

THE INTERCEDING PRIEST

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus is the permanent Priest (Heb. 7:23-25).
2. Jesus is the perfect Priest (Heb. 7:26-28).
3. Jesus is the purifying Priest (Heb. 9:11-14).

Background Passage: Hebrews 4–10

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus fulfills the office of priest, interceding on behalf of people and by becoming the sacrifice necessary to purify them of their sin.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

In the Old Testament, God established a priesthood among His people. The priest's role was to intercede on behalf of the people and perform regular animal sacrifices to purify their sins. Jesus is the perfect Priest, the High Priest who interceded on behalf of the people by laying down His life to be a once-and-for-all sacrifice for sin.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Jesus interceded on our behalf before the Father, we seek to intercede on the behalf of others for their salvation as we tell them how they can be forgiven of their sins through Christ.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **What is your perception of a priest?** (a priest of the Roman Catholic variety; someone who hears confessions and grants forgiveness; something unnecessary today; something pagan or from cults)

EXPLAIN: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- A priest is one who stands in the gap between God and man, bringing man's sins to the forgiving God and God's forgiveness to needy man. In Jesus, we find the perfect Priest. We have seen how His priesthood came to pass. He was anointed at Bethany by Mary. He initiated a new covenant with God's people through the Lord's Supper. He was betrayed and given over to become the sacrifice for sins. In Jesus, we have not merely a priest but the ultimate Priest. He is the fulfillment and completion of the office.

TRANSITION: As we move from the final hours of Jesus's earthly life into a study of Jesus's priesthood today, we find that Jesus is still serving as a mediator between God and us. He brings forgiveness and mercy and grace to us moment by moment. He is the fulfillment of the priesthood that we need to stand before the all-holy God above.

OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTION: **When have you stood in the gap for someone else, maybe a child, a friend, or an older parent?**

(wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)



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POINT 1

JESUS IS THE PERMANENT PRIEST (HEB. 7:23-25).

INTRODUCE: The writer of Hebrews makes an argument throughout the beginning of his book that Jesus is supreme and better than all things. He is our High Priest (6:20), and being such, He is eternal and permanent.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Hebrews 7:23-25** from his or her Bible.

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.

DESCRIBE: Using the content below and **verses 23-24**, describe the role of the levitical priests as you explain (DDG p. 90):

Where every levitical priest failed, Jesus succeeded. He is now our eternal, permanent Priest.

- God's answer to our guilt is the priesthood. The priest's role is to bring man's guilt to God's altar and, by a sacrifice, mediate God's forgiveness to the guilty party. In Israel, the tribe of Levi was set apart to do nothing else. This was a gracious gift from God to His people to have a priesthood set apart to fulfill the holy things of the law, but on account of their own sin, the priests kept dying. The office never ceased, but it was occupied by different men. Some priests were even killed by God for their ungodliness (see Lev. 10). Even the best priests had to make sacrifices for their own sins before they could make sacrifices for the people. As such, they were prevented by sin and death from continuing in office.
- Jesus came not to end the priesthood but to fill it and fulfill it permanently (Heb. 7:24). The sacrifice we needed was one that removed our guilt and brought God's forgiveness to bear once and for all. Jesus, as the perfect Priest, was able to offer the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice—Himself. Because the sinless Savior died for us and was raised again, He now lives for us, continually interceding for His people. There is no longer any need for continual sacrifices for sin. The priesthood is not gone but fulfilled in Jesus.

DISCUSS: Call attention to **PACK ITEM 7: CHRIST AS PRIEST (POSTER)** and pass out copies of **PACK ITEM 8: CHRIST AS PRIEST (HANDOUT)**. Then discuss (DDG pp. 86,90):

From Day 2 in the DDG: **How does knowing Jesus serves as our High Priest today change the way you worship Him?** (we are never without the Priest applying His atoning sacrifice for our sin; we are washed in the blood of Christ; in our moments of sin, we can be sure that our Priest in heaven brings forgiveness to us by the power of His once-for-all sacrifice)



LEVITICAL PRIESTS

As part of Aaron's descendants, levitical priests served in the tabernacle, and then later in the temple, with sacrifices and offerings for worship. They were appointed and consecrated by God to intercede for the nation of Israel, also blessing them and instructing them in the law. Other Levites, not descendants of Aaron, aided the priests but did not serve in the offering of sacrifices.

REVIEW: Guide the group to review the key doctrine, paying attention to the role Jesus plays as Priest (DDG p. 90).

Key Doctrine #53: Christ as Priest: As our great High Priest, Jesus accomplishes the work of reconciling us to God. He is the One whose perfect righteousness is presented to the Father for our justification. He is the One who intercedes for us before the Father (Heb. 7:25; 9:24) and prays for us to remain faithful (Luke 22:31-32; John 17).

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verse 25** that Jesus saves us completely and eternally as our great High Priest

- The levitical priests could not accomplish the deepest desire of God for His people. We need a high priest who is radiantly holy, completely innocent, and eternally effective to bring us to the Father.
- *Optional:* Another translation for “save to the uttermost” (Heb. 7:25) is “save at all times.” This is an expansive phrase. The more our need, the more Christ’s ability to save. The grace of God in Christ extends to all sins. No one is ever beyond saving.
- Jesus intercedes for “those who draw near to God through him.” One of the key responsibilities of a priest is atoning for the people’s sins to bring them back into right relationship with God the Father. Jesus does this perfectly. We go to God through the person of Jesus Christ. He is our merit. He is our entry fee. He is the One who brings us into God’s glory.
- “He always lives to make intercession for them.” Jesus is alive in heaven at the right hand of the majesty on high. Jesus is interceding for you, believer. Your sins—past, present, and future—are covered because our High Priest in heaven is praying for you. So what do you do with your sense of guilt? You come to Jesus, who has taken away your guilt with His blood. His intercession on our behalf is what He lives for.

REFLECT AND ASK: Jesus saves completely and eternally. Give your group a moment to reflect on this; then ask (DDG p. 90):

How does knowing Jesus saves completely and eternally change the way you interact with God? (I know I can come to God with any confession; I rejoice that God is so gracious, and I desire to strive to please Him more; I’m so grateful for His sacrifice and mercy)

TRANSITION: Jesus’s priestly work did not stop on the cross. It extends to His present activity on our behalf now in heaven. He is not only our permanent Priest, He is also our perfect Priest.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“He always lives to intercede for them expresses all that the Lord Christ, as the high priest of the church, does for us now with God, and upon which the certainty of our salvation depends.”¹

—John Owen (1616–1683)

POINT 2

JESUS IS THE PERFECT PRIEST (HEB. 7:26-28).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Hebrews 7:26-28** from his or her Bible.

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.

INTERACT: Bring two wash rags: a clean one and an obviously dirty one. Ask group members which one they would want to use to sanitize their kitchen, and why? (Clean one because you don't have to clean it first in order to use it; clean one because the dirty one will just make everything more dirty) Jesus is the better Priest. He not only is already clean, not needing to make sacrifices for Himself, He also is always clean, thus will never be dirty, never sinning and causing others to sin as some of the priests did.

SAY: Read the summary statement for **verses 26-27** below (DDG p. 90).

Being holy and blameless, Jesus is our perfect Priest, the fulfillment of all the priesthood was intended to be.

CONTRAST: Invite the group to identify ways Jesus is the better Priest, referring them to **verses 26-27** for insight. Record the responses on a board. Supplement as necessary from the leader content.

- The levitical priests achieved some good, but they could never fulfill the need like Jesus could. We need a priest who is "holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens" (v. 26). He needs to be spotless to stand in the gap for us before God the Father.
- Jesus, our High Priest, in His holiness, can take on all our sins and stand before God to intercede for us because He is innocent, free from all sin, and does no evil. Jesus, though He ate with sinners and tax collectors, did not partake in their unholiness for He had no sinful nature. He is not tainted by sin's effects. As such, He is exalted above the heavens, being able to stand in the gap between unholy people and the holy God.
- Verse 27 points to three excellencies of Christ's priesthood in comparison with the levitical priests. The levitical priests offered daily sacrifices; Jesus offered one for all time. The levitical priests offered animals; Jesus offered Himself. The levitical priests made sacrifices for their own sins before they could make sacrifices for the sins of the people. Jesus has no sin and therefore has no need to make a sacrifice for Himself. The total effect of these three contrasts is a more perfect priest who offered a more perfect sacrifice once and for all by means of His own blood. Jesus is the spotless sacrifice to end all sacrifices.

CHALLENGE: Jesus is the only perfect Priest, so He is the only way to salvation and eternal life. In smaller groups of 2-3, discuss (DDG p. 90):

Knowing Jesus is the only perfect Priest, how does that help us explain to others that Jesus is the only way to salvation? (because of our sin, we can't save ourselves; only Jesus is perfect, so only He can intercede for us; God is holy and only holiness can enter His presence)

STATE: Using the content below, state and explain from **verse 28** the difference between the law and the oath (DDG p. 90).

The law was a good thing, but it appointed weak men to the priesthood. But God's oath, His promise, appointed a Son to be a perfect sacrifice to make unholy people holy in the sight of God.

- Though the law was good, it was entrusted to weak men. The levitical priests were not strong enough to bring us all the way home to heaven, nor were they intended to be. They pointed to the One who would come later.
- God gave something better than the law, and that was an oath, or a promise. The will of God stretched beyond the levitical priesthood. His oath overrode the law's weakness with the perfection of the Son. Jesus has been appointed our Priest now, and He is forever perfect. No more weakness for us. We have the industrial strength of Jesus. We are no longer hoping for perfection. In Jesus, we have it. We have the final sacrifice, the living Christ.
- *Application:* The great implication of these truths is a simple one. We have a perfect Priest to bring us into a perfect relationship with God. Forgiveness of sins can be ours because the perfect sacrifice has already been made. The door to heaven is wide open by the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. He stands now in heaven as our intercessor, applying His sacrifice to our sins in the sight of God. There is, therefore, never a moment when we are not forgiven, when our sins are not paid for, or when we can't come to God for forgiveness and newness of life.

DISCUSS: Individually or in smaller groups, ask (DDG p. 90):

Why would you rather live under God's oath and promise than the law? (the law only reveals our sin and doesn't help us; God's oath not only allows us to be forgiven but it helps us conquer sin; due to our sin, the law is about a set of rules, while God's promise is about a relationship)

TRANSITION: Jesus fulfilled the priesthood permanently and perfectly. He is the Holy One who offered Himself on the altar to make us right with God. So He is not only permanent and perfect, He is purifying.

POINT 3

JESUS IS THE PURIFYING PRIEST (HEB. 9:11-14).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Hebrews 9:11-14** from his or her Bible.

11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) **12** he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. **13** For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, **14** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

COMPARE: Lead the group in creating a comparison chart of the old covenant and the new covenant. Record this on a board. Point the group to **verses 11-12** and Day 5 in their DDG (DDG p. 89) for assistance.

SUMMARIZE: Using the chart just created and the content below, highlight the idea that (DDG p. 91):

In the Old Testament, the levitical priests offered temporary sacrifices, but Jesus offers eternal redemption through His blood.

- The old covenant ministry of the priesthood offered only a temporary fix. Temporary tents. Temporary priests. Temporary sacrifices. Temporary purification. We needed something that will last forever because we have a soul, and later a body, that will last forever. We need forgiveness that extends a lifetime warranty because we have a daily need to file a claim for our sinful wreckage and destruction. A temporary animal sacrifice from a temporary sinful priest brings only temporary forgiveness, and that's just not sufficient.
- The old covenant itself, given by God, enshrined these temporary terms. In His mercy, God established the priesthood in His law to offer sacrifices on behalf of the people. The law even specified that one day a year, a sacrifice would be made to forgive unintentional sins as well. On the Day of Atonement, the levitical high priest entered the most holy place to offer the sacrifice of the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins for the people (Lev. 16). It was gracious and merciful, but it still was incomplete on account of its limitations and symbolic purpose.
- In Jesus, we have all that is needed on an eternal scale: the holy place, the holy Priest, and the holy sacrifice for our eternal redemption.

MOST HOLY PLACE

Also called the holy of holies, this is the most inner sanctuary of the tabernacle and temple, which housed the ark of the covenant. On top of the ark was "the mercy seat," where God's presence dwelt. Only once a year on the Day of Atonement could the high priest enter this place, and only with a blood sacrifice.

ASK: God has done everything needed to redeem His people. Ask (DDG p. 91):

Knowing God desires a relationship with us and has planned everything, even the death of His Son, to save us, how should believers respond? (with awe; with gratefulness; with joy; with faith and trust; with wanting to be Christ-like; with trying to live to please God; with wanting to tell others of God's love)

EXPLAIN: Using the content below, explain from **verses 13-14** that Jesus's sacrifice purifies us (DDG p. 91).

If the blood of animals can sanctify, infinitely more does Jesus's blood sanctify, cleanse, and purify us that we may serve Him.

- Sinful people need purification that goes beyond today and reaches into eternity. In the new covenant, God did not rewrite the rules. Instead, He provided a new kind of priest, One who could bring about everlasting purity. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, His blood purified all those who choose to believe in Him. The offering that Jesus made is better than all others because it is eternally effective.
- The law, because of our sin, stood to condemn, but under the new covenant, we can be certain of our forgiveness because we have a high priest who has made the ultimate atonement for all our sin—past, present, and future.
- Jesus is fully effective to cleanse us completely, even our consciences, because He offered Himself through the eternal Holy Spirit as a sacrifice without blemish. Mere animal blood could never bring about the kind of cleansing that we need. Man's sin requires divine blood for reconciliation.
- The perfect obedience of Christ guaranteed that His offering would be fully accepted by God as our payment. Through the blood of Christ, we are saved. By faith, we have been purified.
- *Application:* Knowing this changes the way we live. The blood of Christ purifies not only our bodies but also our consciences from dead works so that we can serve the living God (Heb. 9:14). No longer fearing the punishment of sin, we are free to serve God with a pure heart.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 91)

In what ways can you serve God more, knowing Jesus purifies our conscience so we can serve Him? (in telling others about Jesus; in serving at church or a nonprofit; in helping my neighbor)

TRANSITION: Jesus is our interceding Priest. He died so we can live. He shed His blood so our sins can be shed. We can now come to be in relationship with God eternally because of Jesus.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: In the Old Testament, God established a priesthood among His people. The priest's role was to intercede on behalf of the people and perform regular animal sacrifices to purify their sins. Jesus is the perfect Priest, the High Priest who intercedes now on our behalf. And because He does, we seek to intercede on the behalf of others, pleading to God for their salvation as we tell them how they might be forgiven of their sins through Christ.

HEAD:

The priesthood was not abolished with Jesus but fulfilled and perfected in Him. In Christ we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He lives to intercede for us, applying His finished work to our lives moment by moment. We can draw near to God through Jesus, knowing that we will be accepted.

What benefits of Jesus's priesthood are most precious to you?

HEART:

What do you do with your guilt? Sin creates a real rift between God and human beings (Isa. 59:1-2), and we need a solution. The priesthood of Jesus grants the perfect answer. The sacrifice He made is a perfect one that purifies believers in Christ completely, from the inside out, from beginning to end. We can go to God humbly and boldly knowing that we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus and He intercedes on our behalf when we sin.

Reflect quietly on what sins you would like to confess to God right now.

HANDS:

Jesus is our perfect Priest. We need no one else to mediate between God and us. God has given His people a great honor to serve as ministers of reconciliation in this world (2 Cor. 5:11-21). We get to intercede in prayer on behalf of others. We have the answer to the greatest problem in their lives, which is sin. Jesus has paid it all, and He is willing to forgive them if they simply come to Him. Our prayers may be the means by which God grants salvation to others. That's a priestly role—one we learned from Jesus Himself.

Who has God put on your heart to intercede in prayer for today?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, thank You that You intercede for us and allow us to intercede for others. Help us come to You to confess our sin, knowing You forgive perfectly. Fill us with Your Spirit that we may strive to be more like You in grateful response to Your redeeming love. Help us share Your love with others. Amen.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"I lay my sins on Jesus,
The spotless Lamb of
God; He bears them all,
and frees us From the
accursed load: I bring
my guilt to Jesus, To
wash my crimson stains
White in His blood
most precious, Till not a
stain remains."²

—Horatius Bonar
(1808–1889)

POINT 2: JESUS IS THE PERFECT PRIEST (HEB. 7:26-28).

+ COMMENTARY

“**Such a high priest meets our needs.** Unholy sinners stand in need of a holy priest and a holy sacrifice. What we do not have in ourselves we must have in him, or we will not be accepted by the holy God, who has such pure eyes that he cannot look on sin. Such a high priest is the Lord Christ. **One who is holy.** As he was holy, he does not have sin present with him as we have (Romans 7:18, 21), neither is he entangled in sin (12:1). . . . **Set apart from sinners.** . . . Being set apart from sinners declares what Christ is, his state and condition. He is holy and undefiled. He was separate from sinners in the sense that he was separate from sin, in its nature, causes, and effects. He had to be like this for our benefit. He became the middle person between God and sinners and had to be separate from those sinners in the thing he stood in their place for.”³

POINT 3: JESUS IS THE PURIFYING PRIEST (HEB. 9:11-14).

+ COMMENTARY

“In reality verses 13–14 form one long sentence, with verse 13 presenting a conditional clause that can be translated: ‘if [or since] the blood of goats . . . sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.’ Verse 14, as the follow-up ‘then’ clause, presents a theological capsule of the efficacious sacrifice of Christ: ‘How much more, then, will the blood of Christ . . . cleanse our consciences. . . .’ These two verses form an ‘argument from lesser to greater,’ which reasons: ‘If something is true in a lesser situation, it is true to an even greater degree in a greater situation.’ Here the sacrifice of animals constitutes the lesser circumstance and the offering of the blood of Christ the greater.”⁴

References

1. John Owen, *Hebrews*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 178.
2. Horatius Bonar, “I Lay My Sins on Jesus,” *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Worship, 2008), 593.
3. John Owen, 178-79.
4. George Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 311.