

## Hebrews 7:1-10

# The Greatness of the Melchizedek Priesthood

Our greatest help when the pressures of persecution arrive is the high priesthood of Jesus Christ. The book of Hebrews tells us more about the deity and priesthood of Jesus Christ than any other book in the Bible. The author has already demonstrated that Jesus more than fulfills the whole Messianic prediction of Jesus Christ as King and Priest. His priesthood was appointed by God. God has sworn an oath establishing Jesus in this priestly office which is permanent and filled by the One who has made a single, all-sufficient sacrifice.

We have perfect access to the God the Father based on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The grand theme of Hebrews is Jesus Christ who is superior to the prophets, the angels, Moses, Aaron, and the priesthood of Levi because of a better covenant, a better sanctuary, and a better sacrifice. Why would anyone want to return to the old law, the old covenant, and old sacrificial system because God has replaced it with something far better?

The author of Hebrews has now arrived at the central theme of the epistle. Hebrews chapter seven begins the heart of the doctrinal section of this profound homily where he develops the high priesthood of Christ. This is a topic he introduced early on in 2:17; 3:1; 4:14; 5:6, 10. This is the longest single expository passage the author develops and is based on Genesis 14:17-20 and Psalm 110:4.

Melchizedek's priesthood was superior to the Levitical priesthood of Aaron. Therefore, the priesthood of Jesus Christ is superior in its order to the old covenant and old priesthood.

As we examine this beautiful passage let's keep in mind that where there is light there are bugs, lots of them. Jesus Christ is the only fulfillment of this Scriptural type of Melchizedek. There are a lot of cults that latch on to the name Melchizedek. One cult even makes it into a priestly line with their own ancestral genealogy. There is no such thing as a Melchizedek Priesthood that is passed on to religious orders. Jesus Christ never ordained any individual to be a priest in the order of Melchizedek. Peter, James and John did not ordain a cult leader into the order of Melchizedek. John the Baptist did not ordain the cult leaders for Aaronic offices.

We need to limit our interpretation to the information provided in the Scripture and be careful of reading into it anything that is not there.

In order to appreciate our great High Priest and His ministry we need to understand the significance of the mystery of the person of Melchizedek.

## The Ancient Background of Melchizedek (7:1-3)

The author of Hebrews shows us that the Law proves that there is a greater priesthood than that of Aaron under the old law.

"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually" (Hebrews 7:1-3, NASB95). All Scripture references are from New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update unless otherwise noted.

I understand the word "Melchizedek" to be a proper name. It means "righteous king." He is a king of righteousness of Salem. Salem was the old name for Jerusalem meaning "founding of peace" or "possession of peace" or city of peace. We know this from Psalm 76:2. "His tabernacle is in Salem; His dwelling place also is in Zion" (Psalm 76:2).

It was common in ancient times for individuals to combine the roles of king and priest.

From Genesis 14:23-24 we know Melchizedek was a priest because he blessed Abraham, and Abraham paid tithes to him of all of the spoils he had taken in war.

Melchizedek is a priest of the Most High God. He worships the same God as did Abraham. "Most high" is a description of the majesty, power and authority of God. He is the Sovereign God. He is the one whom we worship.

It is important for the author of Hebrews to stress that Jesus was a member of Melchizedek's order, not Aaron. "Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 6:20).

Melchizedek was a type of Jesus Christ in the sense that he was both king and priest. He was a king of righteousness over the city of peace. He is a type of Christ, whose person and work fully achieves true righteousness and true peace. Christ is our righteousness; Christ is our peace.

There is no indication that Melchizedek was an angelic being or a Christophany. All indications in the Bible are that he was a historic human being who was clearly a type pointing to and finding fulfillment only in the Messiah Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter called Jesus "the Holy and Righteous One" (Acts 3:14).

By satisfying the righteousness of God as our divine substitute, Jesus Christ provides perfect peace with God for all who believe on Him. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Christ reconciles all things to Himself, "having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:20). Christ is our peace (Eph. 2:14).

Some scholars see this passage as a Christophany, the pre-incarnate appearance to Abraham by the second person of the God head. But Melchizedek loses the typology when you interpret him as a Christophany. It is best to interpret one or the other and the evidence all tends toward a type. There is probably no reason to interpret Melchizedek as a supernatural, mysterious personage.

This the first priest mentioned in the Bible. Melchizedek appears out of nowhere. He is described in the Scriptures as having no known genealogy. There is no account of his descent, or of the beginning and end of his life. He is "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life" (Hebrews 7:3). Melchizedek simply appears for a moment in time, and then vanishes from our sight, never mentioned again for another thousand years until King David writes Psalm 110:4. Then he is not mentioned for another thousand years until the writer of Hebrews picks up his pen. It is significant that Melchizedek's parentage is not recorded in Genesis. This does not mean he had no parents, but it is simply not recorded in history. The silence points to a greater truth about Christ. The story of Melchizedek brings out great theological truths about our greater High Priest.

Please remember that it is not the type that determines the antitype, but the antitype determines the type. Jesus is not portrayed after the pattern of Melchizedek, but Melchizedek is "made like unto the Son of God" (Heb. 7:3).

The historical account in Genesis 14:18-20 depicts Melchizedek as a royal priest reigning in the city of Salem, known later as Jerusalem. Of interest to Bible scholars is the fact that the book of Genesis is filled with genealogies, whereas Melchizedek, in spite of his importance, has no record. He simply appears for a moment, and then vanishes from sight. He is described in Genesis as being "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life." This is what makes him an excellent type of our ever-living eternal Savior and High Priest.

This does not mean that he was a biological abnormality or even an angel in human appearance. The important thing is the account given of Melchizedek in the Scriptures and what is not said in silence. The silences of Scripture were as much due to the divine inspiration as were its statements. Melchizedek appears as a living man, king of Salem and priest of God Most High. Then he disappears. He represented the eternal Son of God.

In the record of his life Melchizedek is indeed an appropriate type of Christ as the eternal Son of God who has "neither beginning of days nor end of life." As the king of righteousness He is exalted at the right hand of God the Father. As our great high priest He "abides a priest continually." The type Melchizedek remains a priest continually for the duration of his appearance in Genesis, but his antitype remains a priest continually without conditions or limitations upon Him. The antitype Jesus Christ is our eternal high priest without any qualifications whatsoever.

In His eternal being the Son of God has reality, as Melchizedek has typically, "neither beginning of days nor end of life." He is exalted at the right hand of the Father in heaven. He "abides a priest continually." Melchizedek remained a priest continually for the duration of his appearance in the biblical narrative. However, the antitype Jesus Christ remains a priest continually without qualification forever.

The divine commentary on this great passage in Genesis makes it very clear that Jesus Christ is the Great High Priest of whom Melchizedek was a type. Hebrews chapters five through ten explain how the priesthood of Jesus is superior to Aaron and the Levites. The whole emphasis of Hebrews is on a better priest, a better covenant, a better sanctuary, a better sacrifice and consequently better promises. Jesus is acclaimed the perpetual High Priest "after the order of Melchizedek."

Now, if Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, his priesthood must be greater than a priesthood, which traces its descent from Abraham. Abraham recognized Melchizedek's superiority by giving Melchizedek tithes and receiving his blessings. The priesthood of Melchizedek enjoys higher status than the Levitical priesthood in Hebrews. Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, not from Levi. He could never serve as a Levitical priest. Moreover, no Levite could ever serve as the Messiah King.

The perpetual priesthood of the Messiah was confirmed by a divine oath: "The LORD has sworn, and will not change His mind: Thou art a priest forever." The order of Levi had many priests in number, because they continued to die off. "The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:23–25). Jesus' eternal priesthood is similar to Melchizedek who had no descendants, and there were no priests to follow him. Melchizedek is "made like unto the son of God." The likeness of Melchizedek is to Christ in His divine eternal being person as the Son of God, not as his human incarnate life. In His divine nature the preexistent Son of God was and remains eternal. The eternal Son of God "abides a priest continually."

How then is Melchizedek greater than Abraham and the priestly tribe of Levi?

### **Significance of Melchizedek (7:4-10)**

No one is denying that Abraham was a great man of God.

"Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him" (Hebrews 7:4-10).

Remember, genealogy was important to the Jewish people. The Levitical system made the priests' pedigree of great importance. All of the priests had to be able to prove they were descendants of the priestly family of Aaron or they were excluded from priesthood (Lev. 21:16-24; Ezra 2:62). That fact makes Melchizedek stand out in this passage. He was not a Levite.

It is true that the descendants of Abraham paid tithes to their priests, the sons of Levi, but the emphasis is on how Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. Melchizedek bestowed his blessings on Abraham, and Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek. Abraham recognized the superiority of Melchizedek's order by paying tithes to him. The contrast is really between Aaron, a descendant of Abraham and Melchizedek.

The principle to keep in mind here is the greater people always bless the lesser people. Therefore Melchizedek blessed Abraham and is therefore superior over Abraham. Melchizedek is the greater and Abraham the lesser. Abraham experienced this blessing from God.

In the presentation in Genesis Abraham, Levi and the Aaronic priests all died, and Melchizedek lives on. There is no record of his death in Genesis on purpose. The silence of the record furnishes the basis for the typology. Therefore, Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, Levi and the Levitical priesthood.

What was true of Melchizedek as a type is far greater in a fuller and more literal sense of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The timelessness of the priesthood is what Melchizedek resembles the Son of God. "He abides a priest continually." "He holds His priesthood permanently, because He continues forever" (Heb. 7:24 ESV). The priesthood of Jesus Christ does not pass on to another precisely because it is a perpetual priesthood.

"And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him" (Hebrews 7:9-10). Keep in mind the culture during the time of the writing of Genesis. Back then people regarded a descendent as in one sense participating in the action of his ancestors. Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek even though he would not be born a century later. In fact, Isaac has not even been born yet. He was so to speak still in the loins of Abraham when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. In the ancient way of thinking Levi, the head of the priestly tribe of Israel, had not been born, but he was involved in everything Abraham did.

Nowhere in the Bible is there any evidence that Melchizedek conferred his priesthood on Abraham when he paid his tithe to him or any other person. Nowhere is there any Biblical claim that the Aaronic priesthood was ever incorporated into a Melchizedek priestly order. This is nonsense that cults teach. The author of Hebrews says, "Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently" (Hebrews 7:24). Jesus continues forever, so His priesthood is untransferable" (Goodspeed). The Greek word *aparabatos*, literally is "untransferable," and carries the note of finality. "Priesthood unchangeable and therefore not liable to pass to a successor" (Thrayer's *Greek-English Lexicon*). This is the only place where this word is found in the New Testament. The priesthood of Melchizedek is the peculiar possession of Jesus Christ alone. It cannot be transferred to another. The priesthood of Jesus Christ consummated the Aaronic priesthood. It terminated the Levitical order. The High Priesthood of Jesus Christ resides in the Son of God and cannot be transferred. There is no other priesthood or priestly order.

We will observe later in Hebrews 7:11-28 the superiority of Christ's priesthood which is according to Melchizedek. The superiority of Melchizedek over Levi demonstrates the superiority of Christ to the Levitical system. We can turn to our great High Priest with full assurance and security knowing He is ever ready under all conditions to listen to our intercessions and plead our case before the Father. Who is more a priest of God Most High than our Lord Jesus Christ?

## **SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS**

1. A word of caution. Keep in mind that where there is light there are bugs, lots of them. The only fulfillment of this Scriptural type of Melchizedek is Jesus Christ. There are a lot of cults that latch on to the name Melchizedek and make it into a priestly line in their cult. There is no such thing as Melchizedek Priesthood that is passed on to religious orders. Jesus Christ never ordained any individual to be a priest in the order of Melchizedek. Peter, James and John did not ordain a cult leader into the order of Melchizedek. John the Baptist did not ordain the cult leaders for Aaronic offices.

The great truth is every believer is a priest. The New Testament teaches the universal priesthood of believers. Each believer in Jesus Christ can come to God in prayer, in his own right, and that he can speak about his Lord to his fellowmen. You do not have to join a cult to be a priest! This is your right and privilege as a true Christian. Moreover, it is not limited to gender. Every believer, men and women, are priests. It is not an order; it is a privilege. The term "priest" is never used in the New Testament of a minister or order in the church. It was never introduced into the church. Having risen from the dead Jesus Christ is the priest forever.

2. We have a great High Priest who is always ready to intercede on our behalf. He is in the presence of the God the Father right now listening to our prayers. He is waiting for you to call upon Him right now.

3. There is no "if" attached to justification or eternal life because they are free gifts received upon repentance and faith. How tragic when we attach "works salvation" or "works sanctification" to God's finished work. Peace with God is based upon the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Are you claiming the great promises and blessings of God by trusting in His Word?

4. Have you ever really believed on Jesus Christ? Have you really been saved? Do you know you have been saved? Perhaps you are asking how can I really know I am saved? The Bible is very clear about how to be saved. Every individual is by nature sinful. We are far from God. The problem is how to do we deal with sin.

The message of Hebrews is so important to us because it tells us how God Himself has dealt with our sin problem. The sinner receives salvation as a free gift from God. This is why it is salvation by grace. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). No one can boast. It is not a works salvation.

The Bible is very clear that salvation is by grace alone because man is a sinner and he cannot save himself. God does for the sinner what the sinner cannot do for himself. God forgives our sins based upon the perfect sacrifice Jesus Christ made for the sinner. A great exchange has taken place because Christ died in the sinner's place on the cross. God provided the Lamb of God who would die for our sins. God Himself provides Christ as the One who would die on the cross in our place. He "bore our sins in His body" (1 Pet. 2:24). He died "the righteous for the unrighteous" to bring us to God (1 Pet. 3:18). "He [God the Father] made Him [His Son, Jesus Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). God looks on the believing sinner as if he has always been righteous and has always done what is right. God declares the believing sinner to be just in His sight. Only grace can do that. The sinner is cleansed and forgiven by God because Christ died in his place. God provided a Savior to die in our place.

One of my daughters was saved memorizing Isaiah 53:5-6. "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." (Isaiah 53:5-6). She realized that the prophet Isaiah was speaking of Jesus Christ, and she accepted as a fact the Christ died for her.

Then, perhaps you ask, how can I be saved? The Bible says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). What does it mean to believe? It is not something you have to psych yourself up to do. It is not psyching yourself up to some highly emotional religious experience. The Holy Spirit works in our hearts and minds to enable us to understand what we need to believe to be saved.

Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him" (John 3:16-17).

True faith involves believing something about yourself; you are a sinner. True faith involved believing that Christ is the Son of God who died in your place and paid the penalty for you sins and rose from the dead. Faith is an act of the mind, the will and the heart. It is the whole person trusting in Christ to save you for all eternity. It is trusting in what God had done for you in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Here is what God promises you: "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

Yes, saving faith is in part an act of your mind, and in part an act of your emotions or your heart, and it is an act of the will. God the Holy Spirit works in your person to bring you to trust in Christ alone for salvation.

Have you ever believed in Christ? If you have never received Him as your Savior, you can right now. Just pray to Him, "Lord, if I have never received you, I receive you right now. I am trusting you as my Savior."

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