

Hebrews

Chapter 7

The Priestly Order of Melchizedek

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.

7:1 Melchizedek. Melchizedek is one of those shadowy persons in Scripture about whom we would like to know more. Almost 2000 years before Christ's birth we find him first mentioned in a seemingly inconsequential scene with Abraham. Then there is nothing more until almost 1000 years later when David picks up the name in Psalm 110:4. Now it's almost A.D. 70 when his name surfaces again in Hebrews. (PBC)

Melchizedek, a priest and a king at the same time, foreshadowed the unity of true kingship and priesthood that is fulfilled in Christ. (TLSB)

Melchizedek is "like the Son of God" in that "he remains a priest forever." This does not mean that Melchizedek himself serves eternally as a priest, but that his priesthood is perpetuated by Jesus. (LL)

With the account of Genesis 14 in view, Hebrews 7:1-3 lists seven things that are stated or deduced about Melchizedek:

1. He was priest of God Most High.
2. He blessed Abram.
3. He received a tithe from Abram.
4. His name means "king of righteousness."
5. He is also "king of peace" (Salem).
6. He is without genealogy – that is, no parentage or descendants are mentioned.
7. He has neither beginning nor end, but abides, continues – that is, no account of his birth or death is given. (LL)

Notice that none of the requirements that would later regulate the Levitical priests applied to Melchizedek. No record is given of his parentage or of his descendants – something absolutely necessary for Levitical priest. The idea is not that Melchizedek had no father or mother, but that this information is not important in the case of Melchizedek. In his case, this information is immaterial. Scripture ignores his origin and his descendants, because they have no bearing on the validity of his priesthood. (LL)

The same is true of Christ in regard to His priesthood. While Jesus' ancestry is given in one respect since it establishes His descent from David as the forefather of the Messiah – was not what qualified Him for

His priesthood. Jesus' priesthood was not connected with His genealogy, just as Melchizedek's priesthood was not connected with his genealogy. Jesus' priesthood was of a different order from that of the Levitical priesthood. His was the order of Melchizedek, where genealogy played no role. (LL)

Melchizedek remains a priest forever, since his priesthood lives on the priesthood of Jesus, the eternal High Priest, who continues His priesthood in heaven. Melchizedek's priesthood is perpetuated in Christ. The Levitical priesthood ended with Jesus' once-for all sacrifice of atonement, and the destruction of the temple effectively put an end to its activities. But Melchizedek's priesthood lives on in the eternal priesthood of Jesus, the Messiah, in the heavenly temple. (LL)

The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, who became a man in Jesus the Messiah, was true God from all eternity. He is the original, of which Melchizedek is a shadow. Melchizedek's appearance is a prophecy that points ahead to and reveals some things about the priesthood of the Son of God. The historical figure Melchizedek and the way the Scriptures describe him refer to as "like the Son of God" – that is, as a priest who foreshadows and so reveals beforehand the kind of priest the Messiah would be: one whose priesthood would be independent of genealogy, one greater than the Levitical priests, one who remains a priest forever, and one whose priesthood is established by God's own oath. (LL)

Scripture reveals that Melchizedek is a priest of a category greater than the order of the Levitical priests (7:4-10). Abram paid Melchizedek a tithe, and Melchizedek blessed Abram. Both acts show that Melchizedek's status is higher than that of Abram. Abram paid Melchizedek a tithe, even though there was no genealogical claim or law by which Melchizedek could demand it; Abram simply recognized Melchizedek's greater dignity as "priest of God Most High." (LL)

That greater dignity is also why Melchizedek blessed Abram. It is an accepted truth that "the lesser person is blessed by the greater." Moreover, the Levitical priests, who eventually came from the lineage of Abram, were mortal. But as Scripture does not record Melchizedek's death, his priesthood continues to live on. All of the many Levitical priests who were to be born later were present, so to speak, in the genes of Abram, when that patriarch acknowledged the greater dignity of Melchizedek and paid him a tithe. (LL)

The former law and its Levitical priesthood have now been replaced by a better one (7:11-19). The thesis or conclusion of this paragraph is in 7:18-19: "The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the Law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God." The assertions in that statement are argued in three separate ways. (LL)

First, when Psalm 110:4 says that the Messiah is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, that proves the attainment of final goal is not possible through the Levitical and through the laws that set up the Levitical priesthood and the forms of worship those priests followed and taught. For God does not duplicate His efforts. If His goal would have been attained through the Levitical priesthood, God would never have promised and spoken about another and a priest to come later. (LL)

Second, Psalm 110 speaks of the Messiah, who is the Son of David and so of the tribe of Judah (from which the Lord Jesus was, in fact, born). No member of that tribe ever approached the altar under the old Law. So, again, the prophecy of Psalm priesthood had to be removed and replaced with another priesthood. (LL)

Third, the priesthood of the order of Melchizedek continues on, and the Messiah is a priest forever. His life is indestructible. The grave did not hold Him. He was raised up from the dead. All this is in contrast to the Levitical priests, who were numerous because they were mortal.

They had to be replaced as they died. They had to base their claim to hold their office on regulations that depended on their ancestry, since they had to take up the unfinished work of their weak and mortal fathers, grandfathers, and ancestors. So also on the basis of an immortal life, the priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek is greater. (LL)

As the priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek, Jesus is the guarantor of a better covenant that the covenant served by the Levitical priesthood (7:20-28). When reading Hebrews we should remember the special nature of the covenant God makes with us. In human relationships a covenant means an agreement between two parties in which both have a part in the working out the agreement – for example, the marriage covenant. But the covenant God makes is always completely one-sided. He alone establishes the terms. The other party is invited only to receive the terms. (LL)

For clarity's sake, we call that a promise. Such a promise has a guarantor, someone who puts up evidence of the good faith of the promiser – sort of a bondsman. He holds the thing promised and delivers it to those to whom it should go. Who he is and what he does and has is the pledge of the promise; it is all a believer has to trust in as he hopes to receive the content of the promise. (LL)

Jesus is that guarantor. A priest according to the order of Melchizedek, Jesus is better than the Levitical priests. Jesus is better than the Levitical priests. The promise of which He is the guarantor is also, therefore, better than the promises they delivered as they carried out the arrangements for dispensing God's grace through the system of sacrifices of the old covenant. (LL)

Jesus is a better guarantor. How much better? One indication of how much better lies in the fact that God swore an oath with regard to the Messiah's priesthood. To quote Psalm 110:4 again: "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind." No words so strong were used in connection with the Levitical priesthood. Also, Jesus is better because He remains alive to intercede for everyone, whereas the Levitical priests died and had to be replaced. Jesus is better, too, because He is sinless and has gone to heaven. He has no need to make sacrifice for His own sin (as the Levitical priests did), but He made one sacrifice for everyone once for all and then went to heaven. (LL)

Finally, Jesus is better because He is not weak and susceptible to sin, but is God's own holy Son and has completed His atoning work and is, with an oath, installed at God's right hand as priest forever. (LL)

king ... and priest. Of particular significance is Melchizedek's holding both offices, one of the ways in which he prefigured Christ. (CSB)

For us it may be difficult to realize how central the priesthood was to the Jewish religion and how tightly Jews clung to it. The appeal to leave Christianity with its imminent persecution for Judaism with its eminent priesthood must have been strong. To counteract this pull the author convincingly presents the superiority of Christ's priesthood by pointing to his office and showing that he was a priest not after the order of Levi, but of Melchizedek. (PBC)

Salem. Jerusalem. Early name for the city of Jebus. (TLSB)

7:2 *Abraham apportioned* – Their great father Abraham obviously recognized and honored the priesthood of Melchizedek. Everyone knows that the greatest blesses the lesser and that the lesser pay tithes to the greater. (PBC)

Abraham recognized Melchizedek's priestly status by offering him a tithe. (TLSB)

king of righteousness ... king of peace. Messianic titles (see Isa 9:6–7; Jer 23:5–6; 33:15–16). (CSB)

In Hbr, Melchizedek means “King of Righteousness,” and King of Salem means “King of Peace.” (TLSB)

7:3 The validity of priestly descent had to be established before a priest could take office. The chief OT reference to Melchizedek, Gn 14:18–20, says nothing of his lineage. Melchizedek, whom God appointed as a priest and a king, foreshadows the divine, eternal priesthood and kingship of Christ. (TLSB)

Without father ... or end of life. Ge 14:18–20, contrary to the practice elsewhere in the early chapters of Genesis, does not mention Melchizedek’s parentage and children, or his birth and death. That he was a real, historical figure is clear, but the author of Hebrews (in accordance with Jewish interpretation) uses the silence of Scripture about Melchizedek’s genealogy to portray him as a prefiguration of Christ. Melchizedek’s priesthood anticipates Christ’s eternal existence and his unending priesthood. Some believe the appearance of Melchizedek to Abraham was a manifestation of Christ before his incarnation, but the comparison “like the Son of God” argues against such an interpretation. (CSB)

7:4 *see how great this man was.* The one who collects a tithe is greater than the one who pays it, and “the lesser person is blessed by the greater” (v. 7). In both ways Melchizedek was greater than Abraham. (CSB)

the patriarch. Founding father of the Hebrews/Israelites and all who are justified by faith. (TLSB)

7:5–6 Levitical priests received the tithe from their fellow Israelites as a matter of law. Melchizedek, who was not an heir of Abraham and had no legal claim to Abraham’s possessions, still received the patriarch’s tithe, showing his God-given authority as priest and king. (TLSB)

7:7 *the inferior is blessed by the superior.* The fact that Melchizedek blessed the patriarch Abraham and received his tithe suggests that Melchizedek is in some sense even greater than Abraham. (TLSB)

7:8 *he lives.* Melchizedek’s priestly office is without end (Ps 110:4). This promise is fulfilled in Christ. (TLSB)

7:9 *Levi.* The father of all Israelite priests paid a tithe to Melchizedek, the greater priest, through his ancestor Abraham. (TLSB)

7:1–10 Melchizedek, both priest and king, showed the true nature of his authority by receiving tithes from the patriarch Abraham and blessing him. As both king of righteousness and king of peace, Melchizedek foreshadowed Christ’s work of justification. As Abraham gave offerings and respect to Melchizedek, greater respect is due to our High Priest, Christ. He serves without end to lead us into His kingdom. • Lord Jesus, You are my Priest and King. Rule over my life, and grant me righteousness and peace from the Father. Amen. (TLSB)

Jesus Compared to Melchizedek

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. 17 For it is witnessed of him, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” 18 For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness 19 (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. 20 And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, 21 but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever.’” 22 This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. 23 The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, 24 but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. 25 Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. 26 For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. 27 He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. 28 For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

7:11 *perfection.* OT sacrifices and the Levitical priesthood foreshadowed what was completed in Christ. The fullness and reality of salvation comes through Christ, the true substance of salvation (Col 2:17) (TLSB)

under it. The Levitical priesthood. (CSB)

people received the law. The law of Moses and the priesthood went together. All the people without exception were sinners, subject to the law’s condemnation, and thus were in need of a priestly system to mediate between them and God. (CSB)

after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron. Implies that the Aaronic (or Levitical) priesthood was imperfect but that Melchizedek’s was perfect. The announcement of the coming one who would be a priest forever (Ps 110:4) was written midway in the history of the Levitical priesthood, which could only mean that the existing system was to give way to something better. (CSB)

7:12 *change in the law.* The law stipulates the rituals and ceremonies of worship, and its fulfillment depended on the Levitical priesthood. Changing the priesthood means changing the nature of worship. (TLSB)

7:14 *descended from Judah.* Jesus, although a descendant of Abraham and David, was not a descendant of the priestly tribe of Levi. (TLSB)

7:16 *become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry.* In the law of Moses the priestly function was restricted to the tribe of Levi (Dt 18:1), but Jesus came from the non-priestly tribe of Judah (vv. 14–15). (CSB)

Because Jesus is the eternal Son of God, He needs no priestly descent to serve as the true High Priest of all people. (TLSB)

the power of an indestructible life. According to Ps 110:4 the priest in the order of Melchizedek is “a priest forever.” (CSB)

7:17 Ps 110:4 prophetically speaks of Christ glorified at the right hand of the Father. (TLSB)

7:18 *a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness.* The law is holy and good (Ro 7:12), but it is not able to make right those who sin by breaking it, nor can it give the power necessary to fulfill its demands (v. 19a). (CSB)

7:19 *the law made nothing perfect.* The law could not bring the fullness of redemption that could only come through the priestly suffering and glory of Jesus.(TLSB)

The law was only preparatory (see Gal 3:23–25) and brought nothing to fulfillment (see Mt 5:17). (CSB)

better hope. The new covenant is better because it assures us of complete redemption and brings us into the very presence of God. See note on Col 1:5. (CSB)

Jesus Christ, the perfect Priest, gives us access to the Father, who declares us innocent. The new covenant fulfills the old covenant and offers a lasting solution to the weaknesses of the Levitical priesthood. (TLSB)

we draw near to God. We cry, “Lord, have mercy,” confident that He will graciously help us in our weakness. (TLSB)

7:20 No divine oath was associated with the establishment of the Levitical priesthood. The priesthood pledged in Ps 110 is superior because it was divinely affirmed with an oath. (CSB)

7:21 Ps 110:4 again, emphasizing God’s promise concerning the unending priesthood of Jesus. (TLSB)

7:22 *better covenant.* See chs. 8–10. (CSB)

Jesus is our living guarantee that in Him we have the fullness of God’s mercy and new life. (TLSB)

7:23 *prevented by death from continuing in office.* Impermanence was further evidence of the imperfection of the Levitical order. (CSB)

7:24 *He continues forever.* Since our High Priest, Christ, has passed through death to life, His priesthood and promises will never end. (TLSB)

7:25 *uttermost.* May include the ideas of completeness and permanence (see NIV text note). Jesus is a perfect high priest forever; so he is able to save completely and for all time. (CSB)

draw near to God through Him. Through trust in Christ, we have access to all the Father’s gifts, including the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:11–13). (TLSB)

always lives to make intercession. His people will never be without a priestly representative (see Jn 17; 1Jn 2:1). (CSB)

Jesus presents our needs to the Father, praying on our behalf that we may receive the gift of life to the full (cf Jn 10:10b). Luther: “If here by faith we do not take hold of Christ, who is sitting at the right hand of God, who is our life and our righteousness, and who makes intercession for us miserable sinners before the Father (Heb. 7:25), then we are under the Law and not under grace, and Christ is no longer a Savior. Then He is a lawgiver. Then there can be no salvation left, but sure despair and eternal death will follow. ... [But] I am baptized; and through the Gospel I have been called to a fellowship of righteousness and

eternal life, to the kingdom of Christ, in which my conscience is at peace, where there is no Law but only the forgiveness of sins, peace, quiet, happiness, salvation, and eternal life” (AE 26:11). (TLSB)

7:26–27 Luther: “The cross was the altar on which He, consumed by the fire of the boundless love which burned in His heart, presented the living and holy sacrifice of His body and blood to the Father with fervent intercession, loud cries, and hot, anxious tears (Heb. 5:7)” (AE 13:319). (TLSB)

7:26 *indeed fitting*. Of salvation from sin and its consequences. (CSB)

holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. Jesus is holy because He is sinless, innocent because He never had personal guilt, and unstained because He was a spotless victim for His pure sacrifice for sins. A true human being, He is also truly the Son of God from eternity and so is forever without sin. (TLSB)

7:27 *daily*. A reference to the endless repetition of sacrifices throughout the year (see Ex 29:36–42), evidence that these sacrifices never effectively and finally dealt with sin. (CSB)

first for his own sins. Christ’s priesthood is superior because he has no personal sins for which sacrifice must be made. (CSB)

once for all. A key phrase in Hebrews (see 9:12, 26; 10:2, 10). The Levitical priests had to bring daily offerings to the Lord, whereas Jesus sacrificed himself once for all. (CSB)

The sacrifice of Christ is eternally unique, valid, and effective. (TLSB)

offered up himself. Levitical priests offered up only animals; our high priest offered himself, the perfect substitute—Man for man. (CSB)

7:28 *men in their weakness*. Because (1) they are mortal and therefore impermanent, v. 23; (2) they are sinful, v. 27; and (3) they could only offer animals, which could never provide a genuine substitute for man, who is made in the image of God (see Ge 1:26–28 and notes). (CSB)

God’s own promise concerning the unending priestly office of Jesus remains eternally in effect (cf 5:5–10; 7:17, 20–21). John Hus: “The apostles did not call themselves most holy popes, heads of the universal church, or universal pontiffs; but, having with them the High Priest even unto the consummation of the age, they called themselves servants of Christ, his companions in tribulation and ministers of the church” (*The Church*, p 122). (TLSB)

made perfect forever. Christ was made perfect in that he faced temptation without succumbing to sin (see notes on 2:10; 5:8). Instead he perfectly obeyed the Father, thereby establishing a perfection that is eternal. (CSB)

Jesus’ high priestly perfection comes through His once-for-all sacrifice. (TLSB)

7:11–28 Though the Levitical priesthood could not bring the fullness of God’s salvation, Jesus, the sinless and perfect Priest, serves eternally as the one who brings our needs to the Father. In Him we have access to God’s blessings. His perfect work reminds us that death will always cut short even the best effort that anyone makes to serve God. However, Jesus freely brings us God’s eternal blessings through His sacrificial death. • Father, thank You for providing us with a true High Priest, who serves us with purity and perfection. Amen. (TLSB)

