

MELCHIZEDEK WHO?

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from Jerry Vines Ministries
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Let's Begin

Heroes are a staple of growing up. American children buy baseball trading cards and swap them among themselves. On the other hand, while children in Jerusalem's ultra-orthodox neighborhoods cannot indulge in secular heroes, they collect and trade rabbi cards just as passionately. It seems that no matter the culture, heroes are somehow a significant element.

The Bible is filled with heroes. As we shall see in a few weeks, an entire chapter revolves around heroes of faith (chapter 11). For now, however, we will focus on a mysterious hero named Melchizedek. Only twice prior to Hebrews is he mentioned in Scripture (Gen. 14:18; Psalm 110:4). Yet, the author of Hebrews makes him front page news with the focus of an entire chapter (cp. also 5:6-10; 6:20).

As we attempt to understand Melchizedek, there are three perspectives we must consider. The outline below will direct our journey through chapter seven:

- I. We Must Consider Melchizedek Typically (vv. 1-10)
- II. We Must Consider Melchizedek Legally (vv.11-22)
- III. We Must Consider Melchizedek Practically (vv. 23-28)

I. We Must Consider Melchizedek Typically (vv. 1-10)

Because of false teaching and severe persecution by the Jewish elite, the Hebrew believers were tempted to go back to Temple worship including the entire sacrificial system of Moses. The author passionately exhorted the believers to see that Old Testament rituals were obsolete, and priests were unneeded. In fact, the church had a better priest in Jesus Christ. Contrary to Jesus being a better priest, some had the idea that since Jesus came from Judah and not Levi, He could not be a better priest. The truth is, not being a Levite, He could not be a priest at all!

The Hebrews author then dropped a bombshell: Jesus was not called a priest after the order of Levi, but "Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:10). That would make Jesus'

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priesthood pre-dating Aaron's priesthood by several centuries! The Hebrews were unprepared to hear such a statement. The author is now ready to tease this truth out. He writes, "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 by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually." (Heb. 7:1-3).

In order to understand Melchizedek properly, we must think in terms of *types*. A type is a symbol of something in the future which serves as a prefiguration. Biblically speaking, a *type* is an Old Testament picture of a New



Reflection Connection

As you think about “types” in the Old Testament, what are some other “types” which serve as Old Testament pictures of Jesus? Be prepared to share with the entire group.

Testament truth. For example, the lamb without blemish offered on the Jewish altar was a picture of the coming Christ who would be slain for sin (cp. Lev. 4:32; 9:3; 14:10). Similarly, Melchizedek was a real person who was a picture of Jesus as priest. He was not Jesus, but an Old Testament picture of Him.

More importantly, the author gives two distinct ways Melchizedek pictures Jesus. *First, Melchizedek pictures Jesus by the titles he bears.* Note the titles Melchizedek possesses (vv. 1-3):

- ♦ **King/priest:** In Israel the king was distinct from the priest. In fact, King Saul acted wrongly in fulfilling priestly duties and was severely judged (1 Sam. 13:8-14; see also, Uzziah, 2 Chron. 26:18-20). No priest was ever king and no king was priest. Jesus, however, broke the mold for He was/is both (Zech. 6:13).
- ♦ **King of righteousness/peace:** These two attributes meet in Jesus. The purpose of the priest is to make man right with God, to make peace. Christ makes provision through His cross.
- ♦ **Eternal:** Melchizedek possesses no genealogy; he is “without father, without mother, without descent,” pointing to the changeless, unending priesthood of Christ. Just as suddenly as he appears, Melchizedek disappears. So too, coming from eternity Christ appeared in time and returned to eternity.

Second, Melchizedek pictures Jesus by the tithes he brings. The author of Hebrews writes, “Now consider how great this man *was*, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better. And here men that die receive tithes; but there he *receiveth them*, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchizedek met him” (Heb. 7:4-10).

According to Jewish law, Levitical priests received tithes from Jewish worshippers (Lev. 27:30-32). However, the author of Hebrews throws his readers a flaming fast

ball. Melchizedek received tithes from the Levites via their father, Abraham. Levi was “yet in the loins of his father” when Abraham met Melchizedek and paid him tithes. The point he makes is, the priesthood of Melchizedek is superior to the Levites. The “less is blessed of the better” (v. 7). Christ has a superior priesthood because He is of the order of Melchizedek. The rhetorical question the author asks is, why go back to an inferior priesthood when we have Jesus Christ? Melchizedek pictures our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus.

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II. We Must Consider Melchizedek Legally (vv. 11-22)

Jesus not only is superior to the Old Testament priests, He supersedes them. The author continues, “If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, what further need *was there* that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law... For *it is* evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchizedek there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou *art* a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” (Heb. 7:11-17).

The author offers two legal aspects in understanding the Melchizedek priesthood. First, note the *tribe* from which the priesthood sprang. The Old Testament priesthood was both imperfect and incomplete. The priests from Aaron’s loins were to help people live fulfilling lives while coping with life’s problems, guilt, and stress-related uncertainties. Yet, they lacked “perfection” in doing so. Hence, a new priest—or, in the author’s words, “another priest”—from “another tribe” arose from a superior lineage, the lineage of Melchizedek. Obviously, he is referring to Jesus.

In addition, with the new priest came a “change also of the law” based on the “power of an endless life.” Christ’s priesthood was not based on his family tree as was the Levitical priests. Instead the resurrection from the dead established His Divine lineage.

Second, note the *testimony* upon which the priesthood is built (vv. 18-22). The author refers to the “disannulling of the commandment” (v.18). God set aside the law and replaced it with something better. After all, the law was “weak.” While it could show us we are sinners, the law possessed no power to either change or redeem us (cp. Rom. 8:3). However, the “bringing in of a better hope *did*; by the which we draw nigh unto God” (v.19). Our hope in Christ makes us close to God, the very thing the Old Testament priesthood desired but had no ability to accomplish. Even more, we have a “surety” based upon our new priest, the Lord Jesus (v. 22) which guarantees our salvation in Him (v. 25).

Reflection Connection

Take a moment and think about your family heritage. What value do you place upon it? Do you think you have a tendency to overstate or understate its value? Explain.

III. We Must Consider Melchizedek Practically (vv. 23-28)

The author sums up his focus on Melchizedek with a practical application. Biblical teaching is never a means to merely disseminate information. Rather Biblical truth is always shared as a means to either bring lost people to Christ or to develop more deeply a believer’s relationship with the Lord.

Even so, the author delivers two practical truths which we will consider. First, Jesus as our High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek means we have a *permanent salvation* (vv. 23-25). He writes, “And they truly were many priests,



because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this *man*, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:23-25). Why would it be necessary for "many priests" under the Old Testament priesthood? Once simple reason—they died! Hence, the priestly work could be thwarted by means of death (cp. Num. 20:23-29).

Contrarily, Jesus continues forever. Death has no hold upon Him.

Consequently, we have a permanent salvation; that is, He is able to save us to the "uttermost," seeing He "ever liveth to make intercession for them." As the source of our salvation, Christ's work never ceases. Nor is the scope of our salvation stunted for we are saved "to the uttermost." Indeed He continues to stand in the gap between us and God. John says if we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1). Therefore, as our Divine defense attorney, He pleads our case always before our heavenly Judge. Our security rests with Him not with us. Were it up to us, we would all be lost. He saves us and keeps us forever.

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Second, Jesus as our High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek means we have a *permanent sacrifice*. This too lends itself toward our eternal security in him. The author writes, "For such an high priest became us, *who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore*" (Heb. 7:26-28). In essence, our salvation is permanent because His sacrifice is permanent.

The author says Christ as high priest "became us." By this he means He was "fitted" to us. In other words, He exactly suits our needs. In addition, while some priests were unholy and immoral, Jesus is just the opposite. He is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." In every way, Jesus met the perfect expectations of the Father. Though tempted in every way as we are, He remained untainted by sin. The Second Adam stood where the first Adam fell (cp. Rom. 5:12-18). More importantly, Jesus settled for all time when He shed His blood at Calvary. No more sacrifice for sin is either needed or available. What Jesus did once, He did once and for all (cp. Heb. 9:26-28). Christ's sacrifice is permanent.

Reflection Connection

How does knowing we have permanent life in Jesus Christ affect the way you live? Explain. Do you think it gives people license to live as they please? Why or why not?



Golden Greek Nugget

In speaking of the superiority of Jesus as priest according to the order of Melchizedek, the author says there was a “disannulling of the commandment” (v.18). The Greek noun translated “disannulling,” is *athetesis*, and means “a setting aside” or an “abolition.” Something has been cancelled. In this particular case, the animal sacrifices have been set aside since a greater, permanent sacrifice has come to the forefront of God’s redemption plan—the sacrifice of His only begotten Son.

Wrap Up

In this chapter, we have discovered a new hero—Melchizedek. He is the perfect of Jesus in the Old Testament. Having a mysterious genealogy, he received tithes from the father of all who have faith, Abraham. Hence, he is better than Aaronic priests since priests according to the Levitical lineage paid tithes to Melchizedek while they were still in Abraham’s loins over four centuries before Aaron lived. Jesus, therefore, establishes a better priesthood and offers a better service since He ever lives to make intercession for the people of God.

