

## DAY 7: A PRIEST IN THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK

### Hebrews 7

The author uses the priest-king Melchizedek to explain Christ's superiority over the priesthood established by the Mosaic Law. The superiority and permanence of Jesus as our High Priest is the theme of Hebrews 7.

**THE PRIORITY OF THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD** Melchizedek is mentioned twice in the Old Testament. Unlike any other Old Testament person, Melchizedek was both priest and king. His outstanding characteristics were righteousness (Hebrew *Melchi* means *my king*; *zedek* means *righteousness*) and peace (*Salem* means *peace*). He is similar to Christ by: (1) his titles, “king of righteousness” and “king of peace,” (2) the absence of a family line descended from priests, and (3) his unstated origin and destiny.

Verses 1-10 present the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood. (1) Melchizedek blessed Abraham, an event described as the greater person blessing the lesser. (2) Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek, acknowledging his priestly authority. (3) Melchizedek's priesthood was described as unending and appeared before the Law that established the temporary Aaronic priesthood. (4) Levi—symbolically present in his ancestor Abraham—paid a tithe.

Here, Levi represents Israel's priestly tribe, not an individual. God decreed that Moses' brother, Aaron, and Aaron's descendants were to serve as priests. Men of the tribe of Levi were called as priests to assist the priests descended from Aaron. Set apart for God's service, the Levites were given *a tithe* (*a tenth*) of the people's money and produce. From this, the Levites gave a tithe to the high priests.

**JESUS AND MELCHIZEDEK** Many Israelites began to believe that religious observance of their laws and ceremonies would produce fellowship with God. Following a violation, offering a sacrifice to restore broken fellowship pointed to the need of a permanent blood atonement. Such sacrifices were hampered by their limitations; priests who had to make sacrifices for their own sins had no way of providing full salvation for anyone else. The Law revealed sin and provided a means of putting past sins away, but it could not produce a personal and permanent moral and spiritual change. A new kind of priesthood was necessary, and this new priesthood was promised while the Levitical priesthood was active.

There is only one way to change the priesthood and the Law, which regulated it: God's Law for Israel had to be fulfilled, and the Levitical priesthood completed. Hebrews 7:13 continues the author's argument that Jesus has fulfilled and made unnecessary the Levitical priesthood. Jesus belonged to the tribe of Judah, the royal line of kings David and Solomon. No one from Judah had ever served as a priest. The Mosaic Law did not recognize that anyone from Judah was qualified to do so. Jesus, as priest, then, fulfills the priesthood of Melchizedek. As a descendent of David, He is the rightful king of Israel. He perfectly fulfilled the priesthood foreshadowed by Melchizedek and serves as a priest-king.

**THINK ABOUT** how the Jews had a set view of the priesthood and their anticipated Messiah. Jesus did not fit that mold. Their presumption resulted in enormous loss and had eternal consequences.

We all have preconceived ideas. Scripture doesn't tell us to blindly accept what we have been taught. The Bereans were praised for examining the Scriptures to see if Paul's teaching was true. They were open to rethinking their positions, but did so thoughtfully, prayerfully, and carefully.

The eternal, entirely adequate character of the new order replaces the temporary, inadequate nature of the old order. This new priest is not chosen on the basis of ancestry. He is “*indestructible*.” His death on the Cross was His choice, a sacrifice of one who, by His nature, was not subject to death.



Verse 17 declares the superiority of Christ's priesthood. In verses 18-19, Christ brings a “*better hope*”—the assurance that our High Priest will bring people into God's presence.

The Law only pointed out a need for change that Jesus would actually bring about.

**THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD** God's *oath* makes the supremacy of Christ's priesthood doubly secure. The Greek word translated *oath* is a synonym for *mediate*. It stresses how God keeps His covenant. Jesus guarantees for us the upholding and fulfilling of this new and better covenant.

Verses 23-25 make another comparison—Levitical priests die; Jesus does not. His priesthood is permanent. He is the eternal Priest who conquered death.

Christ's intercession is personal, constant, and availing. This representative work will continue until Christ fulfills the perfecting of humanity. "*He is able*" points to the Lord's unlimited power. "*To save*" means *totally save*. Christ provides complete salvation to every person who comes to God through Him.

**THINK ABOUT** how Jesus "*always lives to make intercession for [you].*" In Luke 22:32 we find Jesus interceding for Peter because Satan is about to test him. As your High Priest, Jesus is also interceding for you. What do you think He might be praying about for you?

Hebrews 7:26 points us to the superiority of Jesus. "*Holy*" sums up Christ's moral character. His sinlessness qualifies Him as our mediator. "*Innocent*" means *blameless, without anything base or morally inferior*. "*Unstained*" refers to Jesus' purity of life and ministry. "*Separated from sinners*" refers to keeping Himself holy while sharing our humanity and our company.

In His personal sacrifice, Jesus presented a permanent sin offering when, for our sake, He gave up His own life on the Cross. The "*once for all*" (7:27) of Christ's sacrifice took away sin and need never be repeated or improved upon. Christ is both the sacrifice and the One who sacrifices. Neither in the Melchizedek nor in the Aaronic priesthoods was this possible.

The author ends by restating that the Levitical high priests experienced weakness, sin, and death. The High Priest after the order of Melchizedek is a Son whose work of redemption is eternally perfected; a Son who, having become man, has been raised to the throne of God.

**PERSONALIZE** this lesson. Jesus Christ, the fulfillment toward which Israel's history had been moving, broke in too suddenly upon the fixed habits of religious people. They resisted change—even the good change God had planned. Do you ever feel like the Hebrew Christians? Is your identity threatened when you are asked to let go of an old habit, belief, or understanding?

God is often too radical for us; He seems always to be expecting us to change. But spiritual growth involves changing behavior, attitudes, and values. "*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come*" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Perhaps our most subtle struggle is between our natural tendency to be comfortable where we are, and our desire to make the changes God has planned for us. What do you need from God specifically to help you navigate this tension? Will you ask Him for what you need?

#### **REVIEW: A PRIEST IN THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK**

13. Which verses or phrases from Hebrews 7 caught your attention? Why?