



19: Melchizedek

At the end of chapter 6 the writer of the book of Hebrews finished his warning and, with a clever twist, brought us full-circle back to the point where it started. He's now set to press on with that difficult to explain teaching about Melchizedek and Jesus' High Priesthood that he temporarily set to the side in chapter 5 verse 10.

"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "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, remains a priest continually.

Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham; but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better. Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives. Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar.

For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of

Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. For He testifies:

"You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek."

For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him:

"The LORD has sworn
And will not relent,
'You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek'"),

by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.

Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Hebrews 7:1-25

The point the writer was making back in chapter 5 and that he continues with here is that Jesus is a better priest than any of the Aaronic priests because He has been appointed by God as a priest "according to the order of Melchizedek."

In the verses we're looking at this evening, first he's going to tell us about what kind of priest Melchizedek was (7:1 – 3), next he's going to show us that Melchizedek, as a priest, was superior to Aaron (7:4 – 10) and then, thirdly, he's going to start us thinking about Jesus as our High Priest and show us that His priesthood is of the same kind as Melchizedek's and so better than that of Aaron or any of the others who came after him (7:11 – 28).

What Kind of Priest Was Melchizedek (7:1 – 3)?

Melchizedek's name appears twice in the Old Testament: in Genesis 14:18 – 20 and in Psalm 110:4.

Melchizedek was king of Salem — probably an earlier name for Jerusalem (see Psalm 76:2) — but it's not so important to know where he was king of as it is to know that he was a king.

Melchizedek was also a priest of the Most High God. "Most High God" makes it clear that he was a priest of the one true God — the God of the Bible — not merely of one of the false gods of Canaan. It seems that there must have been others apart from Abraham who worshipped the Lord in those days. And notice that the writer doesn't just call Melchizedek a priest and leave it at that. He proves it by pointing out that he did what priests do when he blessed Abraham. Not only that, Abraham acknowledged Melchizedek as a priest when he gave him a tenth of his spoils of battle. The point to note being that Abraham acknowledged a priest who had no connection whatever with Aaron.

Melchizedek's name means "king of righteousness" and "king of peace," which would make you think of Jesus, wouldn't it?

Melchizedek lacked many of the qualifications that a Jewish priest was supposed to have. Every Aaronic priest had to be able to trace his genealogy (Ezra 7:63-63). He was restricted in who he could marry. Both his male and female lines of descent mattered (Ezra 44:22; Leviticus 21:7). There was a beginning and an end to his days of service: at the age of twenty-five he was allowed to minister to the other priests but he could only enter full service at thirty and he had to retire when he was fifty. Melchizedek, on the other hand, was "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life." That doesn't mean that he actually had no father or mother and was never born and didn't die. The point is that as far as the Bible record is concerned we're not given those details, as we would have been if we were to be convinced that he was a priest like Aaron. So we can conclude that to qualify as a priest of the kind Melchizedek was those things don't matter.

- ◆ *Why do you think it was important for the writer of the book of Hebrews to make each of these points?*

In all these respects Melchizedek "has been made like (resembles) the Son of God." And because he is like Jesus the Son of God he "remains a priest continually." In other words, his kind of priesthood lives on in

Jesus. Don't miss the point that it's not the Son of God who resembles Melchizedek, but Melchizedek who resembles the Son of God.

People speculate beyond what we're told here and in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110. It's been said, for example, that Melchizedek was the Holy Spirit or an angel or even a preincarnate appearance of the Son of God in human form. Of all the ideas going about, only that last one deserves serious consideration, but it seems clear from what we're told here in the book of Hebrews that Melchizedek and the Son of God are two distinct persons. We have no good reason to think that Melchizedek was anything other than a man who was a priest of God.

In verses 1 to 3 the writer has established that it's possible that there's such a thing as a kind of priesthood other than the Aaronic priesthood that was respected by Abraham, that a priest of this kind could also be a king and that the holder of this priesthood is meant to be considered to be like the Son of God.

Melchizedek Was A Better Kind Of Priest Than Aaron (7:4 – 10)

Abraham was a great man but going by the story of his encounter with Melchizedek it looks like Melchizedek was greater because Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, paid a tithe to Melchizedek.

Abraham's tithe didn't just represent personal respect for Melchizedek. Abraham was acting as the father of the nation of Israel when he gave it so his tithe represented the respect of the whole nation. It acknowledged that the priesthood of Melchizedek was superior to anything Abraham had within himself and therefore superior to anything that would ever be found among his descendants. It was equivalent to David and Solomon, and all the prophets, and priests, and kings of Israel, bowing to the priesthood of Melchizedek. You could say, Melchizedek received tithes from Levi, Abraham's great-grandson (verses 9 and 10).

In addition to paying him a tithe, Abraham accepted a blessing from Melchizedek and so acknowledged Melchizedek's spiritual superiority. "Beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better."

Melchizedek's kind of priesthood wasn't restricted to a particular family or a particular period of time. When the writer says of Melchizedek, "it is witnessed that he lives" he's probably referring back to Psalm 110:4.

"You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek."

He doesn't mean that Melchizedek never died; he means that Melchizedek's kind of priesthood, unlike Aarons kind which was temporary, is forever.

Jesus Is A Priest Of The Melchizedek Kind (7:11 – 28)

In verses 11 to 28 the writer takes his argument forward by drawing some conclusions from what he's just written.

He tells us that the Aaronic priesthood must always have been meant to be superseded. If that hadn't been God's intention there would have been no need for a priesthood like Melchizedek's (verse 11). What's more, if the Aaronic priesthood was always meant to be replaced then it was also God's intention that the whole system that went with it — the law and the temple — should be replaced too (verse 12).

Jesus — "He of whom these things are spoken — comes from a tribe that has no priests in it (verses 13 – 14) but is a priest of the Melchizedek kind. A new order, with Jesus as it's perpetual High Priest (verses 15 – 17), has arrived to replace the old Aaronic system and that new order is better than the old in three ways: it introduces a better hope by which we may draw near to God (verses 18 – 19); it's built on an oath sworn by God (verses 20 – 22) and it is unchangeable because Jesus lives forever (verses 23 – 25).

- ◆ *In what way's, according to this passage, was the Old Testament priestly system deficient?*
- ◆ *In what ways is the new system, under Jesus high priesthood better?*