

**“Melchizedek – A Prototype of the Priesthood”**

Hebrews 7:1-10 (vs.3)

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**Historical Background and Biblical Context:**

The teaching of this chapter is basically simple (although its outworking is complicated). It is that Scripture reveals two levels of priesthood, one that is ‘in the likeness of Melchizedek’, which is superior in every way, and one that is the Levitical priesthood, the Jewish priesthood, which is proved to be a temporary and failing priesthood; there is one that deals in glorious reality and the other that deals in types and shadows.

In this chapter the priestly ‘order of Melchizedek’ is expanded on in order to bring out its superiority to that of Aaron and its application to Jesus. The basic argument is not difficult, even if the detail is more complicated. And that is that Scripture has always spoken of another priesthood, a priesthood other than that of the Levitical priesthood, an older priesthood which was prior to it, and which was superior to it, a priesthood which had been allowed to drop into the background but would be revived on the coming of the Messiah. It is the priesthood which is the background to the High Priesthood of Jesus in Heaven. This priesthood is seen as doing away with all other priesthoods, because their ministries are thereby rendered no longer necessary.

It should be noted that Melchizedek is not to be thought of as important in and of himself. It is not intended for us to look to Melchizedek. Rather his importance lies in the type of priesthood that he reveals, and points forward to, a direct and eternal priesthood. What the writer will seek to convey is not the idea of an unceasing Melchizedek, but of an unceasing, eternal and unique priesthood. It should, therefore, be noted in this regard that Jesus was not declared to be a Priest ‘of the order of’ Melchizedek, which might have been seen as making Him one of a number in a line of succession, He is called a Priest ‘after the order of’ Melchizedek, that is, ‘in accordance with, connected with, of like pattern, of similar type’. The idea is not to link Jesus directly with Melchizedek, but to link Him with his type of royal priesthood. To speculate about Melchizedek is to miss the whole point.

What we are called on to see is that, as High Priest ‘after the likeness of Melchizedek’, Jesus Himself has ‘passed through the heavens’ into the very presence of God (Hebrews 4:14), and that His is no earthly priesthood but a

heavenly one. We are in other words to see what He is and what He has done for us. This consists in the fact that:

- 1) He has 'provided purification for sins' once and for all, something that never needs to be repeated (Hebrews 1:3);
- 2) He is a merciful and faithful High Priest in all matters connected with God, making propitiation for the sins of the people and relieving those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:17-18);
- 3) He is the faithful High Priest of our confession Who has called us with a heavenly calling (Hebrews 3:1);
- 4) He awaits our drawing near to Him in order to show us mercy and give grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

The importance of the Melchizedek priesthood was that it introduced the most ancient of priesthoods, a priesthood that was in existence long before the time of Moses. Yet it was a Scriptural priesthood, and one that could easily be shown to be superior to the Levitical priesthood. It was indeed one that was recognized by God and was itself confirmed by Moses. It thus enabled Jesus, even though He was not of the house of Levi, to be revealed, *in a manner recognized by Scripture*, as the One legitimate and heavenly priest, a priest in a greater and far better Tabernacle (Hebrews 8:2), without having to be connected with the earthly Levitical priesthood in any way. Indeed it did more, it revealed that it was a 'royal priesthood', combining both king and priest, that it was older than that of Aaron and un-ending, and that it was connected by Scripture with the Messianic triumph (Psalms 110:4-5),.

### **The Lesson: Melchizedek - A Prototype of the Priesthood Vv. 1-3**

The Apostle begins by outlining who Melchizedek was. He wants us to know that he was not some outlandish heavenly figure, but a royal priest here on earth. He draws out significant features about him that reveal the similarities that there were between him and Jesus, while at the same time stressing that it was Melchizedek who was like Jesus, and pointed to Jesus, and not the other way round. Jesus the Son of God is the superior, and the One to Whom we should finally look. He preceded Melchizedek as 'the Son', and will exist eternally, long after Melchizedek has been forgotten. Indeed Melchizedek only comes into the reckoning at all because David inherited his priesthood, and it

therefore became linked with the Davidic Messiah in Psalms 110:4. Had that not happened he would have remained as an obscure figure in Genesis. But as it is he appears as of crucial importance because of his Scriptural connection with the Messiah and His priesthood, that is, with Jesus Christ.

Paul gives the characteristics of Melchizedek. The name Melchizedek literally means King of righteousness. The word Salem means peace; therefore, he was also King of Peace. Also, Melchizedek blessed Abraham. It is always the superior who blesses the inferior; therefore, Melchizedek was superior to Abraham although Abraham was the founder of the Jewish race and the unique recipient of the promises of God. That indeed gives Melchizedek a place of which none could be higher.

We have seen from Genesis 14 that Melchizedek has no genealogy; he is without father and without mother. Note that this is one of the arguments drawn from the silence of scripture that does not provide Melchizedek with any genealogy. This was unusual for two reasons. (a) It is the reverse of the habitual practice of Genesis. Genealogies are a feature of Genesis where long lists of a man's ancestors constantly occur. But Melchizedek arrives on the scene, as it were, from nowhere. (b) Far more important--it is the reverse of the rules which governed the Levitical priesthood which depended entirely on descent. Under Jewish law a man could not under any circumstances become a priest unless he could produce a certificated pedigree going back to Aaron, grandfather of Levi. Character and ability had nothing to do with it; the one essential was that pedigree. When the Jews came back to Jerusalem from exile certain priestly families could not produce their genealogical records and were therefore debarred from the priesthood forever ( Ezra 2:61-63; Nehemiah 7:63-65). On the other hand, if a man could produce a pedigree reaching back to Aaron, apart only from certain specified physical blemishes nothing on earth could stop him from being a priest. Genealogy was literally everything.

So, the first difference between the two priesthoods was this--the Levitical priesthood depended on genealogical descent; the priesthood of Melchizedek depended on personal qualification alone. Melchizedek's priesthood was based on what he was, not on what he had inherited. As one scholar puts it--the difference was between a claim based on legality and a claim based on personality.

Secondly, we are told of no time when Melchizedek began or ended his priesthood; we are told of no time when he was born or died. Therefore, the history of his priesthood shows no beginning and has no end; it is an everlasting priesthood. Such as it is with our Lord Jesus who now sits at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly tabernacle in intercession for all who believe on Him.

From this we can gather five great qualities in the priesthood of Melchizedek. (a) It is a priesthood of righteousness. (b) It is a priesthood of peace. (c) It is a royal priesthood, because Melchizedek was a king. (d) It is personal and not inherited because he has no genealogy. (e) It is eternal as exemplified by the fact that it has no start (birth) or finish (death), and his priesthood has no beginning or end. This is a perfect representation of the priesthood that we now experience with regards to our Great High Priest, Christ Jesus.