

Bible Study March 15, 2023

HEBREWS 7 (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

The Priestly Order of Melchizedek

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.

Melchizedek was a priest of God Most High. He “remains a priest forever” (also see Psalm 110:4) because his priesthood has no record of beginning or ending. He was a priest of God in Salem (Jerusalem) long before the nation of Israel and the regular priesthood began. (Some think he was a preincarnate manifestation of Christ, though it is more likely that he was a type of Christ; see the note on Genesis 14:18 and Melchizedek’s profile.)

Jesus Compared to Melchizedek

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.”***

Jesus' role as High Priest is superior to that of any priest of Levi in Old Testament times, because as the Messiah, Jesus is a priest of a higher order (Psalm 110:4). If the Jewish priests and their laws had been able to save people, why would God have needed to send Christ as a priest, someone who did not even come from the tribe of Levi (the priestly tribe) but from the tribe of Judah? Under the Jewish law, animal sacrifices had to be repeated, and they offered just temporary forgiveness; Christ's sacrifice was offered only once, and it offers total and permanent forgiveness. Under the new covenant, the Levitical priesthood has been canceled in favor of Christ's role as High Priest. Because we have Christ as our High Priest, we need to pay attention to him. No minister, leader, or Christian friend can substitute for his work or supplant his role in our salvation.

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 law was not intended to save people or to make them perfect but to point out sin (see Romans 3:20; 5:20) and to point toward Christ (see Galatians 3:24-25). Salvation comes through Christ, whose sacrifice brings forgiveness for our sins. Being ethical, working diligently to help others, and giving to charitable causes are all commendable, but none of our good deeds can save us or make us right with God.

How can you draw near to God? The Bible makes it clear that your own body is God's temple. Your spirit needs and wants closeness to God. You want to know the living God personally, not as an idea or concept, nor as a distant monarch. You can draw near to God through prayer, worship, Bible study, and fellowship with and instruction from other believers. For some, worship has become an activity wedged between multiple obligations and priorities. Instead, make worship your top priority. Meditating on the Bible may include Scripture memorization, songs, and quiet personal reading. The Bible is the Word of God. Spend time meditating on its words every day, and you will draw nearer and nearer to him.

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.

Jesus has a permanent priesthood. He should be everyone's ultimate authority for spiritual life. These days, many people have advisers and counselors whom they elevate almost to the role of priest. People look to political leaders, lawyers, physicians, insurance agents, and financial advisers to provide hope, long life, and security against all disasters. Many Christians regard the advice of church leaders, Christian friends, writers and speakers, and even celebrities before

they consider the words of Jesus written in the Bible. Make your first allegiance and priority to find and follow the counsel given by Jesus.

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.

No one can add to what Jesus did to save us; our past, present, and future sins are all forgiven. As our High Priest, Christ is our advocate, the mediator between us and God. He looks after our interests and presents our requests to the Father. The Old Testament high priest would go before God once a year to plead for the forgiveness of the nation's sins; Christ makes perpetual intercession before God for us. Christ's continuous presence in heaven with the Father assures us that our sins have been paid for and forgiven (see Romans 8:33-34; Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16; 9:24). This wonderful assurance frees us from guilt, the frustration of trying to be perfect, and the fear of failure. You are never too sinful or too far away for him to intercede for you (also see 9:24-28).

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.

When the Jewish people were still sacrificing animals, the animals were cut into pieces, the parts were washed, the fat was burned, the blood was sprinkled, and the meat was boiled. Blood was required to atone for sin, and God accepted animal blood to cover the people's sin (Leviticus 17:11). Because of the sacrificial system, the Israelites were generally aware that sin costs someone something and that they themselves were sinful. Today, however, many people take Christ's work on the cross for granted. They don't realize what it cost for Jesus to secure our forgiveness—it cost him his life and painful temporary separation from his Father (Matthew 27:46; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

Because Jesus died once for all, he brought the sacrificial system to an end. He paid the price for the forgiveness of all sin—past, present, and future. The Jews did not need to go back to the old system because Christ, the perfect sacrifice, completed the work of redemption. You don't have to look for another way to have your sins forgiven—Christ was the final sacrifice for you.

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.

The writer uses this story from Genesis 14:18-20 to show that Christ is even greater than Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, and Levi, Abraham's descendant. Therefore, the Jewish priesthood (made up of Levi's descendants) was inferior to Melchizedek's priesthood (a foreshadowing of Christ's priesthood).

This chapter reveals that there is nothing we need to do—or can do—to make salvation more real for us or to make God love us more. Jesus has done it all. Nothing we do can improve his work. Nothing we do adds to God's acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice.

So how do the benefits of Jesus' sacrifice become yours? Simply accept the gift of salvation by faith, trusting entirely in Jesus for salvation. You can do that now through a simple and sincere

prayer: Dear God, I trust in Jesus alone. I know I can't save myself. I'm sorry for my sins. Please forgive my sins through Jesus, and grant me the eternal life secured by him. Thank you for saving me. Amen.