

THE STAND

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE HEBREWS CHAPTER 7



Chapter 7 Commentary

As we enter into Chapter 7, we will finally get some details about this mysterious person named Melchizedek. The original audience would have also been looking forward to this part of the writer's message. If we intend to understand the importance of Chapter 7 we must consider what was going through the mind of the original audience.

In the Jewish nation, all the kings came from the line of Judah. God specifically set aside the line of Judah as the line of Kings. Jesus was no exception. Scripture clearly shows us that Jesus was also a descendent of the tribe of Judah. Some of the Jews may have still struggled with the fact that Jesus' Kingdom would not be a typical earthly kingdom. However, few would argue that He was eligible to be a Jewish King because of His lineage. The priesthood was a different story.

The priests were all from the tribe of Levi. To be specific, they were all from the family line of Aaron. This is why the Old Testament priesthood is referred to as the Levitical priesthood or the Aaronic priesthood. The writer of Hebrews is claiming that Jesus is a priest, but His lineage clearly does not come from the family line of Aaron or even the tribe of Levi. As well, we never see one of these Judean kings hold both the office of king and priest. However, the writer of Hebrews has continued to convince his audience that Christ holds both offices. This long awaited portion of the writer's message is going to help bring some clarity to these First Century Jews on how Christ can be both Priest and King. For us today, we will be able to build on the foundation that everything in the Old Testament Law and sacrificial system really pointed to Jesus. In fact, we will actually see that Christ's priesthood and purpose preceded all of the religious systems that some of these Jews were still afraid to leave.

Names have significance. Today, parents will name children after family members. These names are intended to remind the generations to come of the great patriarchs of their family. Other times, parents will name their child after people that have influenced their life. From the beginning of time, names have been carefully chosen, and their meanings hold great significance. We will be reminded of this as we look at Melchizedek.

We have heard the name of Melchizedek mentioned a few times already, but with no explanation of this little known character in the Bible. The name Melchizedek actually means "king of righteousness." The writer also says that Melchizedek was the King of Salem, or Jerusalem. The word "salem" translates to "peace." We learn just from his name and title that Melchizedek was the king of righteousness and peace. In every way this title foreshadows Jesus Christ.

We only see one story in Scripture involving Melchizedek and only a hand full of references elsewhere in Scriptures, so we know very little about this great king. In Genesis 14, Abraham met Melchizedek on his way back from rescuing Lot, his nephew. When Abraham met Melchizedek, he gave this priest of the Most High God a tenth of his plunder from battle. In fact, Abraham gave Melchizedek the best of the spoils and Melchizedek blessed him.

Now from a 21st Century point of view, this scenario doesn't sound out of place. After all, kings and priests reigned for thousands of years. If you know anything about priests, they were authorized to collect the tithes from the people, so none of this immediately sounds out of place. At the point in history when Abraham met Melchizedek, the priesthood had not been established. The Law had not yet been given with instructions on tithing, priesthood or sacrifices. None of the Jewish systems that the people of that day followed were in place when Abraham met Melchizedek. This reality will have great significance as we look at Christ's priesthood.

We also learn that Melchizedek's genealogy is not mentioned. The writer doesn't intend to say he didn't have a genealogy, as some might assume, but rather that his priesthood was not one to be passed down by family line. Instead, it was one directly appointed by the Most High God. We understand from Hebrews that a priest must be a man. Therefore, we do not believe that Melchizedek was an angel or pre-incarnate Christ, but instead the beginning of a priesthood that stood outside the confines of the coming Jewish priesthood. This priesthood was one that would be permanent and universal, not temporary or exclusive.

The title, Most High God, is the universal name for God in Scripture. This name is only used when God is being referred to as the God of the universe. Other titles like "God of Abraham" and "God of our Fathers" are names tied to Israel or the Jewish nation, but this title for God is universal; one with whom everyone throughout all time can connect.

The writer has already claimed that Jesus is the High Priest from the priestly line of Melchizedek. Now that we know a

little more about Melchizedek, we can begin to shed some light on how Christ can hold both the office of King and Priest. The first thing we must realize is that the Melchizedek priesthood was established before the Levitical priesthood. This is significant because Jesus was never trying to fill the role of a Levitical priest from the family line of Aaron, His priesthood preceded that of Aaron. Christ didn't have to be of the tribe of Levi to hold the office of the priesthood God had appointed Him to. In fact, this priesthood was greater than the Levitical priesthood. The writer points this out in different ways. First, Melchizedek's priesthood was universal. It was not limited to a certain people group, but was established before God established the nation of Israel. As a part of this priesthood, Christ's sacrifice, salvation and priesthood is not limited to the Jewish nation, but extends universally to all mankind.

Secondly, we see that the Melchizedekan priesthood is superior because Abraham tithed to him. Hebrews 7 says, if Abraham tithed to Melchizedek, by default his descendants also tithed to him as well. These descendants include Aaron and all the Levitical priests that would ever exist. God knew that Abraham would be the father of the nation of Israel and therefore the father of the Levitical priesthood. If the Levitical priesthood was intended to be greater, then God would have never allowed Abraham to tithe to Melchizedek.

Finally, we see that Abraham received a blessing from Melchizedek. Even though Abraham was a great man and his lineage held the promise of God to the nation of Israel, Hebrews 7:7 states that the lesser will be blessed by the greater. Since Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek, we must conclude that the Melchizedekan priesthood was much greater than any priesthood that would have been established through the descendants of Abraham.

The Levitical priesthood was not perfect. In fact, the Levitical priesthood was established to help the people deal with their imperfection. In order for man to realize that they were sinful and separated from God, God provided the Law (Romans 3:20). The Levitical priesthood simply gave man a way of dealing with sin until God provided ultimate forgiveness through Christ. The atonement made through the Levitical priesthood never offered the Jews forgiveness, it was a temporary reconciliation between God and man. As the writer of Hebrews says in verse 11, the Levitical priesthood never offered perfection. But perfection is what God wants us to strive for. Therefore there was a need for a greater priesthood and a greater sacrifice. Christ's priesthood couldn't exist within the confines of an imperfect system. This is why Christ was chosen as a priest from a different line, that of Melchizedek.

The interesting thing about this new high priest is that it is actually a return to the beginning when the priesthood was first established. Christ's priesthood has returned to its original lineage, that of Melchizedek, one outside of the Law. Hebrews 7:12 states that this change in priesthood also changes the law. Christ lived a sinless life under the Old Testament Law, something that no human had ever done or will ever do again. This is why the Law has changed. Through Him we have been released from the Law of Moses and the sacrificial system. The Law requested a priesthood with sacrifices, but the new priesthood allows us to lean on one eternal Sacrifice, that of Jesus Christ.

Not only is the priesthood a return to the beginning, but our hope has also returned to its beginning in faith. Abraham was the father of the nation of Israel, but he was also the father of faith. Before we see the Levitical priesthood established, we see a man with a true faith and trust in God. This was a faith that preceded the Jewish sacrificial system and Levitical priesthood. Genesis 15 says that Abraham was a man who "believed in the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness." In Christ, we are returning to a priesthood that is based in faith in another, not faith in self.

The new covenant that Christ brings is much better than the covenant God initially made with Israel. The main reason is that the new covenant through Christ has eternal elements, not temporary ones. Christ is able to save forever, not just temporarily. Christ's priesthood or representation is also eternal. Since Old Testament priests were mortal men, they naturally died. In Christ, we will never need another priest because Jesus Christ is eternal and is constantly interceding on our behalf. His priesthood is permanent.

We must realize that Christ never abolished any of the Old Testament Laws or systems, He fulfilled and perfected the Law. God, once and for all through Jesus Christ, fulfilled everything necessary to bring mankind back into relationship with Him. Our sacrifice, representation and covenant have been perfected through Christ for eternity. Since Christ is the High Priest of the Most High God (or Universal God) and can save forever those who draw near to Him, we are invited to a better life. Living through the life of Jesus Christ promises to be infinitely better than living life without Him.

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Personal Study Questions

The purpose of these study questions is to help you get into God's Word. We hope that through a personal encounter with God's Word, He will reveal His Truth and allow you to understand His story first hand.

1. Read Genesis 14:17-24. What things did Melchizedek bring when he met Abraham? How does this foreshadow Christ?

2. From the same passage in Genesis, what do you see Abraham save from battle? What things were unimportant to him?

3. We are able to set aside the former Law because Christ has completed it. However, many times we still live as if we are working for our salvation. What's something in your life that you are working for, or trying to perfect, that you should turn over to God?

4. Why was the Levitical priesthood inadequate?

5. What are some of the things that are better in your life because of Christ? Consider sharing these in your group time this week.

