

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΟΥ

“In the Nick of Time”

Occasional Essays
and Other Stuff
for Christian
Students

Presented by the
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American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting today's Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

“...Be instant in season,
out of season;
reprove, rebuke, exhort
with all longsuffering
and doctrine.”

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Shall We Reason Together? Part Five: Ye Ought to Be Teachers

Kevin T. Bauder

The writer to the Hebrews was distressed by the spiritual immaturity of his readers. He wanted to discuss theology with them—specifically, the calling of Christ as a high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:10-14). He made it clear that the Hebrews had been saved long enough (“when for the time”) that they ought to have mastered this topic (“ye ought to be teachers”). Instead, he had to rehearse certain elementary teachings of biblical doctrine (“the first principles of the oracles of God”).

The writer's disappointment with the immaturity of the Hebrew believers was what fueled the warning passage of chapter 6. Not until 7 did he return to the theme that Christ is a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. When he finally got back to it, however, he penned one of the most difficult and detailed arguments in all of Scripture. This argument is highly instructive in three ways. First, it is useful because of what it teaches about Christ's high priesthood. Second, it is useful because it shows exactly how the writer arrived at his conclusions. Third, it is useful because the writer explicitly demonstrated (in Heb. 7) the very thing that he had already said the readers ought to have done for themselves (in Heb. 5:10-14).

In other words, whatever methods are used in Hebrews 7:1-28 are methods that any mature believer ought to master. Any conclusions that are drawn in Hebrews 7:1-28 are conclusions that any mature believer ought to be able to draw. The writer himself rested the authority of chapter 7,

not on its inspiration, but on the correctness of the inferences that he was able to draw from Scripture. He thought that his readers should have drawn them without his having to show them how.

For nothing in Hebrews 7 is really new. Everything in that chapter is inferred from three sources. The first is the Genesis record about Melchizedek, a three-verse snippet of narrative (Gen. 14:18-20). The second is a single verse (Ps. 110:4) from a Messianic psalm. The third is a general knowledge of the history and culture of Israel.

What does the writer infer from these sources? Space permits only a cursory glance at the more obvious inferences.

First, in a book filled with genealogies, no information is given about Melchizedek's birth, death, ancestors, or descendants. Therefore, Melchizedek's right to be a priest cannot be connected in any way with his family line. Unlike Levitical authority, the authority of Melchizedek is not limited to a particular family or a particular time.

Second, Melchizedek was obviously greater than Abraham. The patriarch paid tithes to the priest; the priest blessed the patriarch. Abraham, however, was greater than Levi, inasmuch as Levi was "in [his] loins." *A fortiori*, Melchizedek was greater than Levi, which implies that the priesthood of Melchizedek must be greater than the priesthood of Levi.

Third, the promise that Messiah would be a priest after the order of Melchizedek came hundreds of years after the establishment of the Aaronic priesthood. Another priesthood would not have been needed if the Aaronic priests could really have fulfilled the purpose of a priesthood. Furthermore, the Mosaic Law (which was integrally connected with the Aaronic priesthood) had to be replaced when that priesthood was replaced. These factors imply the weakness and futility of both the Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic Law.

Fourth, Messiah was to come from the tribe of Judah. Therefore, his authority to be a priest could not be connected with the appointment of Aaron and his sons. From what source, then, does Messiah's priestly authority arise? Since he is appointed as a priest "forever," it must arise from His own endless life.

Fifth, the Aaronic priesthood was established without an oath, and consequently it could be altered or even abolished. Messiah's priesthood, however, was established by an oath of which Yahweh will not repent. Accordingly, Messiah's priesthood is permanent and will never be abolished. This permanence is all the more clear in view of the mortality of Levitical priests. Since they died, they constantly had to be replaced. No Aaronic priest could act as a permanent mediator. Since Messiah will never die, his priesthood is ongoing and unchangeable.

Finally, this unchangeable priesthood (grounded in the endless life of the Messiah and the unchangeable oath of Yahweh) enables Jesus to "save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." Unlike the Levitical priests, He only had to offer a single sacrifice one time when He offered Himself.

The above paragraphs have merely traced in a perfunctory way the most obvious inferences in Hebrews 7. Already, however, these inferences are staggering in their proportions. The significant fact for the present discussion is that none of Hebrews 7 is new revelation. Everything in this chapter is implied by Genesis 14:18-20, Psalm 110:4, and a general knowledge of Old Testament history.

How was the writer able to draw these inferences? Did he have to receive the Holy Spirit's ministry of inspiration? The text itself answers this question in the negative. In Hebrews 5:10-14, the author rebuked his readers because they were not already drawing these inferences. He thought that any mature believer should be able to perform exactly the task the he himself went on to perform in chapter 7.

In other words, the writer to the Hebrews *demand*s that readers approach the Scriptures logically. He *demand*s that they draw inferences. He *demand*s that they reason, and he *demand*s that they submit themselves to the authority of the necessary inferences. For the writer to the Hebrews, there was no difference between the authority of the text and the authority of what the text implies.

As we have already seen, Jesus reasoned from the Scriptures with the Sadducees. Here, the writer to the Hebrews reasons from the Scriptures with his readers. In both cases, the conclusions of the reasoning are advanced as authoritative. But—and here is the crucial factor—both are speaking to people who they think should already have done the reasoning.

In the case of the Sadducees, Jesus says that their failure to draw the right inferences constitutes ignorance of Scripture. In the case of Hebrews, the writer says that the failure of his readers to draw the right inferences is a token of their spiritual immaturity. In both cases, there is astonishment and explicit rebuke that the correct inferences have not already been drawn. It's not just that Jesus and the apostles reasoned from Scripture. It's not just that they expect us to follow their reasons. More than that, they accuse us of biblical ignorance and of spiritual immaturity if we are not drawing the necessary inferences from Scriptural teachings. ✕

This essay is by [Kevin T. Bauder](#), president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

Death.

George Herbert (1633)

Death, thou wast once an uncouth hideous thing,
Nothing but bones,
The sad effect of sadder grones:
Thy mouth was open, but thou couldst not sing.

For we consider'd thee as at some six
Or ten yeares hence,
After the losse of life and sense,
Flesh being turn'd to dust, and bones to sticks.

We lookt on this side of thee, shooting short;
Where we did finde
The shells of fledge souls left behinde,
Dry dust, which sheds no tears, but may extort.

But since our Saviours death did put some bloud
Into thy face;
Thou art grown fair and full of grace,
Much in request, much sought for, as a good.

For we do now behold thee gay and glad,
As at dooms-day;
When souls shall wear their new aray,
And all thy bones with beautie shall be clad.

Therefore we can go die as sleep, and trust
Half that we have
Unto an honest faithfull grave;
Making our pillows either down, or dust. ✕

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