



The Unexcelled High Priesthood of Christ Hebrews 7-8

Introduction

In this lesson, Hebrews 7 - 8, we reach the mid-point in the book. In the first six chapters we have looked at the person of Christ. Beginning in chapter 8, we will look at the work of Christ, our great High Priest, alive and in person. Though He is outside the line of the Aaronic priesthood, He is in the line of Melchizedek, who up to this point was an obscure, shadowy figure known from one brief but intense episode in Abraham's life, and one mention in Psalm 110. In chapter 7 the writer proves Melchizedek's priesthood to be superior to that of Aaron.

The blood line and the royal line of David had to be established for Jesus in order for Him to be Messiah and King. In like manner, His right to be a non-Levitical High Priest is now established as having precedent in Melchizedek with Jesus being in the spiritual line of Melchizedek.

Outline of Hebrews 7-8

- I. Superiority of Melchizedek's Priesthood over Aaron's - Hebrews 7:1-12
- II. Christ's Priesthood after the Order of Melchizedek - Hebrews 7:13-28
- III. Superior Sanctuary, Covenant, and Promises - Hebrews 8

I. Superiority of Melchizedek's Priesthood over Aaron's - Hebrews 7:1-12

A. Abraham's Priest - Hebrews 7:1-8

1. Melchizedek's Identity - 7:1, Genesis 14:18-20

Who was Melchizedek? We find his name mentioned only twice in the Old Testament, but here, in the Book of Hebrews, it occurs nine times. In the Old Testament, the historic account of Melchizedek is found in Genesis 14:18-29, two thousand years before Christ. One thousand years after that historic event, David made mention of him in the Psalms in reference to the Messiah, *You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek* (Psalm 110:4). The writer of Hebrews reviews Melchizedek's features from his sole appearance in Genesis 14. The meaning of the name, Melchizedek, is "King of Right".

a. King of Salem

Melchizedek was a king, possibly of Jerusalem in its

early days, centuries before Joshua, and before David's conquest which made it the capital of Israel, as it is today. However, since in verse two the writer tells us that Melchizedek was also "*king of peace*", it may be that a city is not referred to at all.

b. Priest of the Most High God

This puzzling title seems to mean that Melchizedek was God's representative, having the knowledge of the true God, as did Abraham. We are not told where he came from nor where he went after his appearance to Abraham. We are not told of his background or how he came to have knowledge of God. We are not told how he became a king and a priest. Later under the law, kings could not be priests.

c. Met Victorious Abraham

Melchizedek appeared in Abraham's hour of victory, as he was returning from rescuing his nephew Lot. Formerly, Abraham and Lot had parted ways and Lot had chosen to live in the *well watered* plain of Jordan, near the *exceedingly wicked and sinful* city of Sodom (Genesis 13:5-13). So Abraham *moved his tent, and went and dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which are in Hebron*, choosing to live in the company of God (Genesis 13:14-18).

When Lot was taken captive during the battle of the kings (Genesis 14:1-16), the first recorded war in history, Abraham received word, mustered an army, and marched in pursuit, rescuing the people and their goods.

d. Blessed Abraham

Melchizedek approached Abraham as a priest, offering bread and wine as refreshment for God's weary servant. Abraham surely welcomed the ministering.

Melchizedek then blessed Abraham and *blessed....God Most High* (Genesis 14:20) for giving the victory. Blessing God refers to offering Him worship and praise.

2. Melchizedek received tithes - 7:2

Abraham honored Melchizedek by offering him a tithe. Take note that this was before the Law of Moses which required a ten percent tithe to the priests. In giving the tithe, Abraham recognized the superiority of Melchizedek as "*king of righteousness*", and then consequently, "*king of peace*". *Salem* comes from the same root word as "*shalom*", which means "*peace*".

3. Melchizedek's life - 7:3

a. *Without father, without mother*

This does not mean that he did not have parents or that he was necessarily Christ pre-incarnate. It means that we do not know who his parents were. His background is a mystery.

b. *Without genealogy*

He owes his priesthood to no forbear. The Levitical priesthood was hereditary. All priests descended through the line of Levi and high priests were descended through Aaron, the first high priest, appointed by God. Melchizedek's priesthood was not hereditary.

c. *Neither beginning of days nor end of life*

No birth or death is recorded. There is no record of descendants later competing with the Aaronic priesthood.

d. *Made like the Son of God*

The word *like* in verse 3 is used nowhere else in the New Testament. Literally, it is "made to be like". "The implication is that the resemblance to Christ rests upon the way Melchizedek's history is reported in the Old Testament, not upon Melchizedek himself. Melchizedek was similar to Christ in that his priesthood was universal, royal, righteous, peaceful, and unending" (*The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, John MacArthur). These similarities are evident in Hebrews 7:1-3; Psalm 72:2-7; Isaiah 9:6; Jeremiah 23:5; Zechariah 6:13; Romans 5:1; and 1 Corinthians 1:30.

e. *A priest continually*

There is no record of the end of Melchizedek's priesthood.

4. Melchizedek's greatness - 7:4-10

As the receiver of Abraham's tithe of the spoils of war, Melchizedek stands above Abraham. The priestly tribe of Levi (descended from Abraham's great-grandson, Levi), by God's command, received tithes from the people of Israel. And when Abraham gave the tithe to Melchizedek, Levi was, so to speak, *in the loins* (verse 10) of Abraham. So, even the ones who received the tithe, the Levites, tithed to Melchizedek. This confirms that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham.

B. The Superior Order of Melchizedek - Hebrews 7:11-12

The writer's purpose has been to show that the

priesthood of Christ, after the order of Melchizedek, is superior in every way. The Levitical priesthood and the Aaronic high priests were divinely ordained and divinely instituted, but, in the end, they fell short. They could never meet human need.

Perfection could not come through the Levitical priesthood nor the Mosaic Law. (Moses was a Levite.) Perpetuating the Levitical line would only perpetuate imperfection. The Aaronic line of high priests lasted from 1400 B.C. to 70 A.D., long enough to prove that perfection was not going to come that way.

II. Christ's Priesthood after the Order of Melchizedek - Hebrews 7:13-28

A. Tribe of Judah – Hebrews 7:13-14

Before the tribes existed, Melchizedek was. Christ was of the tribe of Judah and no one of Judah had served the altar. Neither was there a prophecy that a priest would arise from Judah. The author of Hebrews argues that God deliberately left out the genealogy of Melchizedek in order to make clear that this order of priesthood is not received by inheritance. Rather, it is received directly from God. It is in this way the Son of God received His priestly mantle directly from God the Father, not from the line of Aaronic priests, because Jesus was not descended from Aaron but from the royal tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:1-3).

B. Power of an Endless Life – Hebrews 7:15-17

Melchizedek's priesthood no doubt ended with his death even though it is not recorded. Christ's life is endless and therefore so is His priesthood. He has all the power and authority of the office forever, as Psalm 110:4 prophesied, *You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek*.

C. A Better Hope – Hebrews 7:18-19

The law was weak by being dependent on the flesh to carry it out (Romans 8:3). It was unprofitable in that it made nothing perfect. Christ has brought a *better hope* that one day we will be perfected in Him. God sees us that way now in Christ.

D. Installed by Oath – Hebrews 7:20-21

The Levites were by heredity but Christ was installed by an oath, *The Lord has sworn and will not relent, You are a priest forever*, (Psalm 110:4).

E. A Better Covenant – Hebrews 7:22

Being a *priest forever* (7:21), Christ guarantees a better covenant.

F. An *Unchangeable* Priesthood – Hebrews 7:23-24

Every High Priest died, ending his priesthood and necessitating another priest, perhaps better, perhaps worse. Christ lives and so does His priesthood. He will never need to be replaced!

G. *Able To Save To the Uttermost* – Hebrews 7:25

"That word '*uttermost*' is a great word. It has within it two qualities, which merge into a complete revelation, the two qualities are represented by '*panteles*', which means all, and is a word of quantity; and '*telos*', which is a word of reach, and means extent. He is able to save to the uttermost, that is in Him there is fullness of provision in quantity, and fullness of provision in duration. Thus, the word '*salvation*', with which we are so familiar, is seen in all its fullness and glory" (God's Last Word to Man, Studies in Hebrews, G. Campbell Morgan).

Because Jesus lives forever, He is able to *save to the uttermost* those who come to God through Him. If you believe in Jesus, He saves you to the uttermost. No case is too hard for Him. Your sin is no surprise nor shock to Him.

H. "Tailor-made" for Us – Hebrews 7:26-27

Such a high priest was fitting for us. Jesus is perfectly fitted to our need. Did you ever have anything that was just right, a house, a suit, a car, a friend, a spouse? Jesus is more than all these in being perfectly suited to us. Seven characteristics sum up His perfection in this regard.

1. Holy
2. Harmless
3. Undeiled
4. Separate from sinners
5. Has become higher than the heavens
6. No sacrifice needed for Himself
7. One offering of Himself, sufficient for all

The writer of the letter uses the term "high priest" seventeen times (the only one to use the term outside the Gospels) and "priest" fourteen times (more than any other New Testament writer). In addition, he speaks of priestly activities such as the use of blood (which he has twenty-one times).

I. The appointment process – Hebrews 7:28

1. Flawed high priests under the law

The law could appoint only flawed high priests since they were sinful human beings. It was them or nothing.

2. Perfect Son of God by oath

But the oath, *The Lord has sworn and will not relent, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek*, (7:21), which came after the law, appointed the Son who has been made the perfect High Priest forever.

III. Superior Sanctuary, Covenant, and Promises - Hebrews 8

The writer has established the superiority of Jesus Christ as our High Priest. He will now go on to establish the superiority of the relationships which result. Just as Christ is better than the angels and a better high priest, He has brought a better covenant which is enacted upon better promises. Furthermore, He ministers to our needs from a better sanctuary.

A. A Better Sanctuary - Hebrews 8:1-6

Our High Priest is seated at the right hand of the throne of God in the heavenly sanctuary. This is not symbolic language but a statement of reality. Christ is seated on a real throne in a real place. It is interesting that Jesus was seen standing in heaven by Stephen when dying as the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:56).

The right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens is the place of honor higher than any other place. It is a place for Christ alone.

1. The true tabernacle – 8:2-5

Christ serves in the true tabernacle which was erected by God and not man. When Moses received instructions to build the earthly tabernacle, God told him to make *all things according to the pattern shown on the mountain* (8:5, Exodus 25:40). This means that the earthly tabernacle was a *copy* and a *shadow*, merely symbolic of the heavenly realities. Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, reigns from on high in the "original" tabernacle *which the Lord erected and not man*.

2. A more excellent ministry - 8:6

Our High Priest *has obtained a more excellent ministry* as the *Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises*. Our High Priest is our Mediator, the One who stands between God and us, on our behalf. Job knew that he could not stand before God to plead his case with any hope of winning. He longed for a *mediator* (Job 9:32-33) to stand in the gap, someone who could see both sides clearly: an advocate, an umpire, a referee to be arbiter of the disagreement and bring resolution. The One Job looked for and longed for has come: Jesus Christ, our High Priest.

B. A Better Covenant and Promises - Hebrews 8:6-13

Our High Priest mediates through a better covenant and better promises. God's dealings with the Hebrew people throughout their history had been based upon a covenant He had made with them. A covenant, of necessity, has two sides and the fulfilment of either side of the covenant is contingent upon fulfilment by the other side. If either side fails to fulfill its part, the covenant is null and void.

1. The problem with the old covenant

God's covenant with Israel is stated in Exodus 19:5, *If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people.* The responsibility on the part of the people was to listen to God and obey His voice. But history proves how completely they failed. The old covenant was imperfect because it required obedience from sinful, stiff-necked, disobedient people. And aren't we all?

2. The prophet in the darkness

In the midst of Israel's darkest hour of history, when she had spiraled down to the deepest level of disobedience, the prophet Jeremiah appeared on the scene, "He looked on through the gloom and saw the dawning of a day, and he spoke of it as a day when God would make a new covenant with men" (God's Last Word to Man, Studies in Hebrews, G. Campbell Morgan).

It is at this point in the letter that the writer refers to Jeremiah's prophecy of a *new covenant* based on mercy and forgiveness. Jeremiah foresaw a covenant in which God's laws would be written on the hearts and minds of His people, who in fellowship with God, would all know Him and His will *from the least of them to the greatest of them* (8:8-12 and Jeremiah 31:31-34). The apostle John later emphasized this truth, *But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you.... and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him* (1 John 2:27).

3. The law written on minds and hearts

Under the new covenant, the law is no longer external as was the Mosaic Law under the old. The new covenant is inward and spiritual, in the mind and on the heart. This does not mean that the Ten Commandments are null and void. It means that they are no longer external rules to follow but requirements which are written inside every person. Paul explained to the Corinthians that the new covenant is, *not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life* (2 Corinthians 3:6).

4. And all shall know me

When an angel appeared to Joseph before his marriage to Mary, he announced the purpose of Jesus Christ coming to earth, *And you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins* (Matthew 1:21). Jesus Christ's death on the cross and resurrection from the dead did exactly that. His shed blood washed us clean and this cleansing ushered us into a new relationship with God. Now we can *know* Him and not just know *about* Him.

This dramatic change in relationship made the old covenant *obsolete* and *ready to vanish away*. It did not vanish immediately following Christ's death and resurrection, but in 70 A.D. when the temple was destroyed, it could no longer operate as intended. For Christians, it has vanished. This was God's planned obsolescence.

Applications

1. Will you plan now exactly when you will meet with your High Priest daily (Hebrews 7:1 and 8:1)?
2. Will you thank Him for saving you *to the uttermost* and for interceding for you continually before God's throne (Hebrews 7:24)? How will your life change, knowing that you are *saved to the uttermost*?
3. Will you worship Him now for His attributes, character and qualities in Hebrews 7:26 and 27?
4. Will you intercede with Him for people you can influence? Who will you make intercession for today?
5. How well do you know God? Jesus Christ has opened the way for you to know Him personally, intimately, and fully? How are you taking advantage of that opportunity?