

The Book of Hebrews

Lesson 7: Melchizedek and a Better Priesthood -- Hebrews 7:1-28

Sometimes the most important character in a story is the one who appears for only a moment. Tucked into the book of Genesis, between the great battles and the towering figure of Abraham, there is a man who shows up in just three verses and then disappears. His name is Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He brings out bread and wine, blesses Abraham, and receives a tenth of everything. And then he is gone. For most readers he is a footnote. But the writer of Hebrews saw in this brief, mysterious figure a window into the priesthood of Jesus Christ, and he builds an entire argument on him.

Why does this strange ancient priest matter so much? Because he points to a kind of priesthood that does not run in the family line of Aaron, does not depend on being descended from Levi, and is not handed down from father to son until death cuts it short. Melchizedek appears in Scripture with no recorded genealogy, no record of birth or death, resembling the Son of God, a priest who simply stands before us in the dignity of his office. He is a living picture, planted in Genesis, of a priesthood that is greater and older and more permanent than the one given through Moses. And the writer's point is breathtaking: God always intended a different and better priest.

Here is the heart of the matter. If the priesthood given to Aaron could have made anyone perfect, there would have been no need for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek. But there was a need, and God promised one in Psalm 110. When the priesthood changes, the writer says, there must be a change in the law as well, because the two are bound together. The old system, with its many priests who kept dying and being replaced, with its endless sacrifices that could never finally cleanse, was never the final word. It was a shadow, doing its appointed work for a season, pointing forward to the One who would come. In Christ, that old priestly system is not merely improved. It is fulfilled and set aside.

And what a priest we have in its place. Jesus holds His priesthood permanently, because He continues forever. He has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, because He offered Himself once for all. He did not become priest by physical descent but by the power of an indestructible life. He is holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens. And because He always lives, 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. Read that last line slowly and let it settle. At this very moment, your high priest is alive and praying for you. The old priests went home at night and eventually went to their graves. This one never stops, never sleeps, never dies, and never stops interceding for you.

Group Discussion: The writer argues that because God appointed a new priest after the order of Melchizedek, the old priesthood and the law connected to it had to change. Why do you think God established the old system at all if He always intended to replace it with something better in Christ?

Personal Reflection: Verse 25 says that Jesus always lives to make intercession for you. How does it change your sense of an ordinary, struggling day to know that your high priest is, at this very moment, praying for you?

Read Hebrews 7:1-28

Study Questions

1. In verses 1 through 10 the writer shows that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham and Levi, since Abraham paid him a tithe and received his blessing. What does this argument establish about the priesthood of Melchizedek compared to the Levitical priesthood?
2. The writer treats a brief, half-forgotten passage in Genesis as rich with meaning about Christ. What does this teach you about the way you read your Bible, and is there a part of Scripture you have dismissed as unimportant that God may want to open up to you?
3. Verses 11 and 12 argue that if perfection could have come through the Levitical priesthood, there would have been no need for another priest, and that a change of priesthood requires a change of the law. What does this teach about why the old priestly system, and the law bound to it, had to be replaced?
4. The old system, with all its rituals and requirements, could not make anyone perfect. Where in your spiritual life are you still trying to reach God through rule-keeping or religious performance rather than through Christ, and what would it look like to rest in Him instead?
5. Verses 18 and 19 say the former commandment was set aside because of its weakness and uselessness, for the law made nothing perfect, but a better hope is introduced through which we draw near to God. What does this teach about the purpose and the limits of the old law, and the better hope that replaces it?
6. This passage says the better hope lets us draw near to God in a way the old law never could. What is one specific barrier that has kept you at a distance from God, and how does the better hope in Christ invite you to come close?
7. Verses 20 through 25 emphasize that Jesus, unlike the many Levitical priests who died, holds His priesthood permanently because He continues forever, and therefore can save to the uttermost. What does the permanence of Christ's priesthood teach about the completeness of the salvation He offers?
8. Verse 25 says Jesus always lives to make intercession for those who draw near to God through Him. How does the truth that Christ is praying for you right now speak to a specific area where you feel weak, tempted, or alone?
9. Verses 11 through 28 build the central argument that the entire Levitical priesthood and its law were temporary and have now been fulfilled and set aside in Christ, our perfect and permanent high priest who offered Himself once for all. Some have looked for an ongoing earthly priesthood that keeps offering sacrifices. Using this passage, how would you show that the old priestly system is finished, and that Christ alone is now our priest, having made one final sacrifice?
10. Look back across the whole chapter. The writer wants you to see that Jesus is a greater, permanent, ever-living high priest who has replaced the old system entirely. Name one specific way this truth gives you confidence to draw near to God this week, and how it changes the way you live before Him.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Genesis 14:17-20, Melchizedek blessing Abraham and receiving a tithe; Psalm 110:1-4, the LORD's oath that the Messiah is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek; Romans 8:34, Christ at God's right hand interceding for us; 1 Timothy 2:5, the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Colossians 2:13-17, the legal demands set aside and nailed to the cross, the substance belonging to Christ.