

Hebrews 7B (2014)

- Who is Melchizedek and why do we care about him?
 - Last week, we learned who he was
 - He's more than a metaphor or myth or picture
 - His name is actually his title, meaning my Lord is righteous
 - The man who met Abraham was part of an order or succession of men, beginning with Adam and continuing until Christ
 - Melchizedek was the priest of the God Most High
 - The man who held that title in Abraham's day, was the ninth man to hold the position and he was one of Noah's sons, Shem
 - His appearance in Genesis was orchestrated by the Spirit so that Melchizedek would present a compelling picture of Christ
 - Moses never revealed that Melchizedek was Shem
 - Instead, he left the man's genealogy a secret, never revealing his origins or his death
 - Furthermore, Shem had become the king of a Jebusite city called Salem, which was eventually to become Jerusalem
 - So that in all these details, we could see that the Melchizedek priesthood is the priesthood Jesus would eventually inherit from Joseph
- So the writer has answered the question, "Who is Melchizedek?"
 - But now, we need an answer to the question, "Why should I care about him?"
 - And that answer comes in the next part of Chapter 7
 - And in this part, we find probably the most challenging portion of the teaching on Melchizedek
 - It was probably this part that the writer was thinking of when he said he had much to say and it's difficult to understand

- But the complexity of this teaching can be broken down into three simple ideas or points
 - First, the writer explains the significance of God having established two different priestly orders

Heb. 7:11 Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron?

Heb. 7:12 For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also.

Heb. 7:13 For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar.

Heb. 7:14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.

Heb. 7:15 And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek,

Heb. 7:16 who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life.

Heb. 7:17 For it is attested of Him,

**“ YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER
ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.”**

- The writer points out that if the Levitical priesthood were able to address man’s problem of sin, God never would have established another priesthood
 - The Levitical priesthood was the priesthood established in the Law of Moses and given to Israel to regulate sacrifice in the tabernacle
 - If this priesthood were sufficient, God would have left well-enough alone the writer says
 - But in Scripture, we find another order of priests, the order of Melchizedek
 - Now, the Melchizedek order came first historically, and the Levitical order followed
 - And with the Levitical priesthood, came also a Law given to Israel
 - And that’s to be expected, because with a change in priesthood, comes a change in Law also
 - So perhaps we might conclude that the Levitical order was an improved version of priesthood

- And if the Levitical order was capable of making men perfect, then it should have been the last word from God concerning priests
- Then when the Messiah arrived, we would expect Him to come in the line of Aaronic priests
- So He can meet the requirements to be the High Priest men desire under the Law
- Secondly, the writer points out that the Messiah could never meet the test to serve as a Levitical priest, so something had to change
 - In v.12, the writer says that the only way to change the rules for who can serve as priest is if God Himself changes the Law that regulates His people
 - Remember back in Chapter 5, that the writer said a priest must be appointed by God from among those he represents

Heb. 5:1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins;

- A high priest must be appointed by God in order to be acceptable to God
 - God isn't going to accept as His representative any man except the one He designates
- And God designates priests according to a Law, or set of requirements, that stipulates who can be a priest
- According to the Law of Moses, only men in the tribe of Levi and in the family of Aaron could be priests
 - On the other hand, according to the blessing pronounced by Jacob on his sons, the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah
 - But if Messiah must come through Judah, then that would mean the Messiah couldn't qualify as a priest under the Law
 - Notice in vs.13-14, the writer says that Jesus (*i.e.*, the "One") belonged to the wrong tribe, one that can never officiate at the altar, under the Law

- And if the Messiah can't be a priest, then He can't be our intercessor
- He can't carry the people's sins before the Lord
- So the writer's final point in this passage is that the Messiah had to come in the order of Melchizedek rather than the Levitical, showing the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood
 - In v.15, the writer says this is clearer still if another priest arises in the likeness (or manner) of Melchizedek
 - "This" refers to the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood
 - The superiority of the Melchizedek order is clearly evidenced by the fact that the Messiah was designated to a different order
 - Again, if the Levitical order were the superior order, then the Messiah would not have sought His qualification under an earlier order
 - While Jesus couldn't meet the requirements for the Levitical order, He was the only One Who could meet the requirements in the order of Melchizedek
 - In vs.15-16, the writer says these priests of Melchizedek had to be qualified by more than a physical requirement
 - Levitical priests were qualified merely by having the right family line
 - But to enter the Melchizedek order first required that a person inherit the seed promise
 - They had to be born at the right time and to the right family, according to God's choice
 - This is the ultimate evidence of God's approval, since He alone determines the day and family of each person's birth
 - Furthermore, the Father promised that the Messiah would hold the order forever
 - In v.17, the author quotes from Psalms 110 to prove his argument
 - David wrote that the Messiah would be a priest in the order of Melchizedek forever

- But the only way to hold the order of Melchizedek forever is by never dying
 - As each Melchizedek died, a new man inherited the office
 - But the Father set the requirement for the Messiah by an oath, declaring that He would serve as a priest in the order of Melchizedek forever
 - So by Jesus' indestructible life, He proved Himself to qualify for the position, according to the Father's requirements
- So now, the writer summarizes why it's important that Jesus came as a priest of a different order

Heb. 7:18 For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness

Heb. 7:19 (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

Heb. 7:20 And inasmuch as it was not without an oath

Heb. 7:21 (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him,

“ THE LORD HAS SWORN
AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND,
'YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER'”);

Heb. 7:22 so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

- The writer uses an “on the one hand – on the other hand” comparison between the Aaronic priesthood Jesus' priesthood
 - On the one hand, he says, the Law (which established the priesthood of Aaron) had to be set aside after a time
 - It was temporary by design and purpose
 - The Law was weak and useless when it came to the main purpose of priests: putting away the sin that separates us and necessitates an intercessor
 - The Law never achieved this end
 - It could not make sinful men perfect
 - Therefore, it could not give us any hope that we could draw near to God

- Our sin would be forever a barrier, since the Law of Israel never did away with sin
- At best, it covered it temporarily, allowing fellowship with God at a distance
- Elsewhere, Paul says the Law was a temporary custodian to protect Israel and preserve her until the coming of the Messiah

Gal. 3:19 Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

- The Law created a temporary institution, the Levitical priesthood, to last only until the promised Seed arrived to fulfill a promise
- And that promise had its own priesthood
- That Seed was Christ, Paul says
- You have the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ
- The Law of Moses was ordained because of sin; the Law of Christ was ordained so that we might obtain righteousness
- That's why the priesthood associated with the promise is called "Melchizedek", which means "The Lord is my Righteousness"
- When He arrived, He would assume His position as the priest Melchizedek
 - With that change in priesthood, came a change in Law as well
 - And so the Law of Moses would have met its purpose

Gal. 3:23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

Gal. 3:24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

Gal. 3:25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Gal. 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

- So to summarize, the order of Melchizedek is the priesthood associated with the Seed Promise given to Adam and Woman and carried down to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, on its way to Christ

- This is the priesthood that leads us to righteousness, because it is the priesthood of Messiah
 - It was established not on the basis of works of Law, but by the Word (or oath or promise) of God
 - By this priesthood, men are made righteous, because it depends on the righteousness of our Lord, and not on our own
 - That's why the priesthood is called "the order of Melchizedek", which means "my Lord is righteous"
 - And it is a priesthood that exists forever, since our High Priest never dies and will never be replaced
- In all these things, the order of Melchizedek is superior to the Levitical order
 - The Levitical order comes by way of a covenant of Law, based on works, not a promise of God
 - Therefore, like Law itself, it cannot make men perfect and only serves to cover over the sins of men
 - It is weak and useless in that regard
- Therefore, the covenant that established the one (the Law) is inferior to the covenant that established the other
 - The writer is alluding to his next topic of covenants, which comes up in Chapter 8
 - At this point, he's simply observing that if the Old Covenant established the Law and the Levitical priesthood
 - And if those things are weak and being replaced by better things
 - Then naturally, the covenant that established them is likewise being replaced
 - We'll wait to say more about these covenants for Chapter 8
 - And so now, the writer finishes by applying the meaning of these things to the way we worship and follow Christ as believers

Heb. 7:23 The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing,

[Heb. 7:24](#) but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently.

[Heb. 7:25](#) Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

[Heb. 7:26](#) For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens;

[Heb. 7:27](#) who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

[Heb. 7:28](#) For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

- So where do we go for intercession before the Living God?
 - In the writer's day, there were two priesthoods seemingly at work within the Jewish world
 - On the one hand, you had the Levitical priests, who continued to operate in the tabernacle, at least in the day this letter was written
 - And on the other hand, we have our Lord, the High Priest in Heaven, who we could approach
 - One was especially attractive to our flesh, since it involved ritual and Law
 - While the other was strictly a matter of faith, since it depended on nothing more than worshipping in Spirit and Truth
 - In light of those options, some Jewish believers were returning to the temple and to practice of the Law, even though they had placed their faith in Jesus as Messiah
 - They saw the Levitical priests as their intercessors, even though they knew Jesus was their Lord
 - And so they went back to the temple to seek God's forgiveness through those priests
 - What they didn't understand was that there was another and better priesthood, that is, Melchizedek
 - Obviously, this behavior is incompatible with faith in Christ, but it's not a disqualification

- What I mean is, a true Christian can fall prey to this kind of false thinking
- We can seek intercession from someone or something other than Christ, even though we have come to know Him truly
- If a Christian remains so spiritually immature and untaught, they can be deceived and misled into thinking and doing the wrong things
- Today, some Christians fall into believing that we must go into a booth and confess our sins before a man who calls himself a priest
- That is seeking intercession through a priest other than Christ and it's wrong
 - Yet some Christians are fooled into thinking it's necessary
- If we know Christ to be our Savior, we seek forgiveness from Him alone and we need no other
 - And the writer points out the worthless nature of the Levitical priests, calling them "former" priests
 - When he wrote this letter, these priests still existed
 - Yet he calls them "former", because they no longer serve a purpose
 - They served in large numbers throughout their history because they were always dying off and needed to be replaced
 - Why should we take the problem of our sin before men who themselves are dying due to sin?
 - Why do we sit in a booth and confess our sin to a man who is just as sinful as we are?
 - And why trust someone who dies in the end, because it means that person was no closer to perfection than we are?
 - The answer: we shouldn't
 - What we need is someone who has already obtained what we seek: the peace with the Father that only sinlessness can provide
 - We want someone who has escaped the penalty of death

- We want a Priest who had no sin of His own, so He can stand before the Father and represent us perfectly
- We want a Priest who never dies, so He can see our salvation through until the end
- And of course, Jesus is that High Priest
 - The writer says in v.25, that Jesus lives forever and can make intercession for us forever
 - Not only is He qualified to intercede, but He also has the power to extend what He has to us to make us perfect
 - He holds his Priesthood forever, since He will never pass it on to another person because He never dies
- In v.26, the writer wraps up his argument saying it was befitting for us to have a High Priest Who was holy Himself, innocent from sin, separated from sinners and exalted
 - He is the kind of High Priest we always needed and the Lord always planned to give us
 - He never offered up a sacrifice for Himself, as the Levites did
 - Because He had no sin of His own
 - He offered Himself instead, for the sins of all the people
 - The entire chapter is summarized by v.28
 - The Law appointed priests who were weak
 - But an oath of God appointed His Son to be the perfect High Priest of a different order
 - That oath was written after the Law existed – the Psalms were written after the Levitical priesthood came into being
 - And therefore, we must conclude the greater priesthood waited for our Lord
 - And so, that is the high priesthood we look to for intercession
- But no discussion of priesthood would be complete without acknowledging that we form a priesthood of our own

- While Christ is certainly our High Priest, every believer is part of a priesthood
 - Peter says

1 Pet. 2:9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

1 Pet. 2:10 for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

- We are a priesthood, in the sense that we serve as ministers for God on behalf of the world
 - We represent God before the people of the world
 - We teach them about His commandments
 - When their prayers are not heard, we pray on their behalf
 - When they are seeking a reconciliation with God, we show them the way
- We never stand in the place of Christ, nor do we ever say a person must go through us to reach the Lord
 - But we are an army of servants our High Priest may use to minister to the world
 - We are now the people of God and we proclaim the excellencies of Him Who called us out of darkness
- So though we are not in danger of making the same mistakes as the writer's audience, we still have our own concerns when it comes to priesthood
 - Namely, are we serving as the priest we are called to be, in service to our High Priest?