



## Lesson 7 | The Priest Like Melchizedek | 1/20/2021

The first clear revelation that the Messiah would also be a priest is found in the promise that he would be like David: "The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." The Lord will stretch out Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, "Rule in the midst of Your enemies..." The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, "**You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.**" And then the writer of Hebrews says, "And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek" (7:15, NASB).

In Hebrews 7:13, the writer introduced the idea that God's ideal priesthood—which He had promised in the Old Covenant—was never meant to be fulfilled in the Levitical order. Instead, the author points out that the promises of the Messiah are applied to someone of the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14), who would also be King. Therefore, there would be planned by God, in bringing the Messiah, a change in the law (Hebrews 7:12). God's promise of a new priesthood meant that He had already put in place an eternal priesthood which came before the law of Moses (Hebrews 7:11). The conclusion of all of this, as presented here, is that God intended to bring us a high priest who would fulfill His promises—a priest like Melchizedek, not like Levi or Aaron.

The symbolic way that Jesus matches the characteristics of Melchizedek, in particular, are useful in explaining what made the priesthood of Melchizedek superior and ultimately, eternal.

The most significant of these is that the order of Melchizedek was based on an eternal commission from God, not merely human ancestry. Melchizedek was "priest of God Most High" (Genesis 14:18) long before the law of Moses, and God promised to establish his priesthood forever (Psalm 110:4). Christ's basis for His priesthood, as shown, is not tied to His human heritage, but to His "indestructible" life (Hebrews 7:16). And this eternal nature of this priesthood is why it is superior to the priesthood of Aaron whose replacement was chosen every generation.

Who was Melchizedek? First, the name Melchizedek means "king of righteousness"; then also, 'king of Salem' means 'king of peace,'" (Hebrews 7:2). With a name like that, we can expect great things, but little is revealed in our introduction to the revered Melchizedek in Genesis 14 about his role as King. In that chapter, the mentioned kings, who were once allies, had waged war in the Siddim Valley, during which Abram's nephew Lot was taken prisoner. Hearing of this, Abram sets out to reclaim his relative and his possessions. This is a great show of the power that Abram had (as one tribal leader) (see the reference to his 318 trained fighting men, v.14). But what the writer of Hebrews will emphasize from the Genesis account, something many may have overlooked, is that Melchizedek is clearly superior to even the powerful Abram.

Melchizedek and Abram served the same God. As Abram returned from his victory over Chedorlaomer, the King of Sodom, the King of Salem came to meet him. Melchizedek was this King of Salem and a priest of "God Most High." While the king of Sodom seeks to wheel and deal over the plunder Abram has just acquired, Melchizedek brings bread and wine with him and speaks a blessing over Abram and in that blessing, says that Abram belonged to the same God Most High that Melchizedek served as priest.

Melchizedek blessed Abram. The point the writer of Hebrews will make is that "it is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior" (7:7). Therefore, in that single act, demonstrated the superiority of the order of Melchizedek before the tribe of Levi is even born. After receiving the blessing, the first recorded tithe is given to a priest showing his higher rank which the writer of Hebrews elaborates, "One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor what Melchizedek met him (7:9-10).



## THE PROMISE OF MESSIAH: WHAT THE BIBLE REVEALS

Melchizedek was a faithful priest. We can assume from the high regard in which he is spoken in every text we read is that Melchizedek acted as a faithful holy representative of the one true God. We don't know how he came to know the Lord, because there is no scriptural revelation on this, but he calls the Lord the name we see through the scriptures: El Elyon, the God Most High. And even the writer of Hebrews extols Melchizedek's unknown beginning with "He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever" (7:3).

Abram and Melchizedek part ways and we don't hear the name of the priest again until it is uttered in the messianic Psalm 110 mentioned above. Jesus himself quoted this verse during his trial before the Sanhedrin (Matthew 26:64), referring to himself, and Acts 2:34–36 states that this verse was fulfilled in the ascension and exaltation of Christ.

The author of Hebrews repeatedly contrasts Old Testament heroes and practices and then profoundly reveals how Jesus is the better and truer fulfillment of the Hebrew's beloved traditions and patriarchs. In chapters 5 through the beginning of chapter 8 the author focuses on the superior priesthood of Jesus over the Levitical Priesthood as the eternal, perfected priest of the order of Melchizedek. The Levitical priests would represent the people of Israel before God. They became priests by lineage, which didn't guarantee righteous living; see Aaron's son's unauthorized fire or Eli's wicked sons for example. Over and over the Old Testament prophesies that the Messiah will be a descendent of David from the line of Judah. Yet, Jesus is superior to every Levite office, including priesthood, because like the first high priest Melchizedek, his priesthood extends to every nation, tribe, and tongue, and "Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant" (Heb 7:22).

He is a priest for all. Genesis is filled with genealogies, but for Melchizedek there is no record of his lineage, before or after. Melchizedek was a priest in an order that had no beginning; because Jesus is the order's greatest priest, it will also never end. The great news found here is that Jesus is not a Levitical priest for the Israelites, but a priest of the order of Melchizedek – meaning he is a priest for all. Though the Jew and the Gentile were once separated by promise and law, through Christ all of humanity was extended the opportunity to be drawn near. "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace" (Eph 2:14-15).

Jesus: the priest forever. We can't get so wrapped up in the stories of our individual lives only to find we have lost sight of the big story that God is weaving. Melchizedek is but a thread in the story that tells of the salvation of souls through Christ, and that thread highlights a more complete view of our glorious Savior. Melchizedek is important. Any glimpse in scripture which offers a more complete view of Jesus is beauty and truth that we cannot set aside. He is the perfect one, the Ancient of Days, the priest forever!

And because of the extraordinary place where Jesus is as a priest like Melchizedek, we can be confident and secure in Jesus. The order of Melchizedek is superior because Christ holds it not by virtue of mere physical descent but "by the power of an indestructible life" (v. 16). Because Jesus overcame death by resurrection (and ascension) means that He will never set aside His priesthood – and will serve believers forever. If we come to God through the priestly ministry of Jesus, we can be sure that like His priesthood, our eternal life with God will be eternal. Knowing that Christ holds an eternal priesthood, we are confident that we can be secure in Him forever. Our salvation is grounded not in our ability to persevere but in the power of the eternal High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, Christ Jesus our Lord, to preserve us.

Next Week | Lesson 8 | The Messiah in the Early Prophets.