

The Letter to the Hebrews

Lesson 4

Hebrews 7:1 – Hebrews 8:13

At the end of chapter six, the writer refers to God's promise to Abraham and His oath to his heirs. God promised Abraham in his childless old age that his descendants would outnumber the sands on the seashore and form the nucleus of many nations. The Jewish nation, Israel, would stand as just one of the many nations descending from Abraham. Therefore, the blessing of God extends to all the nations of the world. After the promise, God gave His oath to all heirs of Abraham. At just the right time in history, God interposed His oath by pledging Himself in the person of Jesus Christ as the final sacrifice needed for the forgiveness of sin for all of mankind. The apostle John refers to this oath guaranteed through Jesus.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

This oath of God stands as a promise of eternal salvation for anyone who will believe in the Son of God as his Savior. The moment Jesus becomes one's Savior, He prepares a place for him in eternity. Although Jesus cannot be seen from this side of heaven, He faithfully keeps the oath promised through His death on the cross. As previously stated in earlier verses, the writer likens Jesus to the anchor of a big ship; once thrown into the ocean, it cannot be seen, yet it holds the ship secure in one location. So too, the oath of God through Jesus Christ anchors our souls in eternity with Him. God interposed Jesus on the cross as the sacrifice for our sins; at the resurrection He became our High Priest, interceding for our every need. Jesus became our eternal High Priest in the same way that the Old Testament speaks of Melchizedek. Chapter seven gives greater insight into the person and priesthood of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:¹For 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, ²to 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. ³Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually.

The text mentions Abraham's slaughter of the kings. Although Abraham fought and won many battles with his men, he used his war expertise only to defend and protect his family and property. Genesis 14 tells the story mentioned in this passage. Five strong kings of Canaan had held several weaker kings in servitude for twelve years. In the thirteenth year the weaker kings rebelled and a battle ensued. By the fourteenth year, the strong kings overpowered the weaker ones and took prisoners from each of their cities, including Lot and his family. When Abraham learned of this capture, he called his 318 trained men to go into battle with him. Abraham quickly

slaughtered the strong kings and their men and rescued Lot, taking all the possessions of the kings for himself. On his way home, Abraham passed by Melchizedek.

Genesis 14: 18-20 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. ¹⁹And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; ²⁰And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tenth of all.

The text calls Melchizedek the king of Salem. Salem is "Jeru-salem." Jeru means "city of" and Salem means "Peace"; therefore, Melchizedek is the king of the city of peace. Salem is the English pronunciation of the Hebrew "Shalom." The Hebrew text gives more details about Melchizedek.

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³Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually.

Melchizedek means "my king is righteousness." Notice these interesting facts about Melchizedek.

- He serves as the king of righteousness.
- He is the king of peace.
- He is the priest of the Most High God.
- He does not have a father.
- He does not have a mother.
- He does not have ancestors before him or descendants after him.
- He does not have a birth date.
- He does not have a death date.
- He was formed in the image of the Son of God.
- He will live as the priest of the Most High God forever.
- He serves as a priest like no other.

Who is this Melchizedek? The clue is found in the totality of the facts written about Him; however, there was only One formed in the image of the Son of God, and that was Jesus Christ. Melchizedek can be no other than the pre-incarnate Christ. Throughout the Old Testament, God showed Himself to man in theophanies, physical appearances or personal manifestations of God to man. The three examples of theophanies in the Old Testament appear below.

- As Priest – In the Old Testament Jesus presented Himself as Melchizedek, accepting the offerings of those whom He had called for Himself. (Abraham)
- As Prophet – In the Old Testament Jesus presented Himself as The Angel of the Lord, bringing judgment on all who opposed Him. (Balaam, Sodom, Gomorrah)
- As King - In the Old Testament Jesus presented Himself as the ultimate ruler, giving directions for life for all who serve Him. (Burning

bush, His back on Mt. Sinai, His Shekinah glory on the Ark of the Covenant)

God used theophanies in the Old Testament times to present Himself so there would be no doubt of His existence. After the incarnation of Jesus, there was no need for theophanies since God Himself had dwelt among men.

Hebrews 7:⁴ Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. ⁵ And those indeed 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 descended from Abraham. ⁶ But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham, and blessed the one who had the promises. ⁷ But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. ⁸ And in this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one *receives them*, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. ⁹ And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, ¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Without dispute, the greater always blesses the lesser, and, in this case, the greater refers to Melchizedek. Genesis 14 shows the greatness of Abraham in his defeat of the strong kings; nevertheless, Abraham paid his tithe to the one who was greater, Melchizedek. When the children of Israel left Egypt and entered the wilderness, the Lord commanded the descendants of Levi to collect tithes from all the other tribes. The Levites, in turn, also had to pay tithes. The writer's use of the phrase, "so to speak," implies that the descendants of Levi paid their tithes to Melchizedek. Almost 500 years had passed since the death of Abraham; nevertheless, the tithes collected by the Levites were, "so to speak," given to Melchizedek whose lineage could not be traced.

Hebrews 7:¹¹ Now if 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?

The writer continues to show the need for a return to a priesthood like that of Melchizedek. The priests, including and following Aaron, were fallible and imperfect; therefore, the need for a perfect priesthood still existed.

Hebrews 7:¹² For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. ¹³ For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. ¹⁵ And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, ¹⁶ who has become *such* not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is witnessed *of Him*, "THOU ART A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK."

The priesthood of Melchizedek lasts forever, unlike the temporary priesthood of the Levitical order. The rules of the priesthood changed with the establishment of the Levitical priesthood; likewise, with the establishment of the Lord Jesus as our High Priest, the rules changed. The indestructible rules of the new High Priest must replace the destructible rules of the old priesthood. When God the Son chose to come to earth as a baby, He came from the line Judah, not from the line of Levi. In the Mosaic-Levitical priesthood, the high priest had to come from the lineage of Aaron, but not so with Jesus. Jesus established an eternal priesthood, free from the restrictions of the old Levitical line.

Psalm 110: 1-7 A Psalm of David. The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand, Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet." ²The LORD will stretch forth Thy strong scepter from Zion, saying, "Rule in the midst of Thine enemies." ³Thy people will volunteer freely in the day of Thy power; In holy array, from the womb of the dawn, Thy youth are to Thee as the dew. ⁴The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, "Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." ⁵The Lord is at Thy right hand; He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath. ⁶He will judge among the nations, He will fill them with corpses, He will shatter the chief men over a broad country. ⁷He will drink from the brook by the wayside; Therefore He will lift up His head.

Hebrews 7:¹⁸For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness ¹⁹(for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. ²⁰And inasmuch as *it* was not without an oath ²¹(for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, "THE LORD HAS SWORN AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND, 'THOU ART A PRIEST FOREVER' "); ²²so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. ²³And the *former* priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers, because they were prevented by death from continuing, ²⁴but He, on the other hand, because He abides forever, holds His priesthood permanently. ²⁵Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

The Levitical priesthood failed in its attempt to provide an adequate relationship with God, but the priesthood of Jesus provides a perfect relationship with God. Therefore, the New Covenant, founded in the oath of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, did away with Old Covenant system. The Levitical priesthood saved no one; Jesus eternally saves all who call Him Lord. He is on the throne constantly interceding for those who belong to Him.

Hebrews 7:²⁶For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; ²⁷who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. ²⁸For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, *appoints* a Son, made

perfect forever. **Hebrews 8:**¹ Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ²a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. ³For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary that this *high priest* also have something to offer.

In this passage, the writer displays the Melchizedek character of Jesus to save those who trust in Him. His character can be seen in His saintliness and purity, his untainted life, and his physical and ethical cleanness. He reigns apart from sinners in heaven and is greater than all the heavens. Without daily needs like human priests, He can forgive sins because He died on the cross for the sins of all mankind once and for all. The old priesthood could not deliver salvation, but the pledge of the oath, interposed by God who cannot lie, provided Jesus the Son of God as the flawless, majestic, powerful, life-changing, excellent High Priest forever. As High Priest, He can also be found as the eternal King sitting on God's throne in His eternal mansion which He alone built. What can the Lord Jesus offer? He offers nothing less than the total bliss of eternity with Him.

Hebrews 8:⁴ Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; ⁵who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "SEE," He says, "THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN."

The Sons of Jacob

Asher	Dan	Gad	Zebulun
Benjamin	Joseph	Naphtali	Issachar
Rueben	Judah	Levi	Simeon

All of the earthly priests descended from the line of Levi. Jesus descended from the line of Judah, making it impossible for the Jewish nation to accept Him as a rightful priest of the order of Levi. But the rightful priesthood on earth only imitated the true priesthood of heaven. When the writer says that the earthly service of the priest served as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, he means a shadowy outline of eternal things. The whole Mosaic system, including the priesthood, the tabernacle, the lamp stands, the table, and the mercy seat, represents heavenly things recreated on earth according to God's description of things already prepared in heaven. God ends the instruction concerning the building of these items as follows.

Exodus 25:⁴⁰ *"And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain."*

The heavenly items did not come down to earth; man recreated those items here on earth as a representation of what God had created in heaven. The priesthood of Levi stood as an earthly representation of the priesthood in heaven; however, the perfect priesthood in heaven fell under the eternal order according to Melchizedek.

Hebrews 8:⁶ But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better

promises. ⁷For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. ⁸For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; ⁹NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. ¹⁰"FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM UPON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. ¹¹"AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL SHALL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. ¹²"FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE."

Jesus could never serve as high priest of the old Mosaic system because of its imperfections and flaws. As the text says, "if the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second." But the first covenant was not faultless because it only represented the perfect covenant. Speaking to the Jews in the church and proclaiming the old covenant as sinful and flawed, the writer quickly restates the Lord's words condemning the old covenant and promising the new perfect covenant to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³²not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. ³³"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴"And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

The Jewish nation had moved away from the instructions of the old covenant and angered God. By the time of Jeremiah, the old covenant, only 900 years old, provided the people with a flawed system of faith, not because of God's instructions, but because of man's manipulation of the instructions. The Jews broke the covenant and a new covenant, one that could not be broken, became necessary. Although the old covenant always dealt with the heart of man, man had moved its focus and purpose to the external attributes of the covenant. In the new covenant, the focus rests in the minds and the hearts of men. The new covenant, through Jesus, forgives the sins of believers once and for all time.

Hebrews 8:¹³When He said, "A new *covenant*," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

Even after the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, which established the new covenant and made the old covenant obsolete, the rules of the old covenant

were followed until 70 A.D. when Emperor Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. The destruction of the Temple brought an end to the sacrificial Mosaic system of faith for the Jews. Referring to the old system, the writer says it "is becoming obsolete and growing old ... ready to disappear." If the Temple had already been destroyed, the author would have said, "is obsolete and has disappeared."