law that demanded it could provide perfection. Perfection is provided only in Jesus Christ.

Received the law (3549) (**nomotheteo** from **nómos** = law + **títhemi** = to put, set) literally means the law has been laid down and thus means established as law.

The Law had profound limitations. It could not atone for sin. The Levitical sacrifices covered over sin, but they did not remove it. The Law marvelously served to enhance one's awareness of sin. Paul tells us in Ro 7:7, 8 that the Law's command not to covet made him aware that all he did was covet. The Law was a teacher Gal3:24 The law was powerless… in that it was weakened by the sinful nature… the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Ro 8:3, 7).

F. F. Bruce - The whole apparatus of worship associated with sacrifice and ritual and priesthood was calculated rather to keep men at a distance from God than to bring them near.

Clearly, the Old Covenant had profound limitations as to making atonement, imparting life, clearing the conscience, and providing access.

WHAT FURTHER NEED WAS THERE FOR ANOTHER PRIEST TO ARISE ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK AND NOT BE DESIGNATED ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF AARON: tis eti chreia heteron anistasthai hierea kata ten taxin melchisedek heteron anistasthai hierea kai ou kata ten taxin aaron legesthai (PPN):

- Heb 7:15,17,21; 5:6,10; 6:20

Further (eti) speaks of an extension of time up to and beyond an expected point. If there was perfection through the Levitical priesthood and if the old sacrifices had been able to bring a person into God's presence, they would have ceased. They would have fulfilled their purpose.

The OT saints lacked the total sense of freedom from the consciousness of their sin. They came short of that full privilege, because the sacrifices of that covenant could not completely remove their sin and bring them to God. Because their sins were not finally cleansed, their consciences could not be wholly cleansed, could not be freed. The New Covenant gives greater understanding of full forgiveness, freedom from guilt, and a peaceful conscience.

Another - Not merely another, but a different kind of priest.

This truth was extremely important for Jews to hear. It was important for believing Jews as assurance that they were now totally secure in Jesus Christ, that their break with Judaism and its rituals and repeated sacrifices was justified. They had no reason to look back longingly at the forms and ceremonies and symbols-as meaningful and significant as these once were. They no longer needed a picture of salvation, for they had the reality of the Savior. But in the argument of Heb 7, the truth is even more important for Jews who had not yet come all the way to Christ. It shows them that the Levitical priesthood could not bring men to perfection, to God. It was never intended to do so. As long as they held onto the priestly ceremonies & relied on animal sacrifices, they would never be free of sin *& they would never have access to God.

Hebrews 7:12 For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. (NASB: Lockman)

> **Greek**: metatithemenes (PPPFSG) gar tes ierosunes ex anagkes kai nomou metathesis ginetai. (3SPMI)
>
> **Amplified**: For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is of necessity an alteration of the law [concerning the priesthood] as well. (Amplified Bible - Lockman)
>
> **KJV**: For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.
>
> **NLT**: And when the priesthood is changed, the law must also be changed to permit it. (NLT - Tyndale House)
>
> **Young's Literal**: for the priesthood being changed, of necessity also, of the law a change doth come,
>
> **Wuest**: For there being a transfer of the priesthood [to another order], of necessity also of the law there is a transfer, (13 for He concerning whom these things are being spoken pertained to a different kind of a tribe from which no one gave attendance at the altar.) (Eerdmans)

FOR WHEN THE PRIESTHOOD IS CHANGED OF NECESSITY THERE TAKES PLACE A CHANGE OF LAW ALSO: metatithemenes (PPPFSG) gar tes hierosunes ex anagkes kai nomou metathesis ginetai (3SPMI):

- Isaiah 66:21; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 16:61; Acts 6:13,14)

When the priesthood is changed - transferred from the Levitical (Law) system of priesthood to that of the order of Melchizedek in Christ. God's choice of this new type of priesthood for His Son, left the Levitical line off to one side, forever discounted, passed by "the order of Aaron".

Christianity, in a sense, comes from Judaism. But Christianity is not merely enhanced Judaism; it replaces Judaism. For a Jewish convert, his faith is changed from Judaism to Christianity. The new priesthood, after the order of Melchizedek, was not added to Aaron's, but replaced it.

Spurgeon - The law of the priesthood alters since the person of the priest, the character of the priest, and the very office of the priest had altered too.

Changed (3331) (**metathesis** from **metatithemi** = transfer from **meta** = implying change + **tithemi** = put) is literally, the act of transferring from one place to another and so the removal or taking up or away. And so it can describe a transfer from one place to another, as for example the translation of a person to heaven...

> By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his **being taken up** he was pleasing to God. (see **note** Hebrews 11:5).

Hebrews 12:27 uses **metathesis** with the idea of removal.

> And this expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

Figuratively, **metathesis** means to transpose or put one thing in the place of another. It can mean a change of things instituted or established, such as a changeover from the Levitical priesthood

> For when the priesthood is **changed**, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. (**Hebrews 7:12**)

Transliterated it gives us the English word **metathesis** which is defined as the transposition of a letter of a word.

Vincent comments on the meaning of **metathesis** here in Hebrews 7:12 writing that it refers to "A change. A transfer to a new basis. Only in Hebrews. See **notes Hebrews 11:5**; **Hebrews 12:27**. The inferiority of the Levitical priesthood is inferred from the fact that another priesthood was promised. If perfection was possible at all under the Mosaic economy, it must come through the Levitical priesthood, since that priesthood was, in a sense, the basis of the law. The whole legal system centered in it. The fundamental idea of the law was that of a people united with God. Sin, the obstacle to this ideal union, was dealt with through the priesthood. If the law failed to effect complete fellowship with God, the priesthood was shown to be a failure, and must be abolished; and the change of the priesthood involved the abolition of the entire legal system.

Wuest explains the transfer to a new basis noting that "The priesthood after the order of Melchizedek was put in the place of the priesthood after the order of Aaron. The blood of animals could not pay for sin, but the blood of Messiah could. Thus, the New Covenant was substituted for the Old Covenant, Jesus' blood, the reality, for animal blood, the type. But that could only be done by changing the law governing the priesthood. Thus, if a transfer to a new and different order of priesthood was to be effected, it must be by reason of a transfer to a new basis. The law governing the priesthood as found in the Mosaic economy must be abrogated in favor of another which would provide for an order of priesthood that would function successfully in the very thing in which the Aaronic priesthood failed. (**Hebrews Commentary online**)

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However note the abolition was not so much the 10 Commandments (in fact those standards remained unchanged in the New Covenant where the Law was now written on man's heart) but the abolition was of the ceremonial law, the Aaronic priesthood (now all believers are priests!) and system of sacrifices (the once for all sacrifice has been made - Jn 19:30), the required rituals and ceremonies of the Old Covenant, has been set aside (Jn 19:30, cp Jesus' words "Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill." Mt 5:17). However this setting this aside was extremely difficult for many Jews and the reasons for doing so were difficult for them to fully grasp. Thus the need for the epistle to the Hebrews!

Some believing Jews not only insisted on maintaining their own Jewish practices, but on making them mandatory for everyone who wanted to become a Christian (e.g., Paul attacked these teachings in Galatians - Gal 2:12, 6:12-13, 5:2, 6, 11-14). These people were called Judaizers, and they were a plague to the early church for many years. They told prospective believers, and even non-Jewish Christians, that they needed to be circumcised and have sacrifices made in the Temple and follow all the prescribed Jewish laws and rituals.

At Sinai the people were fenced off at the foot of the mountain, so they could not approach God. In the Tabernacle and in the Temple the veil stood between them and God's presence in the Holy of Holies. The Old Covenant not only did not bring men into God's presence, it forbade them from trying to get there. Without full cleansing, complete forgiveness of sins, they were not qualified. But Jesus, so to speak, came down the mountain to the people and tore down the veil.

So the whole Judaistic system was changed-not just changed, but exchanged-for a new order, a new Priest, a new sacrifice, an entirely New Covenant. This is why he had exhorted them to leave behind the elementary teachings about the Christ & to be borne along to maturity in Heb 6:1-3. Remember the idea there of "leave" meant to completely lay these old teachings aside.