

The True King Of Righteousness

Hebrews 7:1-10

Introduction

In the last chapter the writer argues Jesus is like a city of refuge (v.18); an anchor (v.19); a forerunner (v.20); and a High Priest (v.20). Jesus enters the presence behind the veil (v.19); Jesus goes before us; “having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (6:20).

The writer of Hebrews believes the Eternal Priesthood of Jesus is superior to the priesthood of Aaron. When the writer wrote this book—almost certainly the Priests of Aaron and the High Priest in Jerusalem were serving in the Temple. What does it mean that Christ’s priestly ministry is superior? The writer will provide a historical argument (vv.1-10); a doctrinal argument (vv. 11-25); and a practical argument (vv.26-38). In chapter 8 the writer will argue that Jesus ministers in a new covenant, a superior covenant (chapter 8); in a superior sanctuary (chapter 9); because of a superior sacrifice (chapter 10).

Why will the writer go to such great lengths contrasting the ministry of Jesus with the Old Testament ministry of Aaron? To prove that Jesus is a King who is a priest—a High Priest—the only High Priest we will ever need! We need not look beyond Jesus—He is all we need!

Jesus is the greater High Priest. The way to God is now changed forever. How do I get to God?

Can you imagine growing up as an observant Jew in the first century? There was only one place where the proscribed sacrifice could be made, Jerusalem, there was only one order of priests who could make that sacrifice, the High Priest. The writer elaborates on the mysterious figure Melchizedek, who appears only twice in the Old Testament (Genesis 14:17-20; and Psalms 110:4).

The Mystery Man Melchizedek (v.1)

Hebrews 7:1 (NKJV) 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,

Who is this man Melchizedek? A king of Salem (later Jerusalem). In the Bible earthly Jerusalem sometimes represents the future Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem (a picture of Heaven itself; Hebrews 11:10).

A priest—of the Most High God. This mystery man is both a spiritual and political leader of his people! In an ideal society there is no separation between the spiritual and the secular—or the sacred and the secular. In a broken world—in a fallen world—when sinful men rule—it is necessary to separate the church and the state! William McDonald; “Only when Christ reigns in righteousness will it be possible to unite the two (Isa.32:1;17)(*Believer’s Bible Commentary p. 2177*).

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This priest is appointed and sent by God.

What exactly did Melchizedek do when he “met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings”?

According to Genesis 14:17-20 he brought forth bread and wine to him. Bread provides strength and wine joy. Melchizedek refreshed Abraham.

William Barclay writes; “In the old Genesis story Melchisedec is a strange and almost eerie figure. He arrives out of the blue; there is nothing about his life, his birth, his death or his descent. He simply arrives. He gives Abraham bread and wine, which to us, reading the passage in the light of what we know, sounds so sacramental. He blesses Abraham. And then he vanishes from the stage of history with the same unexplained suddenness as he arrived upon it. There is little wonder that in the mystery of this story the writer to the Hebrews found a type and forecast and symbol of Christ” (The Letter to the Hebrews p. 75).

It would appear that Abraham—full of joy that God would send His Priest to refresh Abraham, and help celebrate his victory over the enemy—gave the priest gifts (tithes).

And what about our High Priest? Jesus brings us His own word and joy!

“and blessed him”—that is Melchizedek blessed Abraham.

We too are blessed by Jesus. When Jesus was preparing to ascend into Heaven—after rising from the dead, Jesus led his disciples as far as Bethany, and there he lifted up his hands and blessed them (Luke 24:50). We never read that those hands were put down!

The Meaning Of His Marvelous Name (v.2)

2to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated “king of righteousness,” and then also king of Salem, meaning “king of peace,”

The king of Salem received “a tenth part of all”—a tithe—of what Abraham had taken in spoil.

In the Old Testament there was deep meaning associated with a person’s name. A person’s name in part communicated something about that person! This king’s name meant “king of righteousness” and then “king of peace”. Righteousness precedes peace—and peace is impossible apart from righteousness.

And of course we see both righteousness and peace perfected in the name our Lord Jesus. “Mercy and truth. . .met together; righteousness and peace . . .kissed” (Psalm 85:10).

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Our High Priest waits for gifts and offerings. There are four that we give:

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| 1. Our bodies | (Romans 12:1) |
| 2. Our service | (Phil. 2:17; Heb. 13:16) |
| 3. Our money | (Phil.4:18) |
| 4. Our praise | (Heb.13:15) |

Melchizedek is a type and picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was a king who was also a priest.

The priest in the Old Testament could never occupy the office of King nor could the king occupy the office of priest. The priest never sat on a throne—they never sat at all! There was no place to sit in either the Tabernacle in the Wilderness or the Temple in Jerusalem.

The name Melchizedek means king of righteousness and he is the king of Salem—or the king of peace. Both names apply to the Lord Jesus—who is God’s Righteous King.

The city of Salem will eventually be called Jerusalem.

The Marvel Of An Endless Ministry (vv.3-10)

3without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.

The writer sees in Melchizedek a **type** of Christ. The writer repeats and reinforces this claim in verse 15; “And it is yet far more evident, if in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest”

How is this king like Jesus? They not only share the same titles but resemble one another in origin. Does this literally mean that Melchizedek was never born or never died? I don’t think so. I think it means there is no record of his birth or record of his death. There is no record of his past or genealogy (no pedigree).

There are of course those who disagree. But I think they divorce the context and the Genesis record. For those who conclude that Melchizedek is a pre-incarnate manifestation of Jesus—they have the difficult task of denying the historicity of the king of Salem.

Remember the subject and theme of the writer of Hebrews. The superior priesthood of Jesus. In order to be a priest—in Israel and in Jerusalem—it required the proper genealogy. A man had to be born into the tribe of Levi. The qualification began at birth and ceased at death!

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This was not true—about the priesthood of Melchizedek. This king did not inherit his priesthood. God simply picked him out and designated him a priest! And since there is no mention of his birth or death—his priesthood continues.

The expression “made like” means “to be like”—in the sense that Melchizedek was like the Son of God—in the timelessness of his priesthood. I don’t think it means that this Melchizedek is the Son of God.

And yet—because Abraham paid tithes to the King of Salem—and because Melchizedek is a greater priest—greater than other earthly priests—because he had a special right—to the priesthood—he was appointed by God!

Is the writer of Hebrews using this Biblical character in order to make a point about Christ? In one sense yes! But in another sense—Melchizedek’s presence in the narrative is no accident. What the Bible says about him—and his role in Genesis—seems to be a prophetic picture of a future king! And so Melchizedek like Christ is a king of Jerusalem who is also a priest. His priesthood was not inherited from his ancestors or passed down to his children.

In the Levitical system—the priest had to prove their paternity and genealogy by family records! Every single High Priest who descended from Aaron died! Both Jesus and Melchizedek hold their offices permanently (see verses 8; 16; 24-25).

4Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils.

The writer of Hebrews earlier asked us to ‘consider Jesus’ and now he invites us to consider Melchizedek and his greatness. Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils—to him. This gift came on the heels of a great victory over the enemies of both the King of Salem and the Abraham.

Throughout the chapter we learn the characteristics of the ministry of Jesus and Melchizedek; both are royal (v.1); both are superior to Aaron (vv.4-10); and why is it superior? Abraham is ancestor to Levi. We later learn that both the ministry of Melchizedek and Jesus are independent of the law (vv.11-12); independent of the tribe of Levi (vv.13-15); because Jesus was born of the tribe of Judah! The ministry of Jesus is everlasting (vv.16-17); guaranteed (vv.20-22); continuous (v.23); permanent (v.24); Holy (v.26); all sufficient (vv.18-19; 25, 27); flawless (v. 28)!

5And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham;

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According to the Law—the sons of Levi—were empowered or authorized to receive the tithes. They could collect the tithes from the members of the other tribes. Both traced their lineage through Abraham.

6but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.

The passage suggests Melchizedek shared no such origin. Melchizedek could not have descended from Abraham! Yet he receives tithes from Abraham! Why in the world was the father of faith—Abraham—paying tithes—to someone who is disconnected from the nation—through whom would come the Messiah? Apparently Melchizedek’s priesthood was not connected to race—and apparently Melchizedek had both the authority and ability to impart blessing to Abraham! Abraham was the possessor of the promises!

In Genesis 14:19, 20; Melchizedek said, “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; (20) And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” And he gave him, a tithe of all.

7Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better.

In that culture—when one blesses another man—it is understood that the superior blesses is the inferior.

This is not a moral—or personal inferiority—but simply an inferiority of position (see MacDonald p.2178).

Imagine the reader’s reaction. The author of Hebrews—is telling Hebrews—Jews—who revere Father Abraham—that Abraham—acknowledges a non Jewish King—and a non Jewish Priest—as his superior! Why is the writer of Hebrews paying so much attention to this issue?

8Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives.

Look carefully at the passage. “Here mortal men receive tithes” (the sons of Aaron). Levitical priests die. They are subject to death. One generation serves—and dies—and another generation serves and dies. In the case of Melchizedek—no mention is made of his death—therefore he can represent a priesthood—that is unique—and perpetual!

9Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak,

The writer makes the leap—Levi—who receives tithes (and dies) pays tithes through Abraham—and in that payment—acknowledges the superiority of the Priesthood—of Melchizedek.

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Back to chapter 6:20—“for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”. The Priesthood of Jesus is superior to the Priesthood of Aaron. Aaron temporary—Jesus eternal.

10 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Abraham serves as a kind of representative of all his offspring. Abraham paid the tithe to Melchizedek. But in one sense—so was all of Abraham’s posterity. The priesthood of Aaron—that comes from Abraham—is subordinate to the priesthood of Melchizedek.

The writer argues that Melchizedek is superior to Aaron and his offspring; in the payment of tithes. Aaron pays tithes to Melchizedek while yet unborn—in the loins of Abraham. When Melchizedek blessed Abraham he was also blessing Abraham’s future children; including the tribe of Levi; and since the lesser is blessed by the better (v.7).

In the old order—in the Levitical system—in the Jewish Temple—the priests received tithes from their brothers; but in Genesis 14 (predating both Tabernacle and Temple) the priests (in Abraham’s loins) gave tithes to Melchizedek.

This is meant to illustrate the inferiority of Aaron’s priesthood in relation to the superiority of Melchizedek’s priesthood.

Conclusion

The writer of Hebrews wants the reader to be convinced of the poverty, inadequacy and inability of human priests to serve as substitutes for the Lord Jesus Christ. No earthly priest is perfect. But Jesus is perfect. No earthly priest is immortal or eternal. But Jesus is both immortal and eternal. Jesus is the only perfect and acceptable Priest who can represent men to God. But how can this be proven? How can human beings be convinced that the priests of earthly religion, including the Jewish Levitical priesthood, are inadequate and unacceptable to God?

The historical events of Genesis in the encounter of Abraham with Melchizedek illustrate God’s willingness to accept you and me through the superior priesthood of Jesus.

What is our passage saying?

We know longer have to approach God on the basis of earthly priests or an earthly priesthood.

We can be convinced that Jesus is a greater priest than all priests.

We know that earthly priests are inadequate in representing us to God.

We know Jesus is our perfect, eternal, adequate High Priest.

We know that the inadequate and imperfect Priesthood has forever changed.