

Hebrews 7:23-27

²³ There were many who became priests because death prevented any of them from continuing to remain in office. ²⁴ But because this one endures forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ So for this reason he is able to save forever those who come to God through him, because he always lives to plead on their behalf.

Jesus Is the High Priest We Need

²⁶ This is certainly the kind of high priest we needed: one who is holy, innocent, pure, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices on a daily basis, first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. In fact, he sacrificed for sins once and for all when he offered himself.

Jesus Is Our Eternal High Priest

From the time the Israelites received the Law at Mount Sinai until the final destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. historians say the mantle of the high priest was passed on from one high priest to another. The first of these transitions is recorded in the book of Numbers. Moses writes: “Get Aaron and his son Eleazar and take them up Mount Hor. ²⁶ Remove Aaron’s garments and put them on his son Eleazar, for Aaron will be gathered to his people; he will die there” (Numbers 20:25-26, NIV84).

The historian Josephus lists the names of 83 high priests who are known to have served from the time of Aaron until the destruction of the temple. It is that constant passing on of the office of the high priest that the writer to the Hebrews focuses on in today's text. Jesus is different, he tells us. Jesus is our eternal high priest.

I.

“This is certainly the kind of high priest we needed: one who is holy, innocent, pure, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens” (Hebrews 7:26, EHV). Jesus our Great High Priest is different from all the other high priests who had served at the tabernacle and the temple. He is, as the writer declares, holy, innocent, and pure—he is without sin.

The other high priests were sinners; that’s why they died. Some were wicked, like Annas and Caiaphas, who we see in the Passion history. Others were good and decent men like Zadok, who supported King David, or Jehoiada, who sheltered Joash, or Joshua, who returned from Babylon to oversee the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. The one thing all of them had in common was that they were sinners.

“Unlike the other high priests, [Jesus] does not need to offer sacrifices on a daily basis, first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 7:27, EHV). The writer was speaking about the sacrifices made on the Great Day of Atonement. Before going in to the Most Holy Place, the high priest had to make a sacrifice for his own sins and the sins of his household. Only with the blood of the bull that had died for his sins could the high priest enter the presence of God.

Jesus was different. Throughout the Lenten season we saw it again and again. If anything is clear about Jesus, it is that he did not deserve to be on trial and sentenced to death. He had done nothing wrong. Pilate even had to admit it: “I find no basis for a charge against this man” Luke 23:4, EHV).

The Jewish Sanhedrin had to hire false witnesses to testify against Jesus because they knew he had done no wrong. Even the hired false witnesses couldn’t get their stories