

A Study of Hebrews

Lesson 7

Hebrews 7:1-28

The Priestly Order of Melchizedek

(Hebrews 7:1-10)

The question that arises when we study Hebrews 7 is this: “Who was Melchizedek?” This is a somewhat difficult question to answer because we do not know all the details of his life. There are three relevant passages about Melchizedek -- Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 110:4; and Hebrews 7:1-10.

Some have suggested that Melchizedek was an angel, Enoch, Shem, Christ, or the Holy Spirit; however the most understanding is that he was a man. We do know that he could not be an angel because the Hebrew writer calls him a man (Heb 7:4). He could not be Enoch or Shem because we know about their parentage whereas the Hebrew writer says that Melchizedek was without father or mother. He could not be the Holy Spirit because he is called a man. In Genesis 14, he is mentioned as the king of Salem along with other kings of various cities --- so simply stated he was a man.

The Mysterious Melchizedek

1. The name “Melchizedek means “king of righteousness” and he was king of Salem -- Most but not all Bible scholars take this to be an old name for Jerusalem which means “peace.”
2. He was priest of the Most High God. he followed God in a world full of corruption and idol worship. (He was not a Jew.)
3. He met Abraham who was returning from victory in battle and blessed him -- This blessing is found in Genesis 14:19. It was a function of priests to provide blessings. The greater blesses the lesser.
4. Abraham gave Melchizedek 10% of his spoils from battle -- It was customary to pay tithes to priests. When Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe it indicated that Melchizedek was greater.
5. Nothing is known of his father and mother (Heb 7:3) and Scripture does not record his birth or death or the beginning or end of his priesthood.

Melchizedek may seem a shadowy figure, because we know so little about him. Nothing in Scripture is recorded about his birth, death, or family. Since Abraham was blessed by him and paid a tithe to him, we see he was a great man of God. In fact, the Levitical priesthood figuratively paid the tithe to Melchizedek since they are descendants of Abraham (Heb. 7:9-10).

As interesting as Melchizedek may be, he is not the focus of the Hebrew writer. The point that he will now make is that Jesus is a priest like Melchizedek. Jesus was not descended from Levi. Jesus was a king as well as a priest. Jesus is also a king of righteousness and peace. The genealogy of Jesus does not make him a priest. The priesthood of Jesus is timeless.

Jesus Compared to Melchizedek

(Hebrews 7:11-28)

The key words in verses 11-19 are “perfect” and “perfection.”¹ It is obvious that perfection could not come through the Levitical priesthood (Heb 7:11).

1. According to Hebrews 7:12, there cannot be a change in the priesthood without a change in the _____.
2. Jesus did not become a priest because of his genealogy. What was the basis of his priesthood according to Hebrews 7:16?
3. What three facts do we learn about the Old Testament Law in Hebrews 7:18?
4. In what way do we today have a better hope (Heb 7:19)?

The key word in verses 20-28 is “oath.” God can confirmed his covenant with the Jews with an oath (Heb 6:13-17). Psalm 110:4 is applied now to Christ where we read that “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” God did not swear an oath to make the Levites priests, but he has sworn and oath to Christ.²

Hebrews 7:22 tells us that Jesus is the “guarantor” or “surety” of a better covenant. James Coffman writes about his surety, *“The entire gospel of his glorious life, together with all that he did and is doing, constitutes surety. By his enduring the cross, rising from the dead, ascending on high, sitting down upon the very throne of God, and interceding for the redeemed - by these and many other things, Christ is the surety of the absolute truth and dependability of all that Christians have received concerning the new covenant and its inherent blessings.”*³

Verse 22 is the first time we see the word “covenant” in Hebrews. We will find this word repeated **14** times in the next three chapters.

The Qualities of Jesus as High Priest found in Hebrews 1-7

1. Merciful and faithful 2:17
2. Able to help those who are tempted 2:18
3. Great ... passed through the heavens 4:14
4. Can sympathize with our weakness 4:15
5. Tempted as we are without sin 4:15
6. Appointed by God 5:5
7. Forerunner on our behalf 6:20
8. Holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners 7:26
9. Exalted above the heavens 7:26
10. Made perfect forever 7:28

¹ Lightfoot, Neil. *Everyone's Guide to Hebrews*. p. 95

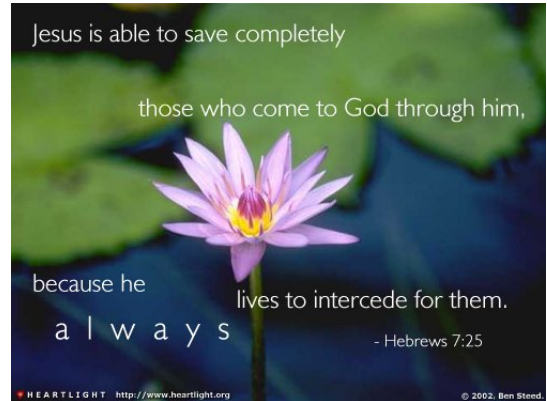
² Ibid. p. 97-98

³ Coffman, James. *Coffman's Commentary of the New Testament*.

The priesthood of Christ is permanent (Heb. 7:24) because he is a priest “forever.” The Old Testament high priests had to be replaced because they faced physical death. The historian Josephus says there were 83 high priests from Aaron to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Jesus is a much better high priest because he lives forever. He will never be replaced.

5. Who is Jesus able to save (Heb 7:25) and how thoroughly can he save them?

Hebrews 7:25 tells us that he “lives to make intercession for them.” This is descriptive of the intercessory work of the high priest. The two words “always lives” shows us that his salvation is always open to those who will draw near to him.



6. What does Hebrews 7:26 tell us about Jesus? (Don't just list the words mentioned, but describe what these mean to you and your life.)

7. What is the significance of the phrase “once for all” in Hebrews 7:27?

8. What contrasts are made between the Old Testament high priests and Jesus in Hebrews 7:28?

9. How does this chapter influence your personal view of Jesus? What have you learned or relearned about Jesus that is important?

10. How does this chapter change how we live day by day?