

Jesus' High Priesthood and His Supreme Sacrifice in the book of Hebrews 6-10 (The Seventh Lesson)

The need of priesthood (Ex: 19): God chose Israel as His own not because of any of their merits but in his mercy and love He chose them and He wanted them to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation where anyone can approach God freely. But their sin (due to Adam's fall) prevented this and separated them from God and a sinful person is not worthy to approach a perfect God and so He established Aaron's descendants from the tribe of Levi as priests to be their mediators for God's forgiveness. He set up the system of sacrifices to help the people approach him. He promised to forgive their sins if they would offer certain sacrifices. Initially, the patriarchs like Abraham were priests of the house or clan and made sacrifices for the family.

Aaron and Aaronic Priesthood: When the Israelites left Egypt, the descendants of Aaron were chosen to serve as priests for the nation. He taught them how to worship him (Ex 28 -29). To do so, He needed ministers to oversee the operations of the tabernacle and to help the people maintain their relationship with God. These men were called Priests and Levites and they could only be the members of tribe of Levi. Aaron was the first high priest of Israel. Priests had more responsibilities than Levites. As high priest, Aaron was in-charge of all the priests and Levites. The priests performed daily sacrifices, maintained the tabernacle and counseled the people on how to follow God. They were the people's representatives before God and thus were required to live worthy of their office. All the priests had to belong to the tribe of Levi, but not all the Levites were priests. The Levites were to be 25 years old before entering the service. They probably received five years on the job training before being admitted to full service at age 30.

Duties of priests: Priests and Levites had different jobs in and around the temple. Priests were authorized to perform the sacrifices. Levites were set apart to help the priests. They did the work of elders, deacons, custodians, assistants, musicians, moving men and repairmen. Priests and Levites were supported by Israel's tithes and by revenues from certain cities that had been given to them. Worship in the temple could not have taken place without the combined efforts of the priests and Levites. The priests and Levites served much the same function as our ministers today. Their duties included - teaching the people about God, setting an example of godly living, caring for the sanctuary and its workers and distributing the offerings.

Ordination ceremony (Leviticus 8-9): Aaron and his descendants could only become priests although all the men from the tribe of Levi were dedicated for God's service. They alone had the honor and responsibility of performing the sacrifices. These priests had to cleanse and dedicate themselves before they could help the people do the same. The ceremony described in Leviticus 8-9 was their ordination ceremony. Aaron and his sons

were washed with water, clothed with special garments, anointed with oil. They placed their hands on a young bull as it was killed and on two rams as they were killed

Uniforms (Ex 39:1-21): The priests wore a uniform to the tabernacle each day. Some of the pieces of the uniform were not only beautiful but also significant. Two parts of the high priest's uniform were the ephod and breast piece. The ephod look like a vest and was worn over the outer clothing. The breast piece was fitted to the ephod. The breast piece was made of colored linens about nine inches square. On its front were attached 12 precious stones, each inscribed with the name of a tribe of Israel. This symbolized how the high priest represented all the people before God. The breast piece also contained pockets that held two stones or plates called the *Urim* and *Thummim*. The high priest could determine God's will for the nation by consulting the Urim and Thummim (Ex 28:30).

Urim and Thummim: The high priest kept the Urim and the Thummim in a pouch attached to his breast piece. Some scholars think the Urim may have been the no answer and the Thummim the yes answer. After a time of prayer for guidance, the priest would shake one of the stones out of the pouch and God would cause the proper one to fall out. Another view is that the Urim and the Thummim were small flat objects, each with a yes side and no side. The priest spilled both from his pouch. If both landed on their yes sides, God's answer was positive. Two no sides were negative. A Yes and a No meant no reply.

Significance of the high priest: The high priest had special duties that no other priest had. He alone can enter the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle on the yearly Day of Atonement to atone for the sins of the nation. Therefore he was in-charge of all other priests. (The high priest was a picture of Jesus Christ who is our high priest in Hebrews 7:26-28).

Priests in the NT (Luke 1:5): A Jewish priest was a minister of God who worked at the temple managing its upkeep, teaching the people the Scriptures, and directing the worship services. At this time, there were about 20000 priests throughout the country - far too many to minister in the temple at one time. Therefore the priests were divided into 24 separate groups of about 1000 each, according to David's directions (1Chronicles 24:3-19). Zechariah was a member of the Abijah division. Each morning a priest was to enter the Holy Place in the temple and burn incense. Lots were cast to decide who would enter the sacred room. One day the lot fell to Zechariah

Jesus as Priest: Old Testament priests served as mediators between humans and God. It was the priests who offered sacrifices on behalf of the people. There is a tremendous contrast between the priesthood of the OT and the NT. Aaron and his descendants were the only ones who could carry out the duties of the priests and approach God's dwelling place. Now that Christ is our high priest, our intermediary with God, anyone who follows him is also called a priest. Now all Christians may come into God's presence without fear because Jesus encourages his followers to do so. Jesus is our Mediator and our High Priest: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

Hebrews 4–10 details how Jesus is our ultimate High Priest and how His priesthood is far superior to the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament. The writer of Hebrews also explains how the Old Testament system of priests served to foreshadow the ministry of Jesus. The Levitical priesthood of Aaron’s line was not intended to continue forever. Jesus’ priesthood is eternal.

Hebrews 4:14–16 says, “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” With Jesus as our High Priest, we can go before God boldly, knowing that Jesus has true compassion on us and that, through Him, we will experience the grace and mercy of God (see also Hebrews 10:19–23).

Hebrews 7 shows how Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek was both a priest and the “king of Salem” who blessed Abraham (Hebrews 7:2; Genesis 14:18). Likewise, Jesus is not just a “priest forever,” but also a king. Jesus’ high priestly role was superior to that of any priest of Levi because the Messiah was a priest of a higher order. If the Jewish priests and their laws had been able to save people, why would God need to send Christ as a priest, who came not from the priestly tribe of Levi but from the tribe of Judah? The animal sacrifices had to be repeated and they offered only temporary forgiveness. Under the new covenant, the Levitical priesthood was cancelled in favor of Christ’ role as high priest.

Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer: John 17 contains the longest recorded prayer of Jesus in any of the Gospels. Jesus prays this after He finishes His final instructions to the disciples and before He is betrayed, arrested, and crucified. First, Jesus prays for Himself, then He prays for His disciples, and He closes the prayer by praying for all believers. This intercessory prayer is commonly called Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer. When Jesus came, He offered His life as the ultimate sacrifice that would not only cover the sins of the people but completely cleanse His people and save them. Jesus is the ultimate High Priest, and His intercession for us in John 17 is a wonderful, multilayered example of His love.

As Jesus begins His High Priestly Prayer, He reveals that His purpose in coming to earth was to glorify the Father by giving eternal life to those who believe in Him. Although Jesus is God and was with the Father before the world began (John 17:5), He humbled Himself and came to earth as a man so people would know “the only true God, and Jesus Christ” whom He sent (John 17:3). Now, the hour had come when Jesus’ work on earth would be finished (John 17:1), and Jesus asks the Father to glorify Him as He prepared to finish the work that would “give eternal life” to those who believe in Him (John 17:2).

Jesus continues His High Priestly Prayer by praying for His disciples. The eleven who remained with Him had accepted Jesus’ words, knew that He is God, and believed that the

Father sent Him (John 17:8). Jesus talks about the Father giving the disciples to Him and the disciples belonging to the Father; Jesus and the Father have everything in common (John 17:6, 9–10). Jesus mentions that glory has come to Him through the disciples (John 17:10). Jesus prays that the Father would protect the disciples since He will no longer be present in the world. He prays not that they will be removed from the world but specifically that they would be protected from the evil one (John 17:15) by the power of Jesus' name (John 17:11). Jesus says that the world hates the disciples because they are not of the world, just as Jesus is not of the world (John 17:14, 16). But Jesus has given His followers the Word and sent them into the world, just as the Father sent Jesus (John 17:18). Jesus prays that His disciples would be sanctified by the truth, which is God's Word (John 17:17) and that they would be unified (John 17:11).

After praying for His disciples, Jesus also prays for everyone who will believe in Him through their message (John 17:21). Jesus' desire, expressed in His High Priestly Prayer, is that all of His followers would be in complete unity, just as He and the Father are in perfect unity (John 17:21). Jesus prays for believers to be in God so that the world will believe in Jesus (John 17:21). When believers are united and abide in God, the world will know that God loves them and that He sent Jesus for them (John 17:23). Jesus loves the world, and His sacrifice that brings eternal life is for anyone who believes (John 3:16–17). Jesus says He has given believers His glory that they may be one as He is one with the Father (John 17:22). Jesus also prays that all who believe in Him will be with Him and see His glory (John 17:24). Jesus affirms that, whereas the world does not know the Father, He does, and He has made the Father known to His disciples. Jesus will continue to reveal God to His followers so that God's love will be in His disciples and that Jesus Himself will be in them (John 17:25–26).

Jesus says that He prayed the High Priestly Prayer because He was going to the Father soon and He wanted His disciples to “have the full measure of my joy within them” (John 17:13). As our Great High Priest, Jesus continues to intercede for us (Hebrews 7:25), and His High Priestly Prayer is an example of what His intercession looks like. Jesus “is able to save completely those who come to God through him” (Hebrews 7:25). His High Priestly Prayer, with its themes of unity, indwelling, glory, and giving, shows the profound extent of that salvation.

The Theology of Sacrifice in the Bible: The biblical idea of sacrifice concerns the way of approach to God, finding acceptance before him by means of an acceptable substitute offered in place of the sinner and bearing the curse of sin.

The idea and practice of sacrifice is prominent throughout the biblical narrative. In Genesis 4:2-5 we read of the sacrifices offered by Cain and Abel. We then read of sacrifices offered by Noah (Gen. 8:20), Abraham (Gen. 12:7-8; 13:4, 18; 22:13), Isaac (Gen. 26:25), Jacob (Gen. 31:54; 33:20; 35:1-7; 46:1). God delivers Israel from Egypt so that they may go and offer sacrifice to him (Exod. 3:18; 5:3), and it is by sacrifice, in fact, that they are delivered (Exod. 12). And in Exodus 20ff and in Leviticus God gives Moses detailed instructions for

establishing and carrying out the sacrificial system that was to mark Israel's worship under the terms of the old covenant. Sacrifice in the Old Testament

Sacrifices in the OT: When God taught his people to worship him, he place great emphasis on sacrifice. Each person offered a gift to God by sacrificing it on the altar. In the OT, the sacrifice was the only way to approach God and restore a relationship with him. Since creation, God has made it clear that sin separates people from him and those who sin deserve to die. In order to restore relationship with God, they had variety of sacrifices in the OT and each one related to a specific life situation. The first seven chapters of Leviticus describe the variety of offerings and how they were to be used.

Five OT offerings: There were five key offerings that the Israelites made to God for their forgiveness and restoration with God. But the death of Christ made these sacrifices unnecessary. Because of his death, our sins were completely forgiven and fellowship with God has been restored.

Offering	Purpose	Significance	Christ the perfect sacrifice
Burnt offering (Lev 1 - voluntary)	To make payment for sins in general	Showed a person's devotion to God	Christ' death was the perfect offering
Grain offering (Lev 2 - Voluntary)	To show honor and respect to God in worship	Acknowledged that all we have belongs to God	Christ was the perfect man who gave all of himself to God and others.
Fellowship offering (Leviticus 3- voluntary)	To express gratitude to God.	Symbolized peace and fellowship with God	Christ is the only way to fellowship with God.
Sin Offering (Leviticus 4 - Required)	To make payment for unintentional sins of uncleanness , neglect or thoughtlessness	Restored the sinner to fellowship with God; showed seriousness of sin.	Christ' death restores our fellowship with God.
Guilt Offering (Leviticus 5 - Required)	To make payment for sins against God and others. A sacrifice was made to God and the injured person was repaid or compensated	Provided compensation for injured persons	Christ' death takes away the deadly consequences of sin.

Difference between the OT and NT Sacrifices

OT Sacrifice	Jesus' Sacrifice
<p>God agreed to forgive people's sins if they brought animals for the priests to sacrifice. When the sacrificial system was inaugurated, the agreement between God and man was sealed with blood of the animal (Ex 24:8) but animal blood did not in itself remove sin and animal sacrifices had to be repeated day by day and year after year.</p>	<p>Jesus instituted a new covenant between humans and God. Under this new covenant, Jesus would die in place of sinners. Unlike the blood of animals, his blood would truly remove the sins of all who put their faith in him.</p>
<p>Every morning and evening, a lamb was sacrificed in the temple for the sins of the people (Ex 29)</p>	<p>God chose to provide the sacrifice himself in Jesus. The sins of the world were removed when Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice.</p>

The Death of Christ as a Sacrifice in the book of Hebrews: The writer to the Hebrews highlights in several ways how the sacrifice of Christ excels the sacrifices of the old covenant.

Christ's sacrifice was offered only once (9:6-7, 11-12, 25-26, 28; 10:1, 10-12). The older sacrifices had to be repeated over and over again, year after year. This would leave the thinking worshiper with doubts as to their real value (10:2-4), with little reason to assume that even the repeated offering of an animal could satisfy God or remove human guilt? The happy announcement of the gospel is that the sacrifice of Christ was of such value that it needed to be offered only once for all. Christ's saving work is a finished work (John 19:30), accomplished "once for all."

Christ's sacrifice effected forgiveness (9:9-10, 12; 10:1, 4, 11, 18). Sin was the problem addressed in sacrifice – it demanded removal. The repetition of the older sacrifices testified to their inability to deal with sin with finality. They were inadequate. The sacrifice was not of sufficient value. But our Lord *offered himself* (9:12, 13, 26), a sacrifice of supreme value (cf. Heb. 1-2), effectual in removing sin.

Christ's sacrifice gained access to God (Heb. 9:7-8; 10:19-22). The old sacrificial system was designed to demonstrate that the way to God is *not* just open to anyone on any terms (v. 8). There must be a qualified priest and an acceptable sacrifice offered in an acceptable way. Even so, the people at large must stay back – only the high priest had access into the holy of holies and that just once a year and by a prescribed ceremony of sacrifice. But by the sacrifice of Christ the way now is open. All who come by him, on the ground of his sacrificial work, are accepted (cf. Matt. 27:51; John 2:19-21).

At the climax of this discussion the writer draws several applications, marked by the word "therefore": Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near

with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works (Heb. 10:19-24).

Concluding Thoughts: The theme of sacrifice, then, takes us to the heart of the gospel and the essence of the Christian faith. In a very real sense it constitutes Christianity. It is this which differentiates Christianity from other religions. Christianity did not come into the world to proclaim a new morality and, sweeping away all the supernatural props by which men were wont to support their trembling, guilt-stricken souls, to throw them back on their own strong right arms to conquer a standing before God for themselves. It came to proclaim the real sacrifice for sin which God had provided in order to supersede all the poor fumbling efforts which men had made and were making to provide a sacrifice for sin for themselves; and, planting men's feet on this, to bid them go forward.

How to be a living sacrifice? God wants us to offer ourselves, not animals, as living sacrifices - daily laying aside our own desires to follow him, putting all our energy and resources at his disposal and trusting him to guide us. We do this out of gratitude that our sins have been forgiven. A sacrifice of praise is thanking Christ for his sacrifice on the cross and telling others about it.

What are the spiritual sacrifices? First Peter 2:5 says, "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Peter was writing to Christians to encourage them to remain strong in the faith, even through persecution (1 Peter 1:6). He reminded them that they were highly significant in the sight of God and urged them to live holy lives (verses 15-16).

Under the New Covenant, every believer in Jesus Christ is a holy priest. As priests, they offer spiritual sacrifices "through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Spiritual sacrifices replace the material sacrifices of the Old Covenant (Exodus 29:36). No longer are priests a separate class, and no longer do they offer bulls, goats, and lambs on the altar (Hebrews 10:1-11). Not only do believers constitute the new priesthood, but they are the "living stones" forming the spiritual temple of God (1 Peter 2:5). Our worship today involves the offering of spiritual sacrifices.

Spiritual sacrifices include the believer's prayers, praises, will, bodies, time, and talents. Such sacrifices are made acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ, the great High Priest. Prayer is a spiritual sacrifice. Under the law, incense, often associated with prayer, was offered on the altar of incense in the tabernacle and temple. David prayed, "May my prayer be set before you like incense" (Psalm 141:2). In his vision of heaven, John saw that the elders around the throne "were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people" (Revelation 5:8; cf. 8:3). Our prayers offered to God ascend as the smoke of the incense ascended in the sanctuary. The fact that the incense was always burning means that we should always pray (Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Another spiritual sacrifice is praise. God created us to praise Him, and we offer a “sacrifice of praise” (Hebrews 13:15) when we turn toward God rather than away from Him in the midst of suffering. Praise is easy when all is right with our world. But when the sky falls in, Satan is ready to suggest, like Job’s wife did, that we “curse God and die” (Job 2:9). When we resist the urge to judge God for our misfortune and offer praises instead, that becomes a spiritual sacrifice.

Another spiritual sacrifice is surrender of the will. Just as Jesus surrendered His will to the Father’s (Luke 22:42), so do we. Surrender of our will is an ongoing battle. The sin nature that resides within each of us battles for supremacy (Romans 7:18–20). Self wants to rule. It is an act of worship when we willingly crucify self and embrace surrender to the will of God. We choose His way rather than our own.

Another way we offer spiritual sacrifices is to present our physical bodies as “living sacrifices” (Romans 12:1–2). Our bodies are the temple of the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:18–20). Those who are in Christ by virtue of saving faith offer themselves completely to the Lord. The believer’s body is yielded to God as an instrument of righteousness (Romans 6:12–13; 8:11–13). Believers maintain good sexual boundaries (Ephesians 5:3). They refuse to use their bodies for theft (Ephesians 4:28) or for bringing harm to another person (Colossians 3:12–13). They offer their bodies daily to God, asking Him to live His life through them (Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:12–14).

Spiritual sacrifices are any word or deed motivated by a desire to glorify God alone. Jesus promised us rewards for every kind action done in His name (Mark 9:41; Revelation 22:12). But we don’t offer spiritual sacrifices for what we will get out of it. We offer them without strings attached because our hearts long to live in close fellowship with God. Sacrifice is part and parcel of worship. Christians offer sacrifices of the heart

Why do we celebrate the holy mass repeatedly if Jesus died once for all? In Dt 8:2-3, 14b-16a, Moses instructs the Israelites to “remember and not forget” the miraculous provision of food in the manna given to them. The Church, through the Holy Mass, remembers and reenacts the Sacramental meal (Last Supper) and Jesus’ sacrifice on Calvary.

The core of our Christian faith is Eucharist vertically (God) and horizontally (human beings). The Eucharist makes the church physically and theologically visible and relevant, manifesting the presence of Jesus of Jesus from the rising of the sun to its setting. On the solemnity of the Body and Blood of Jesus, it is important to know the theology of the Eucharist for better appraisal of our catholic faith

Eucharist is a New Covenant and memorial: Jesus replaced the Old covenant and establishes the New covenant (Jer 31:31-34) by using His own Blood rather than that of sacrificial animals. Jesus instituted the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist while eating the Passover meal, the feast on which the Jews still gather annually to commemorate

their ancestors' deliverance from Egyptian slavery. We celebrate it because Jesus himself commanded us to celebrate it saying "Do this in memory of me".

Eucharist is a Sacrifice: The Eucharistic celebration is a sacrifice because it is the representation of Christ's Death on Good Friday and of his Resurrection on Easter Sunday. By means of signs, symbols and prayers in the Eucharist, we share in Christ's passion, death and Resurrection. Sacrifice is the heart and culmination of Eucharistic celebration.

Eucharist is a Mystery: The Eucharistic Meal is a great mystery because during the Eucharistic celebration the substance of bread and wine are changed into the substance of Jesus' Body and Blood, while their appearances (or 'accidents') remain. We believe in this transformation of bread and wine (called Transubstantiation), because Jesus unequivocally taught it and authorized his apostles to repeat it. As a Sacrament, the Holy Eucharist imparts to us Jesus' abiding presence in our souls.

Eucharistic Transformations in life: First of all we must have a very deep faith that Jesus whom we consume in the Holy Eucharist is our personal God who assimilates us into His very being. During the week we grow into Jesus and he grows in us. When we grow in him, we are able to make an inward journey to clean up our selfishness, egos, anger and overcome our sinful tendencies. We see a real transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit and we become very much rooted in Christ. Ultimately the Joy and Peace of Christ remain in our minds and hearts.