

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part twenty-seven

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ALL OTHER ATTEMPTS TO REACH GOD ARE MADE OBSOLETE WITH THE COMING OF THE CHRIST

Hebrews 7:1-16 - "For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, [2] and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. [3] 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. [4] See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! [5] And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. [6] But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. [7] It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. [8] In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. [9] One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, [10] for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him. [11] Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? [12] For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. [13] For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. [14] For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. [15] This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, [16] who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life."

If I were a betting pastor I would bet a year's pay there isn't a congregation anywhere in Canada using Hebrews 7 for the sermon text. This is a clunky, awkward text. It doesn't flow. It doesn't feel poetic, engaging, or immediately relevant. So why on earth did the Holy Spirit - the One Jesus described as the Divine Teacher - why did **He** inspire - breathe out - such a cumbersome string of sentences for the church?

Here's my goal this morning. Why do any of us need to know a whiff about Melchizedek? I want everyone here to leave church feeling almost surprised - like they were inwardly saying, "O, OK. **That's** why those verses matter!" And I have two Sundays to try to make this happen.

I've chosen a big block of text to work through this morning so we're going to jump right into it:

1) **MELCHIZEDEK IS REFERENCED IN THIS SPIRIT-INSPIRED TEXT TO HELP US UNDERSTAND THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE OLD COVENANT PRIESTHOOD AND THE MINISTRY OF THE CHRIST**

Here's why this matters so much. There have always been, and still are, dozens of religions claiming access to God. There are prophets and leaders and teachers and angels, priests and high priests in abundance. **What gives any one religious belief the right to claim supremacy over the others?**

There could hardly be a more important question and that's what this cumbersome text is addressing. **Priesthood**, in any religion, is all about getting to God. Priests are all about getting access to God. Our writer picks **one** such religion thoroughly endorsed by the entire Old Testament - **Judaism**. And he uses that as an example of how the coming of the Christ makes all religion **without** Christ and **outside** of Christ obsolete. And he quite strangely uses this mostly unknown name - **Melchizedek** - to make his point.

Hebrews 7:1-10 - "For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings **and blessed him**, [2] **and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything**. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. [3] **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. [4] See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! [5] And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. [6] **But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.**[7] It is beyond dispute that **the inferior is blessed by the superior.**[8] In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the

other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. [9] One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, [10] for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.”

When our writer begins this seventh chapter with those three simple words - “*For this Melchizedek....*” (1) - he is signaling this is not the first time he has mentioned him:

Hebrews 5:6 - “....as he [God] says also in another place, ‘You [Jesus] are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.’”

Hebrews 5:10 - “....[Jesus] being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.”

Hebrews 6:20 - “...where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

The key point in each of these texts is this unknown priest, Melchizedek, is repeatedly linked up with Jesus. He’s not the *same* as Jesus, of course, but he *illustrates* Jesus. Melchizedek is used to picture the *type* of priesthood Christ accomplished. But what exactly is it that is so special about the priestly ministry of Melchizedek? Why does this inspired text use him to explain and define the ministry of our Lord? That’s what we want to look into in this first point.

Three times in three verses our writer repeats the phrase Jesus is a high priest “....*after the order of Melchizedek*....” (5:6, 10, 6:20). He means Jesus is a priest *along the lines* of Melchizedek - *after the pattern* of Melchizedek. And this isn’t as complicated as our text in chapter 7 might make you think.

There are two radically unique features of the priestly “*order of Melchizedek*.” *First, Melchizedek wasn’t a descendant of Aaron and he wasn’t of the tribe of Levi as all the Old Testament priests were commanded by God to be. Second, Melchizedek has no traceable ancestry in the Old Testament.* And I want you to see why both of these features are the theme of Hebrews chapter 7.

First, Melchizedek wasn’t in the Levitical priestly line. Consider this. Melchizedek is the first priest *named* in the Bible. And every other priest - those offering all the sacrifices and offerings in the Old Testament - were the *Levites* in the family line of *Aaron*. No king, no prophet, no leader could take the priesthood upon himself. The Levitical priesthood was prescribed by the law given through Moses. This is what our writer is driving at in **Hebrews 7:5** - “*And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham.*”

Melchizedek is an *outsider* to the whole Judaic covenant. He doesn’t fit into Old Testament law at all, and yet is specifically called, “....*priest of the most high God*....” (7:1).

Just think about what’s being said here. You’ve probably struggled through reading the books of Leviticus and even Numbers. There is all that endless repetitive detail about the construction of every corner of the Tabernacle and every conceivable rule of animal sacrifice and sinner purification. And woe betide anyone who ignores these divinely spoken regulations.

And yet the very first priest named in the Old Testament isn’t in the family of Aaron. He isn’t a Levite. He isn’t a descendant of Abraham. He isn’t Jewish.

No. Yet our writer actually tells us Melchizedek is *greater* than Abraham. This is shown from our text in *two ways*. *First*, Melchizedek *blesses* Abraham, rather than Abraham blessing Melchizedek - **Hebrews 7:1 & 7** - “*For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him....*” [7] It is beyond dispute that *the inferior is blessed by the superior.*”

And *second*, Abraham offers the tithe of his battle spoils to Melchizedek. And the lesser offers gifts to the greater - **Hebrews 7:2 & 4** - “....*and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace*....” [4] See *how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils!*”

The only brief record we have of this event is in **Genesis 14:17-20**. After defeating the invading kings from the East and liberating his nephew Lot, Abraham happens upon this one recorded encounter with Melchizedek and offers him a tenth of all the spoils of battle.

Remember where we are. I said there were two prophetic pictures contained in the priesthood of Melchizedek. And our writer wants to identify these features when he says Jesus was a priest ***“....after the order of Melchizedek”(5:6, 10, 6:20)***. The ***first*** feature was Melchizedek transcended the Mosaic law and boundaries of the Levitical priesthood. He is a priest from the ***outside***. He is of another order all together. He was greater than Abraham, Aaron, or Levi.

Now on to the ***second*** important feature of the priestly order of Melchizedek. Our writer gives an important clue in ***Hebrews 7:3 - “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.”***

Just to be clear. Our writer ***doesn't*** mean Melchizedek was an eternal being just as God the Son. Melchizedek wasn't divine. What our writer means is you can scan your Old Testament from beginning to end and there is no ***record*** - no ***“genealogy”*** - of his lineage. There is no record of his ***birth*** or of his ***death***. In other words, he has the ***legal look*** of one without a beginning or ending because revelation has intentionally included no ***data*** on those things.

So what is being revealed about our High Priest, Jesus the Christ through these two features of Melchizedek? Our writer is showing us the whole Old Testament priestly sacrificial system wasn't a the ***ultimate*** system. It was important for its time, but was ***passing and provisional***. It was divinely commanded, to be sure. But it was a ***human system to the roots***. It sprang from a completely human genetic tree. It only ***pointed*** to what was yet to come.

In linking Christ with Melchizedek our writer is proving ***the Levitical priesthood*** was designed to point to something more ***powerfully permanent and effective***. The Levitical system was the lesson - the ***pre-ample*** - getting the world ready for love's great redeeming priestly work. That missing genealogical data from Melchizedek is pointing to the entry of the yet to come divinely Spirit-conceived, incarnate coming High Priest. ***All earthly religious systems must be forced into obsolescence in the light of God Incarnate in Christ.***

And those worshipful tithes presented by Abraham point to the fact that, just as Jesus Himself said, One infinitely greater than Abraham would one day create a redeemed people of God from every race on earth - far beyond the lineage of ethnic Abraham.

To put it another more simple way, God is revealing that just as the ***first*** priest named in the Bible by-passes and transcends the entire Levitical system, so will the ***last great eternal high priest - the Christ.***

2) **WE NEED TO REMEMBER THE PRIESTLY WORK OF CHRIST OR WE WILL REMAIN IN RELIGIOUS AND MORAL BONDAGE**

Hebrews 7:11-16 - “Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? [12] For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. [13] For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. [14] For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. [15] This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, [16] who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.”

The whole idea of these six verses is set up by the question of our writer. Boiled down to its essence the question of ***verse 11*** is this: ***If the Old Covenant Levitical priesthood was sufficient why would there be a need for Another coming Priest after the order of Melchizedek? If the Levites, descendants of Abraham, actually brought perfection before God why is any further work necessary?***

Now the simple answer to that question seems obvious. The work of Christ on our behalf is greater and deeper than any earthly priesthood. And that's true. But it's a weak answer in that it begs a more important question: ***How do we know Christ accomplished a greater and deeper work?*** And that's where our writer wraps up his argument in today's text. But it's buried in some other details and you have to sift it out.

The problem with the Levitical priesthood - and ***all*** earthly religious endeavors - is those descendants of Aaron all

died full of their own sin and mortality. You can see our writer working this contrast when he was referring to the tithes Abraham gave to Melchizedek right back in **verse 8** - **"In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives."**

Of course, as we've already seen, Melchizedek wasn't actually eternal, but he's **pictured** in eternal terms by bursting on the scene with no traceable genealogy. But the Priest our writer has in mind is the One **symbolized** by Melchizedek. In contrast to all earthly priests who did their legal assignment and then faded off the scene, our Lord **rose from the dead, conquering those still-to-be-paid heavy wages of sin.**

Now the conclusion. Here's where our writer wants your brain to land this morning. All those Old Covenant priests **finished** their priesthood in death. They **lost** ultimately to death. And that means their priesthood was one that constantly came to an end - one priest after another. The wages of **undefeated sin and guilt** were constantly being paid.

Until. Until one Final Priest - not a Levite appointed by Mosaic law - one Final Priest offered one final Sacrifice. And this sacrifice paid off all of this fallen world's sin debt. And we **know** this payment was absolutely sufficient. We **know** our eternal future is safe with this Priest because His Priesthood didn't end with His death. We know sin was finally pardoned because death was defeated and this Priest still lives. And His priesthood is still effective and purifying on our behalf.

Verses 15-16 are the best summation any sermon could ever have - **"This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, [16] who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life."**