

## Hebrews 7A (2014)

- Over the past three lessons, we've studied the third warning in the letter to the Hebrews
  - We can summarize the writer's warning as set your goal on pursuing spiritual maturity through the Word of God
    - Don't fall away to the life we knew before our coming to faith
    - Because doing so, poses the risk that we may never return to a life of serving and pleasing God
    - Instead, take hold of the hope of resurrection and eternal reward
    - And always remember that God is faithful to keep His promises to you regarding these things
    - So we can live with eyes for eternity
  - And remember why the writer launched into this warning in the first place
    - He wanted to explain the mystery of Jesus as a priest in the order of Melchizedek
    - But this teaching is complex and built upon other truths of Scripture
    - And without the necessary spiritual maturity, the writer questioned whether his audience was ready to understand what he needed to explain
    - Because he knew his audience had failed in pursuit of maturity, he issued them the warning we've been studying
- But now it's time for the writer to return to his original point of Melchizedek
  - And so we pick up with him at the end of Chapter 6, as he transitions back to his proof that Christ is a greater priest than any found in the Law

**[Heb. 6:19](#)** This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil,

**[Heb. 6:20](#)** where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

- Ending his comments from Chapter 6, the writer calls our hope in resurrection and rewards an “anchor to our soul”
  - The picture he’s painting is easy to appreciate
    - An anchor serves to hold a ship steady and in one place while it floats
    - Without an anchor, a ship drifts and can’t be sure of its position
    - If you’ve ever been on a boat without an anchor as it drifts, perhaps while you’re fishing, then you know the feeling of not being able to detect your own movement
    - You have no reference point on the water
    - You’re likely moving away from your intended location, but you can’t tell, and you therefore can’t correct
  - That’s a good analogy for how a Christian will live if they are not focused on our anchor, the anchor of our souls
    - As we’ve learned, that anchor is both our hope of resurrection and the expectation of reward for living in a manner pleasing to the Lord
    - When you plant those anchors in your life, you won’t drift away from the Lord
    - You won’t fall away, as the writer feared
  - But if you ever lose sight of these promises of God, then you will drift away from Him and from a life set on pleasing Him
    - Your salvation is no less sure
    - And, to some extent, your inheritance is still available
    - But you are unnecessarily piercing your soul with many griefs as Paul says in 1 Tim. 6
- Then the writer adds that our eternal hope enters within the veil
  - The power of our hope lies in the confidence that Jesus, as our High Priest, has moved beyond the veil
    - He has the power to make our hope real

- It's because Christ enters within the veil, that we possess the hope of resurrection and reward
- He has put to an end the thing that stood between us and the hope we now possess: our sin
- The writer's mention of the veil takes us back to the conversation of the priesthood
  - The veil he's speaking about, of course, is that cloth curtain that separated the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place of the tabernacle
  - This veil was all-important in the Jewish religious experience
  - It was a barrier separating men from knowing and enjoying the glory of God
  - 99.999% never experienced stepping beyond the veil, but they all thought about it when their high priest stepped beyond the veil
  - And it was a symbol of how sin separates us from the hope of eternal life
- So entering beyond that veil was an all-important desire for the Jewish people
  - Beyond that veil was the mercy seat, the place where the glory of God resided and where atonement for their sin could happen
  - In a round-about way, it was imaging yourself as sinless, without worry of being judged negatively
  - Under the Law, the sins of Israel were removed by an application of bull's blood on the mercy seat
- This procedure was spelled out under the Law of Moses
  - Only the high priest of Israel could enter
  - And this man could only enter once a year, on a day called Yom Kippur, the day of atonement
  - On that day, the priest sprinkled the blood of a bull on the mercy seat, satisfying the wrath of God for the sins of the nation

- By this ritual, the Lord counted the sins of the nation covered for another year under the Covenant
- But there are obvious problems, or limitations, in this system as the Lord designed it
  - First, the high priest suffered from the same weakness as the people he served
    - He suffered in sin like those he served
    - And therefore, he was under the same penalty of death as the rest
    - So he was required to make a sacrifice for his own sins before he was qualified to apply the sacrifice for the people
    - And because he was a sinful man, he died like all men, so he had to be replaced from time to time with a new high priest
    - Not a very reassuring system for those in Israel, who depended on the intercession of the high priest
    - Even the very best high priest eventually died, and someone would take his place – that doesn't suggest a very final solution to our sin
  - Secondly, the blood of the bulls and goats was clearly inadequate to remove the people's sin forever
    - The sacrifice of Yom Kippur was repeated annually, because the sin of the people never ended
    - There was never a point when the people felt relief from their sin
    - For as soon as one sacrifice had been performed by the High Priest, the cycle began again
- So we need a better priesthood if we're ever going to put an end once and for all to this separation
  - So in v.20, the writer says that Jesus is that better priest because He serves in a better order of priest, the order of Melchizedek
    - Now we're beginning to sense why it's important to understand this order of priests
    - Because it's this order that puts to an end the problem of sin

- It's this order that solves all the limitations of the order of Aaron formed under the Law
- So then in Chapter 7, the writer launches into the full discussion of this superior order of priesthood
  - And the writer begins by explaining the order's namesake, that is, the man Melchizedek

**Heb. 7:1** For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, **Heb. 7:2** to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace.

**Heb. 7:3** Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually.

**Heb. 7:4** Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils.

**Heb. 7:5** And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham.

**Heb. 7:6** But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises.

**Heb. 7:7** But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater.

**Heb. 7:8** In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on.

**Heb. 7:9** And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, **Heb. 7:10** for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

- The man named Melchizedek is a bit of an enigma in Scripture
  - He appears first in Genesis 14, in the story of Abraham defeating the four kings of the north
    - These kings came into Canaan to defeat the five kings of the cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zoboim and Zoar
    - In the process of this battle, the four kings of the north took captive all the people of the city of Sodom, including Abraham's nephew, Lot
    - Abraham hears of these events and acts quickly to attack the retreating kings and free his nephew
  - In Chapter 14 we read this:

[Gen. 14:14](#) When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

[Gen. 14:15](#) He divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.

[Gen. 14:16](#) He brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the people.

[Gen. 14:17](#) Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

[Gen. 14:18](#) And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High.

[Gen. 14:19](#) He blessed him and said,

“Blessed be Abram of God Most High,  
Possessor of heaven and earth;

[Gen. 14:20](#) And blessed be God Most High,  
Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.”  
He gave him a tenth of all.

- In v.18, Abraham is met by a man who is a king, a man called Melchizedek
  - This man's name is not actually a name at all
    - The word “Melchizedek” is a title, much like “Pharaoh” and “Caesar” are titles, and not names
    - His title means “My king is righteous”
    - But the writer says the name means “king of righteousness” in v. 2, which isn't literally correct
  - The writer is making a play on the name, because this man was a king of a city called Salem
    - Salem (which is present-day Jerusalem) was a Jebusite city in that day
    - In fact, the suffix of his title, “zedek”, is a Jebusite name
    - Later, David conquers the Jebusites and takes Salem for Israel, making it the capital, and renaming it Jerusalem
  - The word “salem” means “peace”, as the writer points out in v.2
    - So not only could we say this man is the king of righteousness

- But we could also say he is the king of peace
- The man is also a priest, which means he was an intercessor for the people before God
  - And both Abraham, and now the writer of Hebrews, testify that this man was a true priest of the God Most High
    - He wasn't a priest to some pagan religion
    - And he wasn't a self-appointed priest or pretender
    - He was actually a man appointed as a priest by God Himself
  - Furthermore, Abraham recognized this man to be a person of authority and worthy of Abraham's honor
    - Notice in Heb. 7:2, Abraham pays a tithe to this man
    - Now, we know the tithe wasn't for Melchizedek's benefit
    - Abraham wasn't giving Melchizedek the spoils because he wanted to honor Melchizedek
    - When men tithe, they do so to honor God
    - So if Abraham handed his tithe to Melchizedek, it means that Abraham believed that this man was an intercessor before God
  - Finally, the writer notes in v.3, that this person appears out of nowhere in the narrative of Genesis – which is very uncharacteristic for Genesis
    - Moses never spends time addressing Melchizedek's genealogy
    - There is no mention of his birth or parents
    - And there is never a mention of his death
    - This is highly unusual, considering how careful Moses is to always record the beginning and end of every significant person in the story of Israel
    - The genealogies of Genesis are the key feature connecting the events of the Garden to the Messiah Who comes to correct for the mistake of Adam
    - And yet here's the very important player who is never linked to any genealogy

- So the mystery of Melchizedek leaves us asking who was this man?
  - Remember, this man served as a priest before there was the Law of Moses
    - There was no tabernacle
    - There was no sacrificial system
    - The priests of Aaron had not yet been established, for Aaron had not yet even been born
  - So how did this priest come to be a priest?
    - Where did his priesthood originate?
    - Why did Abraham view him to be his superior before the Lord?
    - And finally, how is this ancient priest related to Christ as our High Priest?
- Before we consider who Melchizedek was, let's deal with one possibility
  - Many have noticed that the unique characteristics of this man create a clear and obvious picture of Christ
    - Christ is the King of Righteousness
    - Christ is the King of Peace
    - Christ is both a priest and a king, something that priests under the Law could never do
    - And though Christ was born a man, He had no beginning, since He existed from the beginning with the Father
    - And Christ will have no end, now that He lives to the Father forever
    - He is the Alpha and the Omega
    - So clearly, Melchizedek is a picture of Christ, and the writer of Hebrews is in the process of making the very same point
  - But some have speculated that Melchizedek was more than a picture of Christ and was actually a pre-incarnate theophany of Christ
    - In other words, some hold that Melchizedek was not a man at all

- He was Christ appearing to Abraham in the form of a man
- Much like the pre-incarnate Lord appeared to Abraham at his tent Genesis 18
- But this interpretation makes a common mistake in confusing a picture for the substance
  - Ironically, this confusion only serves to prove what the writer of Hebrews was concerned about in the first place
  - Concerning Melchizedek, there is much to say and it is hard to explain
  - And even today, some Bible students continue to miss the main point
- Melchizedek was a real man who served as a priest of God in Abraham's day, and before we understand who is truly was, let's rule out the theory that he was a pre-incarnate Christ
  - First, the writer's description of Melchizedek precludes as interpretation that this man was a theophany
    - The writer says this man was "like the Son of God"
    - The term "like" in Greek is *aphomoioo*, means "to be made in the likeness of something"
    - So the man Melchizedek was made in the likeness of the Son of God
    - This is the opposite situation of a theophany
    - A theophany is always the Son of God being made in the likeness of something else, like a burning bush or a man visiting Abraham
    - So Melchizedek isn't a theophany; he's a shadow, a picture of Christ
  - Furthermore, the writer says in v.8 that this "mortal" man received Abraham's tithe
    - If the writer calls Melchizedek a mortal man, then certainly he had a beginning and an end
    - Mortal means he was an ordinary human being, and not a theophany

- Finally, we learned in Hebrews 5:1 that a priest is always taken from among men to represent those in whose likeness he shares
  - The writer explained that since men must be represented by a man, Christ took the form of man so that He could become our High Priest
  - The writer says that Melchizedek was a priest to the Most High God, and as a priest, he represented men before God
  - Melchizedek could only have done this as a true man
  - If this were a theophany of Christ, then it came prior to Christ's incarnation
  - And if it predates Christ's incarnation, then Christ was not yet a man and therefore unable to serve as a priest before men
- We could list other reasons why Melchizedek could not be a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus, but the point has been made
  - This man was a real, historical figure
  - He was king over the Jebusite city of Salem
  - And he served as a priest of God to men on earth in that day
  - Such that even Abraham sought for him when he desired to worship and tithe to the Living God
  - So we return to our central question...who was he?
- The first thing to remember from a few lessons ago, is that the term "order" doesn't mean a society or organization, like an order of monks
  - The word literally means a "succession"
    - It refers to handing down an office from person to person through a succession of office holders
    - For example, the office of high priest in the Aaronic order was held for life and then handed down to a successor upon the death of the current office holder
    - That succession started with Aaron, so we call it the Aaronic order
    - But there was only one high priest at any time

- Similarly, the order of Melchizedek describes a succession of priests
  - Each person in this order held the office for life
  - And the next office holder received the office upon the death of the prior office holder
  - Each man who held the office inherited the title Melchizedek, but that wasn't his actual name
  - So the name of this man was obscured by Moses, who only recorded his title
- But we find a critical clue in 2 Peter 2:5, when Peter declares that Noah was the preacher of righteousness in his day

**2 Pet. 2:5 and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;**

- That translation from the NASB Bible is very unhelpful, in that it obscures the real words Peter wrote in Greek
  - A more literal translation of this verse taken from Young's Literal Translation reads this way:

**2 Pet. 2:5 and the old world did not spare, but the eighth person, Noah, of righteousness a preacher, did keep, a flood on the world of the impious having brought,**

- The more literal translation reveals that Peter was saying Noah was the eighth person of righteous
  - Peter wasn't saying Noah was one of eight people on the Ark, though that was true also
  - He was calling Noah an eighth person of righteousness
  - As in the eighth man in an order, or succession, of people called righteous
- From Peter, we learn that Noah was the eighth person to hold the office of Melchizedek
  - And if Noah was the eighth, then it's relatively simple to follow the succession backward to learn the previous seven men to hold the position

- Noah inherited the position from his father Methuselah
- And Methuselah inherited it from Jared
- Jared inherited it from Mahalalel
- Mahalalel inherited it from Kenan
- Kenan inherited it from Enosh
- Enosh inherited it from Seth
- And Seth inherited it from Adam
- What we're learning, is that ever since the fall of Adam, the Lord has appointed one man to serve as His priest on earth
  - That man was always found in the line of the seed promise
  - Each man held the office until he died
  - And the office of Melchizedek was inherited by the next man in the seed promise line
- This priesthood predates the priesthood of the Law, and it continued on, even after the Law was put in place
  - And it's a superior priesthood, one that by its very name foretells its purpose, that is, to bring in righteousness
  - We'll come back to the relationship between the priesthood of the Law and the priesthood of Melchizedek later
  - But for now, we only need understand that this priesthood is the one that Christ belongs to
- So, who was the priest that met Abraham?
  - Well, Noah was Melchizedek, but he died shortly before Abraham's battle with the kings
    - So it was Noah's son, Shem, who was the next man in the line of the seed promise
    - Shem inherited the office of righteousness and became the Melchizedek that Abraham met
    - In fact, Shem outlived Abraham, so Abraham never inherited the title Melchizedek himself

- It passed from Shem to Jacob



- We know Shem settled in the area of Canaan
  - And apparently, Shem also became the king of the city of Salem
  - Making him not only a priest of righteousness but also a king of righteousness
  - And in that way, his life became a shadow of Christ, Who was both Priest and King
  - Interestingly, there is Jewish rabbinical teaching that Shem was Melchizedek
- We know Abraham was a descendent of Shem
  - Shem was Abraham's great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandfather
    - So, in a patriarchal culture, Abraham naturally viewed Shem as his superior

- That's why the writer says in vs.4-7 that this man Melchizedek was Abraham's superior
- Even more interesting, the king that Abraham had killed, Chedorlaomer, was also a descendent of Shem
  - So Abraham had killed a distant cousin, another member of Shem's family
  - So Shem met Abraham, presumably to restore peace in the family through an offering (bread and wine)
  - While Abraham tithed to Shem in recognition of his authority over the family and in thanks for the victory
  - Even in this gesture, we find another picture of Christ, in that He reconciles us to our Father
- In vs.8-10, the writer says this analysis proves that the priesthood of Melchizedek was a greater priesthood than the one that follows in the Law
  - The priests of the Law were descended from Levi, who himself was descended from Abraham
    - So just as Abraham showed Shem respect because he was Abraham's elder, then by logical extension, Levi would have done the same thing had he been alive
    - And likewise, Aaron, who was descended from Levi, would have acknowledged Shem as his superior, had Aaron been alive to meet him as Abraham did
  - Therefore, the writer says that Levi and Aaron were present in Abraham's loins
    - Meaning that this priest was superior to any order that came later
    - And the Melchizedek priesthood must always be considered superior to the one given in the Law
- This priesthood of Melchizedek is important, because it demonstrates that the Lord has been at work since the beginning, providing an intercessor for sinful men
  - Long before Moses and the Law, the Lord made a provision for a priesthood, a priesthood called "the Lord is righteous"

- It stood for generations, moving from man to man
- In each generation, there stood a man – and only one man – who could intercede on behalf of those who wanted the Lord’s mercy
- And that man served until death
- One day, this priesthood was inherited by Jesus Christ
  - When Jesus’ earthly father, Joseph, died, Jesus received the office of Melchizedek, My Lord is Righteous
  - This explains why Joseph died by the time Jesus’ earthly ministry began
    - Jesus had to inherit the order of Melchizedek during His earthly life
    - That’s why you see the genealogy in Matthew’s Gospel passing through Joseph – he was passing the seed line and the order of Melchizedek down to Jesus
    - Since Jesus became man, to serve as our intercessor
- So, for the first and last time, the order was held by One Who was truly Righteous – Jesus Christ
  - But since Jesus lives forever, the order will never pass down to another person
  - The order will be held forever by Jesus, who is a priest in the order of Melchizedek
  - Having rightly obtained it through inheritance
  - Next time, we see the writer explaining this point fully