

Lesson 21
Melchizedek and Christ
Hebrews 7:1-19

Today we are going to discuss the central chapter of the Book of Hebrews. This chapter is important because it deals with the priesthood of Jesus Christ. In chapter 5, we saw how Christ qualified to be our Great High Priest because He is truly man as well as truly God, but in chapter 7 the question arises, "Is Christ's priesthood a real one?" This was a vital, living question to any Jew who was living in the first century and especially to these Hebrew-Christians to whom this letter was written.

Remember, the Aaronic priesthood of the Old Testament was the very heart of Judaism. The readers of the Epistle to the Hebrews were perplexed by the revolutionary teaching of Christianity that the high priesthood of Christ has completely supplanted the earthly Aaronic priesthood of the Old Testament. From childhood and from prior generations these Jews, although professing Christians, had grown up with the Mosaic Law with its priesthood, tabernacle and altar by which they believed they had access to God. Was all this that they believed in and revered, which had come to them from Jehovah-God, to be done away with entirely? These brethren were having a hard time accepting change.

We, today, should be able to sympathize with these Hebrew-Christians. We can understand their reluctance to accept a new revelation of Christianity when they were saturated and satisfied with the old. Think of yourself. In one way or another you may have been brought up with certain conceptions about the Christian Faith. Some of the things you learned as a child or a new Christian and accepted as fact, may not have been truth at all. As you became more exposed to God's Word, you had to face the reality of change. Here and there you may have found radical departures from what you had been taught earlier, and you found it was not easy to discard these errors you once held. Often change comes slowly and sometimes there is confusion and even rebellion. Exposure to God's Word over a period of time brings change, but change comes slow and hard for many. In order for us to change, we have to be taught God's Word, conflict with God's Word, be honest with God's Word, and others have to be patient with us while we go through the change process.

Hebrews chapter 7 is deep truth and to grasp it one needs a good understanding of the Old Testament. Back in Hebrews 5:10, the author began to speak about Jesus Christ who was a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, but he abruptly stopped because he felt it was too deep for them, for the majority of them were babes in Christ and could not take in this deep truth. This is the meat, not the milk, of the Word.

If you find yourself bored with this teaching on Melchizedek and Christ, you can pretty well tell your level of spiritual maturity.

When I was a new Christian of about five months, I was reading through my New Testament and became fascinated with Hebrews 7 and Melchizedek. I must confess I did not understand what I

was reading, and I could not break through. I went to one of my leaders for Campus Crusade and asked him about Melchizedek. He gave me some oversimplified answer and it was obvious he was not too interested either. I did not pursue this chapter until I went to seminary and there I began to get more light on Hebrews 7. It was not until my study this week that I began to revel in this chapter, but I must confess there are still some things that are difficult for me to understand.

The general argument of the author is quite clear but the details at times are a bit fuzzy. He proves the priesthood of Christ is superior to the priesthood of Aaron because Christ comes from the Melchizedekian priesthood and not from the Aaronic priesthood. Melchizedek is a type or shadow of Christ and Christ is the perfect substance or fulfillment of this Old Testament type. With the coming of a new priesthood, the old priesthood and the Mosaic Law from which the priesthood derived its authority, has been done away with and supplanted by Christ Himself.

THE ORIGIN OF MELCHIZEDEK - Hebrews 7:1-3

“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, 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.” -- Melchizedek was a real Old Testament character but there is only one Old Testament historical reference to this obscure person. Genesis 14:18-20. Abraham, with 318 crack soldiers, had inflicted a tremendous defeat upon one of his enemies, and after the battle, Abraham was met by this great man, Melchizedek, who was both a king and a priest. He was King of Salem, which is a reference to Jerusalem, and he was a priest of the one, true, and living God. Melchizedek did two significant things in relation to Abraham: 1) He received a tithe from Abraham, and 2) He blessed Abraham.

Melchizedek is a type of Christ; therefore we know that Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of one who is King of righteousness and peace.

“... And this is His name by which He will be called, The LORD our righteousness”
(Jer. 23:6).

“... And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6).

This Melchizedek brought out “bread and wine” to Abraham which is symbolic of Christ, who, as our High Priest, gave His sinless body and shed His holy blood that we might have our sins forgiven. Today, we Christians memorialize Christ’s death by observing the Lord’s Table. Christ was the final King of righteousness and peace, and the order is significant, for there can never be peace without first having righteousness. A person must have Christ’s righteousness before he can have Christ’s peace. There is no peace with God until there is the receiving of Christ and His righteousness.

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the

righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

“Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days or end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually.” -- This is still a reference to the historical Melchizedek, but because of the language, some have taken Melchizedek to be a theophany of Christ (that is, an appearance of Christ in the Old Testament before He became the incarnate Son). That he is not a theophany is evident because the text says he was “made like unto the Son of God” and in 7:15 it says Christ is a priest “according to the likeness of Melchizedek.” Melchizedek was a real person and a type of Christ, but a type can never be perfect or fill every detail, for if it did, then the type would be the reality. Melchizedek was not an eternal person, and it is important to see that the Bible does not record his ancestry. There is no record as to who his parents were, when he was born or when he died. God purposely kept these out of the record that Melchizedek might be a type of Christ, who is the eternal One, with no beginning or ending. The Biblical record merely gives the appearance that Melchizedek had no beginning or ending. Melchizedek was a priest perpetually in that his priesthood was a type of Christ’s eternal priesthood, and, furthermore, no one could ever take his office from him or succeed him as did the priests in the Aaronic priesthood.

THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK - Hebrews 7:4-10

Before any Jew could accept a new order of priesthood in Jesus Christ, he would have to be convinced that the Melchizedekian priesthood and Christ were superior to the Old Testament priesthood of Aaron and the tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe.

“Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils.” -- Before it can be shown that Christ is superior to Aaron and Levi, it must be proven that Melchizedek was superior to Abraham from whom Levi came. Abraham actually paid tithes to Melchizedek, making Melchizedek superior to Abraham.

“And those 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 descendents from Abraham. But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham, and blessed the one who had the promises.” -- The Mosaic Law commanded that all the eleven other tribes of Israel pay tithes to the tribe of Levi, who had the priestly function for the nation of Israel. By law, they were obligated to pay tithes. However, Abraham voluntarily paid a tithe to Melchizedek, who had no revealed genealogy, and besides this, Melchizedek gave a priestly blessing to Abraham.

This is the one verse that might indicate that tithing is both an Old Testament and a New Testament principle because Abraham tithed before the Mosaic Law was given; therefore, the Church should tithe after the Law is done away with. There may be several objections to this which are: 1) Abraham did not give ten percent of all his spoils, but only of the “choicest spoils”, and 2) He gave only once and it does not indicate this was a constant practice.

“But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater.” -- Abraham had God’s promises and was the wealthiest and most affluent man of his time; yet he humbly bowed and received a blessing from Melchizedek. Melchizedek is greater than Abraham because the blessing is greater than the blessed, and the receiver of the tithe is greater than the giver.

“And in this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on.” -- In the Old Testament the priests were mortal men subject to death and passed their priesthood on to their sons, but Melchizedek, as a type of Christ, has his priesthood live on through Christ.

“And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.” -- Now the author shows how Christ is superior to Levi, the originator (progenitor) of the priestly tribe of Israel. Levi was in the loins (genes) of Abraham in some direct or representative sense, and he actually paid tithes in Abraham before he ever existed. This makes Melchizedek greater than Levi and the Melchizedekian priesthood greater than that of Aaron or Levi.

THE OFFICE OF CHRIST GIVES A NEW PRIESTHOOD - Hebrews 7:11-19

“Now if (and it is not) 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?” -- It is the purpose here to show that the Melchizedekian priesthood not only surpasses, but supercedes for all time, the Levitical priesthood and Aaron. The Levitical priesthood could bring no one to perfection, that is, to completion, fulfillment or maturity. No one was saved (completed) or sanctified (matured) by the Levitical priesthood because the priesthood was powerless to bring inward cleansing. All the ritual of the priesthood pointed forward to Christ who would take away sin. The Levitical system was a system of shadows, types, promises and symbols, and not the real substance of redemption. There would have been no need for a new priesthood if the old one could have perfected people.

Perfection comes because Christ has come. Perfection could not be in the Old Testament. Did you know the last word in the Old Testament, the last word of the Book of Malachi is “curse?” But the last word of the New Testament, the last sentence in the Book of Revelation is, “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all.” In the New Testament we have a full manifestation of God’s grace because God has spoken to us in His Son.

“For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also.” -- This verse is one of the most theological verses in the entire Bible. The change of the priesthood demanded a change of the covenant of law. The priesthood and the law go hand in hand, and to do away with one, you must do away with the other. The Mosaic Law, in its entirety, is done away with because Christ is the fulfillment of the Law. ***“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes”*** (Rom. 10:4).

This change of the Law includes the judicial, ceremonial, and social aspects, and, in my

understanding, it does not include the moral law as expressed in the Ten Commandments, although I cannot be dogmatic on this last point. For sure, any mixture of the Mosaic Law in the gospel, under any guise whatsoever, is contrary to this verse. Mosaic Law and grace can never mix!

“For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.” --To be a priest according to the Mosaic Law, one had to be from the tribe of Levi, but Christ was from the tribe of Judah. How then could He be a priest? Christ did not come from the Levitical priesthood but from the Melchizedekian priesthood.

“And this is clearer still, if (since) another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement (fleshy commandment), but according to the power of an indestructible life.” -- Christ’s priesthood did not rest on the carnal commandments of the Mosaic Law, but His priesthood rests on His eternal character which is the power of an indestructible life. Christ is eternal. He always was. He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last. He is the One who is, who was and who is to come, the Almighty. As the eternal One, He has an eternal priesthood.

“For it is witnessed of Him, ‘Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’” -- This is a quote from Psalm 110:4. About 1,000 years after the historical Melchizedek, God declared through King David that Christ would be a priest according to Melchizedek. Then about 1,000 years after that, Jesus Christ lived, died and was resurrected and ascended to the Father’s right hand to remain forever our Great High Priest. How gloriously accurate is God’s Word!

“For on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, ...” -- The Mosaic Law and the Levitical priesthood were weak and useless for they could perfect (save or mature) no one. Why? Because the Law was made weak by human flesh, and the Law was a type or shadow that pointed forward to Christ. Christ has come! Christ left heaven and became man! The long awaited Messiah has arrived! Because of this, we who live in the gospel age, or the age of grace, have a better hope. Why? Because we worship Christ who has come and have the full revelation of Christ. We have Christ who the Old Testament saints looked forward to! Old Testament saints were saved by grace through faith in the promise of Messiah to come, but their hope was limited because they had limited revelation and understanding of Christ. Today we have a better hope!

“... . through which we draw near to God.” -- It is only through Christ that men can be brought near to God. The Law never brought any person to God. The Levitical priesthood never saved anyone. Only Christ can save men and draw them near to God.

CONCLUSION

Christ can and does bring men and women to God. Christ alone can save people from their sins.

Christ alone can give sinners eternal life.

Since Christ is the only one who can save, then draw near to God and receive the Lord Jesus as your all-sufficient Savior for sin.