

“Melchizedek, a Perpetual Priest”
Hebrews 7:1-10

Introduction: The author to the Hebrews, you will recall, has been comparing Christ to the Old Testament mediators. He compared Christ with the angels, to show that Christ is greater, since He is the Son of God, whereas the angels are merely His servants who worship Him, and who render service for those who will inherit salvation. He compared Christ next with Moses and Joshua, to show us that although both of these were faithful servants in the house of God, yet Christ is the builder of the house who has much more glory. For although Moses led the people out of the iron furnace of Egypt, yet he was not able to bring the people of God into God’s promised rest. And even though Joshua was able to bring the people into the land, he was not able to bring them into the full rest of God. But Jesus could, and He in fact did. He became lower than the angels and was made a man, that He might become for us a faithful and merciful high priest, to bring us to God.

Throughout this book, as I have said, the author lays a great deal of stress on this priesthood of Christ. It is one of the three offices that Christ holds as a part of His mediation. He is a prophet, king and a priest. But it is particularly in His priesthood that our salvation lies. He began to tell us more about this in chapter 5, but then had to stop to exhort his hearers again because of their lack of maturity and ability to handle these things. He was not yet able to teach them what he believed was necessary for their spiritual well-being. But now that this exhortation is over, he again begins to pick up what he left off in 5:9-10, where he writes, “And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.” It is this Melchizedek whom the author deals with in this passage this evening. And the basic thing he sets out to prove is that,

Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, therefore his priesthood is greater than that of Levi.

I. First he tells us that this Melchizedek is a type of Christ. A type, you will recall, is a picture which foreshadows something else of greater importance, yet to be revealed. This Melchizedek was a picture of the Christ who was coming.

A. We are introduced to Melchizedek in Genesis 14:17-20.

1. This is really the only place that he shows up in the history which the Bible presents to us.
2. In this passage, there were four kings (whose names were Amraphel of Shinar, Arioch of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer of Elam, and Tidal of Goiim), who had made war with the five kings of the valley (Bera of Sodom, Birsha of Gomorrah, Shinab of Admah, Shemeber of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela).
 - a. At that time, Lot was living in Sodom, and as a result of that war, he had been carried off as a captive.
 - b. When a fugitive came and told Abram about it, he led out his trained men, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them.
 - c. With God’s help, they were able to defeat them and bring back all of the goods, along with his nephew Lot, and all of the people they had taken.

3. It is here that we learn about Melchizedek. Moses writes, “Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, ‘Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.’ And he gave him a tenth of all” (Gen. 14:17-20).
 4. Outside of this passage, he is only mentioned in one other Old Testament text: Psalm 110:4, “The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘Thou art a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.’”
 - a. This psalm is a Messianic psalm, where Christ’s office of King and Priest is highlighted.
 - b. David begins by saying, “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet’” (v. 1).
 - c. This speaks of the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of the Father at the ascension, and the beginning of His Mediatorial reign until all of His enemies are subdued under His feet, beginning with the Jews.
 - d. But in the midst of this glorious psalm, which tells us of the coming age of the Messiah, there is this one verse which speaks of the priesthood of Christ, that He would not be in the line of Levi, for it was already plain that He was to be born of the tribe of Judah, the kingly line, as a son of David. He was to be according to the order of Melchizedek. Here is the only other possible priesthood which Christ could be in, for it is the only other one mentioned in Scripture, unless, of course, God wanted to establish a new one.
- B. But who is this obscure figure who just seems to materialize at the time of Abraham, and then falls again into obscurity? We actually learn more about him here than in any other portion of Scripture. And here we find many things about him which foreshadow for us the person and work of Christ. The author writes, “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 abides a priest perpetually” (vv. 1-3).
1. We learn first of all that he was a king.
 - a. His name literally means “king of righteousness.” The Hebrew work for king is ‘מל,מ,,’ and the word for righteousness is ‘qd,c,.’
 - b. But we also learn from the account in Genesis that he was the king of a city by the name of Salem. The Hebrew word for Salem, ‘~lev’, means peace. Some believe that Salem is the ancient name of Jerusalem and that Melchizedek could have been its king. The word Jerusalem means “seeing peace” (JFB *Sage* 2:1060).

- c. It is not unusual that his names and titles translate out into these meanings, for just about every name in Hebrew seems to be a word or a sentence which means something else. Abraham, for instance, means the father of nations. Sarah means princess. Isaac means laughter.
 - d. But it is interesting that this Melchizedek has the titles king of righteousness and king of peace. Though these specific titles are not given to Christ in Scripture, titles like them are. He is the “Lord our righteousness” (Jer. 23:6) and the “Prince of peace” (Is. 9:6).
2. We learn secondly that he was a priest, a “priest of the Most High God.”
- a. This may seem strange to us, since we usually don’t think of there being any other priests besides those who are of the tribe of Levi. This is still several years before there would be a Levitical priesthood, about 400 years.
 - b. And yet, perhaps it shouldn’t seem so strange, since we find in the book of Numbers that there was at least one prophet besides Moses, who was also outside of the covenant community, namely Balaam (Num. 22-24).
 - c. And perhaps we don’t often think about it, but there were still several patriarchs still living at the time of Abraham, such as Noah, Shem, Arphaxad, Selah, Eber, Reu and Job. If the genealogies in the book of Genesis are complete, which many believe them to be, Abraham could have known these men. The reason why they are not mentioned could again be that the focus of redemptive history has moved away from them to their posterity. Time keeps moving forward, and so does the progress of God’s redemptive plan.
 - d. But Melchizedek, as a priest, was ministering to the Most High God. This man blessed Abram and received from him one tenth of the spoils, or a tithe. It was the priests, after all, that blessed in the name of the Lord, such as that which we see in the Aaronic Benediction (Num. 6:24-26), and received the tithes of the peoples of Israel.
 - e. But notice again the similarity to Christ. We know that Christ was not only a King, but also a priest. The patriarchs appeared to function as all three. Abraham rules his house, which as we have seen was quite extensive and powerful. He was called a prophet by God to Abimelech (Gen. 20:7). And he made sacrifices to God. This was true of Moses, as well. And it seemed to hold true until the Lord set aside the tribe of Levi to minister to Him. After that, there were priests, prophets and kings as separate groups. But there were from time to time those who again incorporated all three offices in their person, such as Samuel and David, who in this respect, were also pictures of Christ. But when Christ came, He again exercised the prerogatives of all three offices, and in so doing, puts an end to the earthly offices, it appears, by the close of the Old Covenant economy in 70 A.D. at the destruction of the Temple, having become the fulfillment of everything that these were pointing to. The apostles seemed to have incorporated all three in their persons as well. But once they had done their work, and the new age had come, the age of the new covenant, there was no longer need for these things. The church had reached her age of maturity.
3. But that which marks Melchizedek more than anything else as a type of Christ is

verse three, “Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, He abides a priest perpetually.”

- a. Because of this verse, there have been many different interpretations of who Melchizedek was.
- b. Some see him as a supernatural being, perhaps a preincarnate appearance of Christ, or a Theophany of the Holy Spirit, or an angel. Certainly the Son of God did appear to several of His people in the Old Covenant. He also could have been said not to have had an earthly father or mother, nor any beginning of days nor end of life. Therefore He could abide as a priest perpetually. An angel could also fit this description, in this sense.
- c. Still others believe that Melchizedek could have been Shem, or a Shemite, perhaps the last of the descendents of Shem in any other line, outside of Abraham’s, the rest of them having been destroyed by the descendents of Ham.
- d. But, whoever he was, he certainly could not have been Christ, since he was said not to be Him, “But made *like* the Son of God.” He was a picture of Christ, who was the archetype, or the original. He pictures Christ in His office as priest and as king. Notice who comes first. It is not Melchizedek, but the Son of God, for Melchizedek is made like Him, not He like Melchizedek.
- e. Melchizedek must certainly have been, therefore, a person living at the time of Abraham. He was a priest, and he was a king. The reference to his being without father and mother, does not mean that he had none, but it means either that he not have the right lineage to be a Levitical priest, or that he was one of humble parentage, of no reputation.
- f. And the reference to his abiding a priest perpetually must therefore have reference to his office, rather than to his person, for if he still remained a priest, then there would be two priests in the Melchizedekian priesthood, which is impossible. When the author says that he had no beginning of days nor end of life, he is probably referring to the lack of a record of his birth and death. In this sense, he is like Christ in that it is witnessed that he lives on.

II. But as we consider this man, let us not forget the main purpose why the author is bringing him into the picture. It is to prove that Christ is a great high Priest in another order which is far superior to that of Aaron. This is what the author will begin to show us in the remainder of our passage. He writes, “Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoil.” He does this by way of three arguments which he draws from the Genesis passage. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, Abraham was blessed by him, and Melchizedek’s priesthood continues.

- A. First, Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek.
 1. The assumption is that if you pay tithes to someone, you are submitting to their office on behalf of God.
 - a. He writes, “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” (v. 5).
 - b. Not all of the Levites were priests. Only those who were the descendents of Aaron.

- c. But these were authorized by God to collect a tenth from their brethren for their livelihood. The people that gave the money were actually giving the money to God. But God had told them that He wanted to give the money to the Levites for their support, since they did not receive any land. The Levites in turn would give a tithing of that tithing to the priests for their support (Num. 18:22-28). The same principle works today with regard to those who teach and preach in God's church. Paul writes, "Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the *food* of the temple, *and* those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:13-14).
 - d. The people are supporting the office-bearers through their giving to God, and they are submitting themselves to this ordinance for the Lord's sake, for the Lord allows them to stand in His place to receive His tithes. This is a great honor.
2. But the important thing to see here is that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek.
- a. He writes in verse 6, "But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them [that is, the Levites] collected a tenth from Abraham," and again in verses 8-10, "And 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."
 - b. The fact that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek meant that he recognized the honor bestowed on him by God. He gave Melchizedek a tenth of the "choicest spoils" (v. 4).
 - c. But Levi was still in his loins when he paid them, that is, Levi was not born yet. And so in a manner of speaking, Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek. Now he did not do this literally and really, so that he did everything that Abraham did and became equally responsible with him in his deeds. This is the way that some attempt to explain the Fall. We were in Adam's loins when he sinned and therefore are responsible for his sin. But this would not explain why it was only that *one* sin that we were held accountable for. Instead what is meant here is that he did so "in a manner of speaking." If Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, thus making Melchizedek greater than Abraham, and Abraham is greater than Levi, since Abraham was his father, then Levi must be lesser than Melchizedek.
 - d. Therefore the Melchizedekian priesthood is greater than that of Levi.
- B. But the second argument is even stronger than the first. Melchizedek blessed Abraham.
- 1. He writes, "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."
 - 2. If you will trace through the Bible you will find that this principle holds true in every case. It was the place of the superior to bless the inferior, never the other way around.

- a. And so Isaac, before he died, blessed his two sons, Jacob and Esau (Gen. 27).
 - b. And Jacob, just before he died, blessed the two sons of Joseph (Gen. 48:15-16).
 - c. Moses blessed the people of Israel before they entered into the Promised Land (Deu. 1:11). Balaam blessed Israel, when Balak tried to get him to curse them (Josh. 24:10), because Balak knew that the one whom he blessed was blessed, and the one whom he cursed was cursed (Num. 22:6).
 - d. The Lord commanded Aaron to bless His people in His name (Num. 6:22-26). And we see the Apostles doing the same thing at the end of their apostolic letters.
 - e. There is authority which comes from holding office, whether it be patriarch, prophet, priest, king, apostle, or elder. These have authority to bless the people in the name of the Lord.
 - f. There is certainly a blessing which we should ask the Lord to grant one another as His children. But there is also a blessing which comes with greater authority to those under their charge.
 - g. But the point we don't want to miss is that Melchizedek blessed Abraham, the one who had the promises. Abraham was a great man and a man greatly blessed of God. He had given to him the first revelation of the covenant of Grace. But Melchizedek is greater, for he blessed the man who had the promises.
- C. The last argument is that Melchizedek lives on, whereas the Levitical priests do not. "And in this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on" (v. 8).
1. As I said, the Scripture makes no mention of the death of Melchizedek, so he appears to live on.
 2. And yet he doesn't live on, but the One who occupies this office in this order does, namely Christ, who holds His priesthood according to the power of an indestructible life.
 3. The Levitical priests were limited by time, as we all are. But Christ is not, for He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8). Melchizedek's order is therefore superior to that of Aaron.
 4. The point which the author will make regarding this is that Christ is of this superior order, and because He is, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him. Let us therefore draw near to God through our Savior and ask Him for His blessing. Let us ask Him for the grace that we need to serve Him in His kingdom this upcoming week. And let us ask Him to cleanse us of all of our sins and failures.