

Hebrews series
Part 8
"Melchizedek and Jesus"

Last time we ended with the writer once again bringing up the person called Melchizedek and comparing him in some ways to Jesus:

Heb 6: 19-20 "This certain hope of being saved is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls, connecting us with God himself behind the sacred curtains of heaven, 20 where Christ has gone ahead to plead for us from his position as our High Priest, with the honor and rank of Melchizedek."

Now Chapter 7 deals exclusively with this mysterious man. He's sort of like Elijah in the way he suddenly appears from nowhere onto the pages of Scripture. He's intriguing to say the least. So let's see what the writer has to say about him:

7:1a "This Melchizedek was king of the city of Salem and also a priest of the Most High God."

So here is the first way Melchizedek is like Jesus. He was both a king and a priest. In the OT, you were either a king or a priest, but never both. Melchizedek was king of Salem and also a priest. And so is Jesus. He is our King and our Great High Priest, which means He rules a kingdom and also makes

spiritual sacrifices on behalf of the subjects of His kingdom—the church.

Next the writer tells us how and where Melchizedek first appears in the Biblical narrative:

7:1b “When Abraham was returning home after winning a great battle against many kings, Melchizedek met him and blessed him;”

It was after Abraham saved Lot and his family from captivity from foreign kings following a war the king of Sodom was involved in that Melchizedek appears. And look what happened next:

7:2a “then Abraham took a tenth of all he had won in the battle and gave it to Melchizedek.”

We’ll talk about the significance of this more in a moment. The writer goes on tell us more about him:

7:2b “Melchizedek’s name means “Justice,” so he is the King of Justice; and he is also the King of Peace because of the name of his city, Salem, which means “Peace.”

Again, there are similarities between this man and Jesus. Our Lord is all about justice and He is also called the “Prince of peace,” just as Melchizedek was.

In verse 3 the writer shares more similarities:

7:3 “Melchizedek had no father or mother and there is no record of any of his ancestors. He was never born and he never died but his life is like that of the Son of God—a priest forever.”

Now, this is not to be taken literally. He’s not saying that Melchizedek was not human like us; that he had no parents and was an eternal being like an angel.

He’s saying that since we have no record of his birth, and know nothing about his ancestors or genealogy or where he came from, he resembles an eternal being. This is how he can compare to Jesus, because Jesus WAS in fact an eternal being.

John writes in his gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1 NKJV).

The LB says, “Before anything else existed, there was Christ, with God. He has always been alive and is himself God.”

The NLT puts it, "In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The reason this is important is because huge theological disputes have raged at certain times in church history about who Jesus really was. Some claimed and still do that He was created, that His birth was the beginning of Him.

For instance, the Jehovah's Witnesses claim that Jesus Christ was God's first creation, and this is one of the claims that makes them a cult, not a genuine Biblical church.

The doctrine of the eternality of Christ is one of the key features of genuine biblical Christianity. So the writer of Hebrews is showing how Melchizedek's birth and origins being unknown cause him to resemble an eternal man, like Jesus who was never created. But Melchizedek in fact was just a man.

He continues:

7:4-6 "See then how great this Melchizedek is: Even Abraham, the first and most honored of all God's chosen people, gave Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils he took from the kings he had been fighting."

The Greek word rendered here "spoils"—ακροθιριον akrothinion—means literally, "the top of the heap." Abraham

tithed to Melchizedek the top of the heap, the best of the spoils. Why? Because he recognized a superior grace and position on Melchizedek. He was an anointed king and priest before God.

So the writer here is once again drawing a parallel between Melchizedek and Jesus. Remember, he is writing to Jewish people and telling them that, as Melchizedek held a superior position in Abraham's day, Jesus holds a superior position in every way to the religious system they grew up in under Moses.

The writer continues:

7:5-6a "One could understand why Abraham would do this if Melchizedek had been a Jewish priest, for later on God's people were required by law to give gifts to help their priests because the priests were their relatives. But Melchizedek was not a relative (a Levite), and yet Abraham paid him,"

Again, keep in mind that the writer's purpose here is to show the superiority of Jesus to the OT priesthood. He is writing to Jews that had been raised in OT religion with Abraham as their father, Moses as their lawgiver, and the Levites as their priests. He's saying, "A greater than all of these has come—His name is Jesus and he is our King and our Great High Priest!"

He continues with his comparison:

7:6b-7 "Melchizedek placed a blessing upon mighty Abraham, 7 and as everyone knows, a person who has the power to bless is always greater than the person he blesses."

It is a rule that someone of superior rank or office blesses someone of lesser rank. For instance, when a father lays his hand on his children and blesses them, it is understood to be the act of one superior in age, honor, and authority.

When a prophet pronounced a blessing on the people, the same thing was understood, and the same is true also when a minister pronounces a blessing on a congregation. This was understood of Jesus Himself when parents brought their children to him to lay his hands on them and bless them.

He continues:

7:8-10 "The Jewish priests, though mortal, received tithes; but we are told that Melchizedek lives on (metaphorically speaking). 9 One might even say that Levi himself (the ancestor of all Jewish priests, of all who receive tithes), paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham. 10 For although Levi wasn't born yet, the seed from which he came was in Abraham when Abraham paid the tithes to Melchizedek."

It was from Abraham that the 12 tribes descended. So when he paid a tithe to Melchizedek, it could be said that by proxy, Levi paid a tithe to a greater one than himself.

Next, the writer reasons with the Jews about the failure of Moses and the law to save their soul:

7:11 "If the Jewish priests and their laws had been able to save us, why then did God need to send Christ as a priest with the rank of Melchizedek, instead of sending someone with the rank of Aaron—the same rank all other priests had?"

Answer: Because the law couldn't save them from their sins!

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians, "The old way, trying to be saved by keeping the Ten Commandments, ends in death; in the new way, the Holy Spirit gives them life" (2 Cor 3:6 LB).

The writer continues:

7:12-14 "And when God sends a new kind of priest, his law must be changed to permit it. As we all know, Christ did not belong to the priest-tribe of Levi, but came from the tribe of Judah, which had not been chosen for priesthood; Moses had never given them that work."

God changed things up when ushering in the New Covenant. Instead of His Great High Priest coming from the tribe of Levi, He chose Jesus to come from the tribe of Judah.

7:15-17 "So we can plainly see that God's method changed, for Christ, the new High Priest who came with the rank of Melchizedek, 16 did not become a priest by meeting the old requirement of belonging to the tribe of Levi, but on the basis of power flowing from a life that cannot end. 17 And the psalmist points this out when he says of Christ, "You are a priest forever with the rank of Melchizedek."

7:18 "Yes, the old system of priesthood based on family lines was canceled because it didn't work. It was weak and useless for saving people. 19 It never made anyone really right with God. But now we have a far better hope, for Christ makes us acceptable to God, and now we may draw near to him."

The Ten Commandments were glorious and true and our best laws are rotted in them, but they were weak because of our flesh. Our fallen nature could not fulfill their requirements. So no one was ever saved by keeping them perfectly!

The writer goes on to show the superiority of Jesus' Priesthood over the Old Covenant priests:

7:20-22 "God took an oath that Christ would always be a Priest, 21 although he never said that of other priests. Only to Christ he said, "The Lord has sworn and will never change his mind: You are a Priest forever, with the rank of Melchizedek." 22 Because of God's oath, Christ can guarantee forever the success of this new and better arrangement."

As the chapter winds down, the writer continues to show how much "better" the Priesthood of Jesus Christ really is:

7:23-28 "Under the old arrangement there had to be many priests so that when the older ones died off, the system could still be carried on by others who took their places. 24 But Jesus lives forever and continues to be a Priest so that no one else is needed. 25 He is able to save completely all who come to God through him. Since he will live forever, he will always be there to remind God that he has paid for their sins with his blood.

26 He is, therefore, exactly the kind of High Priest we need; for he is holy and blameless, unstained by sin, undefiled by sinners, and to him has been given the place of honor in heaven. 27 He never needs the daily blood of animal sacrifices, as other priests did, to cover over first their own sins and then the sins of the people; for he finished all sacrifices, once and for all, when he sacrificed himself on the cross. 28 Under the old system, even the high priests were weak and sinful men who

could not keep from doing wrong, but later God appointed by his oath his Son who is perfect forever."

Thank God for our better, superior, greater, and all sufficient Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God!