



The Book of Hebrews

Chapter 7: 1-28

July 8th, 2018

The Priestly Order of Melchizedek

Chapter 7 is the focal point of Hebrews. It concerns the central, the most important, part of Judaism—the priesthood. No sacrifices could be made except by the priest and no forgiveness of sins could be had apart from the sacrifices.

A Priest With No Beginning and No End

Hebrews 7:1-10 (ESV) ¹ For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, ² and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. ³ He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever. ⁴ See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! ⁵ And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. ⁶ But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. ⁷ It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. ⁸ In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. ⁹ One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, ¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

Type - refers to an Old Testament person, practice, or ceremony representing events or aspects related to Christ that has a counterpart in the New Testament. Types are incomplete and flawed representations of what they symbolically represent or point forward to.

Antitype – found in the New Testament. Antitypes are the events, characteristics or aspects of Christ alluded to symbolically by the **type** in Old Testament scripture.

Example of a “Type”

Num. 21:8 (ESV) ⁸ And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.”

Corresponding “Anti-type”

John 3: 14-15 (ESV) ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Example of a “Type”

The sacrificial lamb offered on behalf of the Israelites by the High Priest for their transgression of the Law of Moses

Corresponding “Anti-type”

John 1:29 (ESV) ²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

Melchizedek spoken of here in Hebrews chapter 7, is also a type of Christ. The Bible gives very little historical information about Melchizedek. All that we know about him is located in **Genesis 14**, **Psalms 110**, and **Hebrews 5-7**. The most detailed information we have about him is found here in **Hebrews 7:1-3**.

Melchizedek's Superior Priesthood

Remember that Melchizedek is presented here in Hebrews only for the purpose of serving as a **type** to the **anti-type** of Christ. Thus, the characteristics of his priesthood written here in Hebrews, serve only to imperfectly point forward toward the characteristics of Christ's priesthood.

However, here in chapter 7, the author points out that Melchizedek's priesthood was superior to the Levitical priesthood in every way. We will identify five specific ways given here in Hebrews 7:1-3.

Question for Discussion: Why would the author of Hebrews feel it necessary to illustrate the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood versus its Levitical counterpart?

1) Melchizedek's Priesthood Was Universal, Not National

In relation to Israel, God took the name of *Jehovah*, or *Yahweh*. This name was uniquely related to God's covenant with Israel. It was His covenant name. The Levitical priests, therefore, were priests of Jehovah. The Israelites were Jehovah's people and the Levites were Jehovah's priests. The Levitical priests could minister only to Israel and only for Jehovah.

Melchizedek, however, was priest of the *Most High God* (*'Ēl 'Elyôn*, a more universal name for God). It represents God as possessor of heaven and earth, God above all national or dispensational distinctions. The Most High God is over both Jew and Gentile, and is first mentioned in Scripture in relation to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18).

2) Melchizedek's Priesthood Was Royal

Melchizedek was himself a king. Four times in two verses (7:1-2) he is referred to as a king. Rulership of any sort was totally foreign to the Levitical priesthood. Melchizedek had the double rank of king and priest. No Hebrew could unite these offices in his person; the only one who tried to do so was smitten with leprosy for his presumption (**2 Chron. 26:1-21**).

3) Melchizedek's Priesthood Was Righteous and Peaceful

There was no permanent righteousness or peace related to Aaron's priesthood. The purpose of the Aaronic priesthood was to obtain righteousness for the people. The sacrifices were made to restore the people to a right relationship with God. But they never succeeded. At least not in any deep and lasting way.

Melchizedek, however, was king both of righteousness and of peace. His very name means "king of righteousness." Although we have no historical record of his monarchy, we are told that he ruled righteously and peacefully. His priesthood was a better **type** of Christ's priesthood than the Levitical, but it was still a **type**.

Romans 5:1 (ESV) ¹ *Therefore, since we have been justified [made righteous] by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Melchizedek, though king of righteousness and of peace, could not make men righteous or give them peace. Only the Divine Priest could give righteousness and peace. That is the necessary order: righteousness and then peace. Christ gives us peace by giving us righteousness.

4) Melchizedek's Priesthood was Personal, Not Hereditary

The Levitical priesthood was entirely hereditary, through Aaron. From the beginning of the Aaronic priesthood, genealogy determined everything, personal qualification nothing. If you descended from Aaron, you could serve; if you did not, you could not.

Melchizedek's priesthood was a **type** of Christ's, not because he had no genealogy, but because like Christ, his genealogy was not significant in regard to his priesthood. To be sure, Jesus' royal genealogy is important. But, His lineage is not traced to Aaron or Levi, but to Judah. Jesus Christ, though God's own Son, was not qualified for the Levitical priesthood. Like Melchizedek, as far as his priesthood was concerned, He had no priestly genealogy and He needed none.

Hebrews 7:16 (ESV) ¹⁶ *who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.*

Like Melchizedek, Jesus' qualifications were personal, not hereditary.

5) Melchizedek's Priesthood is Eternal, Not Temporary

Individually, a priest served only from the time he was 25 until he was 50. No priest, no matter how faithful, could serve more than 25 years.

Melchizedek's priesthood, however, had no such time limits or restrictions... *"he continues a priest forever"*. It is not that he lived forever, but that the order of priesthood in which he ministered was forever. The fact that we have no biblical or other record of the beginning or end of Melchizedek's personal priesthood simply **symbolizes** the eternity of his priestly order.

Melchizedek's priesthood was symbolically a type of Christ's truly eternal priesthood. Christ, "because He abides forever, holds His priesthood permanently. As a result, *He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them*" (**Heb. 7:24-25**).

Superiority of Melchizedek's Priesthood Proved

In verses 4 through 10, we are given three reasons, or proofs, as to how and why Melchizedek's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood.

1) Abraham Gave a Tithe to Melchizedek

Though Melchizedek was a king, he had not fought with Abraham against Chedorlaomer. Nor do we have any record, or reason to believe, that Melchizedek had ever performed any priestly service for Abraham. Abraham simply recognized Melchizedek as a deserving and faithful priest of God Most High and consequently gave him a tithe from the best of his spoils. It was a voluntary act revealing thanks to God.

Hebrews 7:4-10 makes the case for the superiority of Melchizedek's over the Levitical priesthood in that Abraham, the common and supreme ancestor, paid tithes to Melchizedek. Since Abraham was the progenitor of both Levi and Aaron, in essence the Levites, "in advance," so to speak, also paid tithes to Melchizedek. Even before they existed, those to whom tithes were paid had themselves paid a tithe to another priesthood, proving that Melchizedek's priesthood was superior to theirs.

2) Melchizedek Blessed Abraham

In verse 7 we read... *"It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior."* As the blesser, Melchizedek indisputably was superior to Abraham. If Melchizedek was superior to Abraham, then he must also be superior to the Levites, Abraham's descendants. Consequently, his priesthood is superior to theirs.

3) Melchizedek's Priesthood Is Eternal

The scripture here points out the permanence of Melchizedek's priesthood... *"but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever."* Even if the Levitical priests had not been required to quit ministering when they reached 50 years of age, they would have ceased ministering when they died.

Since no death is recorded for Melchizedek, his priesthood symbolically and in **type**, is eternal. In this his priesthood would be clearly superior to that of the Levitical.

A Perfect Priesthood

Hebrews 7: 11-19 (ESV) ¹¹ *Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of*

Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? ¹² For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. ¹³ For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. ¹⁵ This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, ¹⁶ who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." ¹⁸ For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

The singularly greatest point in this section of scripture, is the concept of one's ability to draw near to God in verse 19. Aaron's priests could never bring a man fully to God. There was always a barrier in between. The veil could not be removed because sin had not been fully done away.

God never intended for the Levitical priesthood to remain forever, and nowhere in Scripture was this idea taught. The Old Testament, in fact, anticipated (as in **Ps. 110:4**) that another priesthood was coming. If God predicted another priesthood was coming, it would have been reasonable to assume that the new one would be better and would replace the old. Israel was told that a greater priesthood was to come, of which the Messiah would be the Priest.

The goals both of the Aaronic priesthood and of the Mosaic law were to bring men to God. They were both imperfect in achieving this goal. Here in Hebrews, the author is powerfully proclaiming to the Jews that a perfect priesthood has arrived. The most important result of this perfect priesthood? ... that we now have access to God!

John 14:6 ⁶ *"No one comes to the Father, but through Me."*

Hebrews 10: 1-2 (ESV) ¹ *For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. ² Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins?*

The fact that the Messiah was a priest after the order of Melchizedek now opened the way. He could remove the veil because He atoned for sin. He actually bore our sin; the Levitical sacrifices only symbolically anticipated its cancellation. And now that sin had actually been dealt with, the Levitical priesthood was no longer necessary, and God set it aside.

The prophet Jeremiah clearly and boldly predicted this New Covenant instituted by a perfect High Priest, Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah 31: 31-34 (ESV) ³¹ *"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."*

Jesus, the Perfect Priest

Hebrews 7: 20-28 (ESV) ²⁰ *And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, ²¹ but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever.'" ²² This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. 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. 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.*

In this section of scripture, the Holy Spirit is telling us that Jesus as a superior priest in three ways.

1) Guarantee of a Better Covenant

God did not swear to Aaron that his priesthood would be forever. In fact God never suggested, to Aaron or to anyone else, that that priesthood would be anything but temporary. However, many Israelites no doubt thought that it would be permanent, but their belief had no basis in Scripture.

But with Christ He swore an eternal priesthood. Here in verse 21, the author points back to what David wrote about in **Psalm 110:4**...*"The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, You are a priest forever."* To make the point more emphatic, David added in Psalms, *"will not change His mind"*.

2) Eternal Priest and Savior

The Levitical priests had what might be called the ultimate disqualification for permanent ministry: death. None of them could serve indefinitely. Each died and had to be succeeded in order for the priesthood to continue. Once again, the Jewish readers are reminded of the limitations of the Old Covenant. Levitical priests were temporary and the atonement achieved through their sacrificial offerings were as well.

Christ, because He abides forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Jesus is the superior High Priest because He needs no successor. His priesthood is permanent, eternal.

Permanently (*aparabatos*) means more than incidental permanence, or something that simply will not be changed. It means unchangeable, unalterable, inviolable—something that cannot be changed. Jesus' priesthood does not just happen to be permanent. It cannot possibly be anything but permanent. He is the last high priest. No other will ever be needed.

Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. **(7:25)**. Jesus' priesthood not only is eternal and unalterable, but is also unlimited in its scope. He saves forever (*panteles*). Although the meaning in the context of 7:25 can be that of eternal, the basic idea of the word is that of completeness or perfection.

3) Holy and Sinless Priest

All the Levitical priests were sinful, and they had to offer sacrifices for themselves before they could offer them for the people. Not so with Christ. He is holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. It was fitting, necessary, that He be such a person.

Because Christ is perfect and sinless, He does not need to offer sacrifices for Himself, like the Levitical high priests. Sinlessness needs no sacrifice. Jesus offered only one sacrifice, and that one not for Himself but for others. He did it once. A perfect sacrifice by a perfect Priest and it was done—for all time.