

Jesus Brings the Better Covenant: Part 1

Before the Law of Moses and the Levitical priesthood, God revealed His ultimate plan for an eternal priesthood through the Old Testament figure of Melchizedek. Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of a priest who was outside the legal requirements of the law and the limitations of a flawed human priest.

Hebrews 7:1-10

INTRO

In chapter 5, the author began his introduction to the character, Melchizedek, but spent chapter six on a rabbit trail of exhortation for the Hebrew Christians to be growing in understanding and anchored in the hope of Christ. In chapter 6, he picks back up in his discussion of Melchizedek, displaying again how Jesus is the greater high priest who ultimately brings a greater covenant.

- The picture of Mel begins to bring forth the greater meat of the word. Paul is moving out of Jesus' earthly ministry and showing the deeper meaning of His heavenly ministry.

QUOTE

In his commentary on Hebrews, Warren Wiersbe makes an interesting observation,

“The emphasis in Hebrews is not on what Christ did on the earth (the milk of the Word), but what He is doing in heaven (the meat of the Word).”

BIBLE VERSE

Heb 7:1-19 NKJV – 1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated “king of righteousness,” and then also king of Salem, meaning “king of peace,” 3 without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually. 4 Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. 5 And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham; 6 but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. 7 Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better. 8 Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives. 9 Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, 10 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

ILLUSTRATION

Back in Northern California, the Lord gave us the unique opportunity to build a house. Some unexpected elements came together, we purchased a plot of land, and we were on our way to the joys of building a house. Thanks to an amazing contractor, the process was a joyful one even through the many setbacks that naturally came with the process.

- I still remember going through the process of all the drawings. Our contractor still drew by hand. In the middle of the process, he switched to computer-based modeling. The first time I saw the drawings, I fell in love. I saw what the yad would look like, the finishes of the exterior; all of the lines, materials, and colors.
- Then the building process started. Things don't immediately look like the picture overnight. As much as I loved those drawings (and still have them), the final product was far better than what I could have imagined. It was like the picture, but real. It was the fulfillment of the image I had been looking at and envisioning.

- How silly would it have been if I looked at the house and said, “No, I don’t want that, I like the drawings better!”?

APPLICATION

Well, in the Old covenant which included the 10 commandments, the legal ordinances, the Aaronic priesthood, sacrifices, and the tabernacle (later the temple), God had provided a blueprint. An image that was pointing to the greater fulfillment and reality that would ultimately come in Christ. But Israel had fallen so in love with the pictures, that they completely missed the real, tangible expression of what they all were pointing to.

On top of that, there were parts of the blueprints that they missed. For example, they got all the foreshadowing of the Messiah being a king correct, but they missed the image that the prophets painted of the Messiah also being a suffering servant. They saw the details of the Messiah saving His people, but they missed the finer aspects that he would save them by suffering for their sins and carrying their shame through death.

Another aspect they misunderstood within God’s drawings was the priestly aspect of the Messiah’s ministry. the Messiah would be the “Forever priest” to make intercession between humanity and God.

- But would he be of the line of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi? After all, the messiah must be kingly, from the tribe of Judah. On top of that, the priests from the line of Aaron were confined to ministry within the earthly temple and were bound by the first covenant, the Law.
- Was there another line of priests? Yes, and God actually wrote him into the story. It was a detail that many missed.

He gave a sketch in genesis 14, a small yet significant blip on the radar. A few short verses about a priest named Mel. Later, he reminds David of this priestly order and prophetically speaks of the priest that would come.

“You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” -Psalm 110:4

Then, when the time is just right, God built the house... Jesus Christ, the source of eternal forgiveness, righteousness, mercy, and grace. God is so excited for those who have been living under the law, who have seen their insufficiencies, flaws, and limitations; now they could see

God's eternal salvation through a priest who could do what no other human priest could. Not limited by genealogies, sin or death, or the need to be replaced, Jesus would usher in a new covenant, a sacrifice that would last forever, and a priestly ministry that would be forever.

Unfortunately, people had fallen in love with the temporal law, they had drawn over God's original plans and made their own version of the house. Instead of letting the law of Moses expose their need for someone greater, they became self-righteous. They believed they did not need anything better. And so, God, the master architect, publishes "HEBREWS." In chapter 7 he tells them all the reasons why Jesus brings the better covenant because he is not from the line of Arron and Levi. Being eternal and perfect, He is not subject to the condemnation that comes from the law of Moses because He is qualified to perfectly fulfill and thereby usher in God's "new covenant/new law" based on faith. The author of Hebrews points back to Melchizedek to confirm to his audience, "Jesus coming as a king and high priest was God's plan all along."

CONTEXT

So who is this vague and mysterious character Melchizedek in the Bible? ***There are countless ideas out there.***

- ***Some believe he was a heavenly being; an angel (though I think the context of "Jesus being greater" than the angels eliminates that)***
- ***Some say He was a descendant of Japheth, the son of Noah, who settled in the area of Salem (That's mostly conjecture)***
- ***Others indicate that he was a Christophany (an Old Testament appearance an expression of the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ)***
- ***Still, others believe that he was just a man that was chosen by God to be a type, or a symbol, of the kind of ministry that Jesus has.***

Personally, by the specific content of the letter, I believe that Mel is a Christ revealing Himself in the OT. Either way, it's evident that Melchizedec is a prototype, a foreshadow, and a symbol of the kind of priestly office that Jesus the Messiah would fulfill.

1

The Heavenly Title

BIBLE VERSE

Heb 7:1-19 NKJV – 1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated “king of righteousness,” and then also king of Salem, meaning “king of peace,”

BIBLE VERSE

The picture of Jesus in Melchizedek:

Here, the author recalls a three verse event from Genesis 14, and in it is packed 20 sermons worth of material. Let's turn to Genesis 14 and quickly dissect this.

- Abram had just rescued his nephew Lot from captivity to an alliance of kings that came against Sodom and Gomorrah.
- Abram and his 318 men experienced a great victory and were able to collect all the spoils of the battle.
- Upon returning from the battle, Abram is met by this strange and obscure figure:

Gen 14:18-20 NKJV – 18 Then Melchizedek (king of righteousness) king of Salem *(Ancient Jerusalem, before the law, and before the establishment of the Jewish nation* **Meaning: peace)** **brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. 19 And he blessed him and said: “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” And he (Abraham) gave him a tithe of all.**

CONTEXT - LET'S LOOK AT THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MEL**1.) He is both a king and a priest**

- In the system of the Old Covenant, the priestly line (Levi) and the kingly line (Judah) were separated. Because of the sinfulness and selfish ambition of men, no man could be both King and priest lest he would combine and abuse his spiritual and physical authority.
- He is the priest of God Most High – **El Elyon** – God, who is the God in authority over every other god. He was THE priest, not a priest. In the Levitical priesthood, there were many

priests, but Mel represented the SINGLE highest priest.

2.) He is the perfect blend of righteousness and peace.

- By the nature and meaning of His name, He also holds the title “King of Righteousness” and from the name of the city, Salem, He is also the “king of peace”; the perfect balance of grace and truth.
- Prophecying of the coming Messiah, David wrote of Him – ***Psa 85:10 NKJV – 10 Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.***

3.) His blessing is sealed with bread and wine

- People, look at this. It’s amazing! The king of righteousness and Prince of peace approach Abram (the representation of all those who approach God by faith) with bread and wine.

Who is both a king and the ultimate priest? JESUS.

Who comes as the perfect expression of God’s peace and God’s righteousness, the Prince of peace and the righteous branch of David and Jesse? JESUS.

Who comes to the children of Abraham by faith with bread and wine as a seal of the blessings of His covenant? This bread is my body broken for you. This cup is my blood, poured out for you. Symbols of the New Covenant of God with men through faith. And through that bread and wine (the cross), all the blessings of God are poured out from heaven upon us! JESUS!

- And this was written 2000 years before Jesus showed up!
- If anything, this message should build an unshakable confidence in the integrity of God’s word. No human being could have dreamed up and created such a majestic and perfect prophecy foretelling the entire gospel message in three verses 2000 years before it happened.
- Jesus fully represents and fulfills the righteousness of God, but at the same time can represent the one who is able to make peace between sinners and God.

But it gets better folks!

2

The Heavenly Genealogy

BIBLE VERSE

3 without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.

CONTEXT

In verse three, the author points out that even the lack of information that is recorded about Mel was an intentional move by God. God made his ancestry obscure to prove a point.

- None of his genealogy is recorded. His birth and death records are non-existent.

Why does this matter? According to the legal system of Judaism, one could not serve as a priest without proving their genealogy back to the line of Aaron and Levi (this is found both in Ezra and Nehemiah).

QUOTE

It implies that Melchizedek's priesthood was not established upon the external circumstances of birth and descent. It was based on the call of God and not on the hereditary process by which the Levitical priesthood was sustained.

William Lane,

CONTEXT

In this way, Mel could be an adequate representation of Jesus, the High Priest of the New Covenant who was neither from the line of Aaron or Levi.

No beginning or end of days or life:

Not only does this speak to the eternal nature of Jesus Christ, who has no beginning or end, but it speaks to the fact that this priest ministry goes on without end.

- The Levitical priest could serve between the ages of 25-50, but Mel had no recorded beginning or end to his ministry. Jesus' ministry can never end because his life has no end. ***He has conquered the grave and is alive forevermore (Revelation 1:18)! He told the Jews in John 8:58 – “Before Abraham was, I am.”***

3 He was made like the son of God.

QUOTE

Jesus didn't come to represent the ministry of Melchizedek, Melchizedek existed to represent the ministry of Jesus.

Josh, Quote

TITHE

3.) We also read that Abraham gave Him a tenth (tithe) of all the spoils of His battle, but Mel gave Abraham something much better, the blessing of God. What's the significance of this trade? it becomes clear in the next verses:

3

The Heavenly Priority

BIBLE VERSE

Heb 7:4-10 NKJV – 4 Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. 5 And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham; 6 but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.

CONTEXT (THE SUPERIORITY OF MELCHIZEDEK TO ABRAHAM = THE SUPERIORITY OF JESUS TO ALL)**7 Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better.**

Between two people, the one doing the blessing is always greater than the one who is doing the giving.

ILLUSTRATION

If the Levites received the tithes of Israel and in return blessed Israel, that made them pretty important.

If the Levites who received the tithes were descendants of Abraham, that made Abraham pretty important.

If Abraham gave his tithes to Melchizedek and Melchizedek gave the blessing, that makes Mel more important than Abraham, the Levites, all of Israel, and even the law itself!

If Mel is truly merely a representation of Jesus, that gives Jesus the highest and most deserving place of worship.

QUOTE**LEVITES = LAW****LEVITES > ISRAEL****ABRAHAM > LEVITES****MELCHIZEDEK > ABRAHAM****MELCHIZEDEK = JESUS****JESUS > ISRAEL, LEVITES, ABRAHAM****JESUS = GRACE**

GRACE > LAW

4

The Heavenly Tithe

BIBLE VERSE

8 Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives.

- To receive a tithe, you must be alive. The fact that all people, through Abraham give to Jesus is proof of His life.

9 Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, 10 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

ILLUSTRATION

Which one is the greater of the two? The Levites received a tithe, but where were those tithes really going?

In Hebraic thought, you were the son of your ancestors, no matter how far removed. Realize, Hebrews believe in a concept called “racial solidarity” – that one man can act on behalf of a group.

Remember when Jesus was dealing with the Pharisees? In multiple places, he says this, but I'll take John's account. There were Jews who wanted to believe in Jesus but they were confused by Jesus' language about their father:

Jhn 8:39 NKJV – 39 They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham.”

He goes on to tell them that because of their rejection of Him, they are actually children of the devil!

The tithes that were paid to the Levitical priests were actually going through their father, Abraham to Mel. How? The Levites came from the genealogy of Abraham, which means when Abraham (who was great) gave his tithes to Mel, in a sense, all of his ancestors after gave the same.

BIBLE VERSE

Gal 3:7 NKJV – 7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.

TO THE JEWS

Why would this matter so much to the Jews? Their entire life was built on a system that indicated a Levitical priest was necessary in order for there to be any hope of reconciliatory work between them and God, and Jesus wasn't from the tribe of Levi.

- But Paul basically says, "There is a better priestly order. Not only do you not need the Levitical priesthood any more, you get a better priesthood in Jesus that lasts forever! The superiority of this priesthood is demonstrated by Abraham's submission to Melchizedek, which really represented the entire system of the Mosaic law and the Levitical Priesthood becoming subject to the eternal priestly ministry of Jesus Christ.

ILLUSTRATION

It reminds me of the Biology final. It was a tough class, and the final exam promised to be very difficult. The professor decided to give the students a break. He told the class they could bring to the exam as much info as would fit on a piece of notebook paper. Most students wrote in tiny print trying to cram as much as possible on their 8.5 by 11-inch sheet of paper... Except for one student. He came to the class, laid a sheet of notebook paper on the floor, and had his friend – a graduate student in biology – stand on the paper. His friend was able to tell him all he needed to know.

He was the only student in the Biology class that day to get an A. **Proving conclusively, it's not as much what you know as it is who you know that counts.**

FOR US

And though you may feel somewhat far removed from Jewish tradition, and though the Levitical and Aaronic priesthood may seem like irrelevant topics, they are incredibly applicable. They mean that today, we get to come straight to God through faith in His son Jesus Christ. We no longer need a flawed and temporary human priest to mediate on our behalf.

1Ti 2:5 KJV – 5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

And unlike the office of the Levitical priesthood which had to make continual sacrifices, Jesus only had to make ONE sacrifice that sufficed for all sin. He doesn't have to be crucified again, His blood will never become void or run out of forgiving power. That is why the priesthood of Melchizedek matters so much... and God told us all about it over 4000 years ago!

CONCLUSION

Ok, Josh, this was all really nice and informational. But what on earth does Mel have to do with me? It sounds like a TGIF 90s sitcom, "Mel & Me."

- 1. Mel teaches me that Jesus is worthy of my honor and worship** – Abraham is certainly greater than me. Who am I to withhold from Christ what he deserves? Not just my tithe, but what it represents; that Jesus deserves my all, the bowing of my knee, and the giving of my life.
- 2. Mel teaches me that Every blessing of God comes through Christ** – As a high priest forever, he has the power to pronounce His blessing over me. The greatest blessing comes through his sacrifice, the bread, and the wine.
- 3. Mel teaches me that Jesus supersedes religion** – Mel was somewhat an offense to the Jew who valued the pomp and circumstance of the temple priesthood with all its ceremonies and rituals. Mel was plain, without a prestigious ancestral line, yet He was chosen by God. Jesus was a rock of offense to the Jews. A plain carpenter from Nazareth, no red carpets, no fine clothes, not wealthy, powerful human connections, yet this is how God chose to express Himself... an insult for all those who would trust in their religion to save them.