

## THROUGH THE BIBLE HEBREWS 7-8

Once, a little girl came home from Sunday School so excited. She announced, “Mom, God can do anything! He works miracles with His left hand, and heals with His left hand, and holds us close with His left hand.”

Well, the mother was thrilled that her little girl was so enthused about God, but she didn't understand her fixation with God's left hand. She told her daughter, “Honey, you realize God can also use His right hand.”

The little girl shook her head, “No.”

She said, “Mom, He can't! We learned in Sunday School that Jesus is *sitting on God's right hand.*”

Obviously, the little girl was slightly confused - Jesus isn't sitting *on* God's right hand, but *at* His right hand.

Hebrews 7-8 teaches us that after Jesus rose from the dead, He ascended into heaven where He sat down with God - and today, He functions as our eternal High Priest... “He ever lives to make intercession...”

In 5:10 the writer of Hebrews introduced the priesthood of Jesus, “called by God as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, *of whom we have much to say...*” Yet the writer was unable to say it because the Hebrews weren't ready for deeper truths.

His readers could handle the milk, but not the meat.

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*).” Wiersbe is saying the basics of the Christian faith revolve around Jesus’ earthly life and ministry, while His priestly ministry constitute the meat.

Jesus spent just 30-odd years at work on Earth, but He’s now spent 2000 years ministering in heaven.

The priesthood of Jesus is an important topic we shouldn’t overlook. And that’s our subject tonight...

Chapter 7 begins, “**For this Melchizedek...**”

This strange fellow, Melchizedek, is mentioned three times in Scripture... **Genesis 14** brings him up in his **historical context**. **Psalms 110** in a **prophetic context**. And **Hebrews 7** discusses him in a **doctrinal context**.

If you were asked to name the Top 10 major players in the OT I’m sure Melchizedek wouldn’t be on your list. He probably wouldn’t be in your Top 50...

But the writer of Hebrews surprises us by placing an amazing importance on the life and ministry of this obscure, cryptic character named “**Melchizedek.**”

We’re told first that Melchizedek was “**king of Salem.**”

“**Salem**” means “**peace.**” It’s short for the name “**Jeru-salem**” or “**city of peace.**” Melchizedek was the king of Jerusalem - the “**priest of the Most High God...**”

That he was both *king AND priest* immediately tips us off to Melchizedek’s unique status in the Scriptures.

In Israel there was a sharp division between church and state - *kings were forbidden to serve as priests.*

The **kings** were from *the tribe of Judah*, and the **priests** from *the tribe of Levi*. Any crossover was forbidden. In 2 Chronicles 26 when King Uzziah tried to usurp the role of priest God struck him with leprosy.

Under the Old Covenant God made with Israel only Levites were allowed to serve as priests before God.

You might say the Levites wore “*pre-washed genes.*”

That Melchizedek was both a king and priest means he was of a different order of priest - he stood outside the requirements of the OT, Levitical priesthood.

We're told *this Melchizedek* “**met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him...**”

Remember the story... A coalition of Syrian marauders raided the city of Sodom and took Lot and his family captive. Uncle Abraham came to the rescue.

In Genesis 14, he chased down the bandits, and returned to Palestine with both *Lot* and the *loot*.

It was on the way back from the rescue mission that Abraham met this man, Melchizedek. In Genesis 14:18 we're told, “**Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High.**” *Notice the mention of the “bread and wine...”*

Melchizedek then blessed Abraham - and we're told in Hebrew 7:2, "to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all." Of course, a tenth is another word for a *tithe*. Here Abraham *tithed* his spoils to Melchizedek.

Elsewhere in the Scripture Abraham's act is held up as example to believers. This is where we get the principle of tithing - *or donating a tenth of our income* - to support the priestly ministry of the Church on earth.

Of course, Abraham's actions were a surprise for a man of his spiritual stature. Abraham was the most respected and honored person in all of the OT.

As we'll discover later, **the blessing** is always of higher stature than **the one blessed** - just as the recipient of a tithe is of greater authority than the payer.

That Abraham humbled himself before Melchizedek was an acknowledgement of Melchizedek's superiority.

We're told more about this king-priest, Melchizedek, "first being translated "king of righteousness..." The word "*Melchizedek*" means "king of righteousness." "And then also king of Salem, meaning "king of peace..." He's both king of righteousness and peace.

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." How would you like to be the FBI agent assigned to do this guy's background check?

No dad? No mom? No descendants? No birthday? No date of death? If you didn't know better, you would think the guy was in [the Fed's witness protection plan](#).

There is actually much debate as to the actual identity of this man, “*Melchizedek.*” Was he simply a Canaanite prince, or was he more? The early church father, Origen, believed Him to be *an angel*. Other scholars have suggested he was *Noah’s son, Shem*.

Some commentators have explained away his mysterious description, “*without father, without mother, etc.*” as more figurative than literal. To them its not that he had no parents, but that in contrast to the Levitical priests, his parentage was irrelevant to his priesthood.

*That sounds good, but it’s not what the writer says.*

I personally believe the description in verse 3, when taken literally, can only have one explanation. Put it all together... *King of righteousness, Prince of peace, He carries with Him the elements of bread and wine (or Christian communion), no human parentage or genealogy, no beginning or end of life...* In my opinion *Melchizedek* can be none other than a pre-incarnate appearance of our Lord Jesus. Long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem He was the Royal Priest of Salem.

Verse 4, “*Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils...*” Now the discussion gets very Jewish...

Remember, this letter was written to Jews, so its issues and arguments are relevant to Jewish concerns.

What happened to the Levitical priesthood may not be important to us, but it was critical to the people who received this letter, and by trying to put ourselves in their shoes there’s a lot we can learn in the process.

Verse 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; but he whose genealogy is not derived from them (Melchizedek) received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better.”

Remember *the receiver of a tithe* and *the initiator of a blessing* are of greater spiritual stature than *the payer of a tithe* and *the recipient of a blessing*.

Thus, when the nation paid tithes to the tribe of Levi, and the Levites blessed them it was evident that the tribe of Levi was the superior tribe in Abraham’s family.

But when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek and received His blessing - it also mean that Melchizedek was superior to the whole family of Abraham! Levi was the superior son, but Melchizedek is superior to the whole family of Israel - including the priesthood of Levi.

Verse 8, “Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them...” Notice the implication that the Melchizedek of history was more than a mortal man.

“Of whom it is witnessed that he lives.”

Melchizedek was spoken of in Genesis 14 - around 2200 BC. But here we’re told “*he lives*” - present tense. He lives today! Melchizedek was “a priest forever.”

And in an odd kind of Jewish way, the Levitical priests actually paid tithes to Melchizedek. This is where our western, Gentile logic breaks down. But just remember this was written to Middle Eastern Jews.

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

Realize, Hebrews believe in a concept called “racial solidarity” - that one man can act on behalf of a group.

Recall the war between the Israelites and Philistines. Each army sent out a champion to fight on behalf of their respective armies. Instead of risking thousands of lives, David and Goliath fought it out in a proxy war.

Even an ancestor could be your proxy. One person could act on behalf of future generations. Thus when Adam sinned, all men were stained with sin.

At first we might buck this principle. It doesn't sound fair. Why should I be responsible for someone else's mistake? But it's got an up-side. In the same way that I inherit Adam's sin, I also inherit Jesus' righteousness.

Because Jesus obeyed God in every respect, when I'm born again into Christ I receive His righteousness.

And this is a good deal. Even if I didn't inherit Adam's sin, I'd probably sin on my own. But I could never earn Christ's righteousness if it wasn't given to me in Christ. Ironically, the principle that condemns you, also saves.

And here too, the writer of Hebrews uses this principle of racial solidarity. When Abraham paid tithes the Levites were still in his loins – *in his Levi genes*, so to speak. Thus, the Levitical priests were paying tithes to Melchizedek by proxy - and in doing so were showing Melchizedek's priestly superiority over Levi.

This all illustrated that Jesus was a better priest than the OT priests of Judaism. In leaving behind their religion to follow Jesus the Hebrews improved their lot.

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 one student. He came 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, *its not as much what you know as it is who you know that counts.*

And the same is true in religion. No one can enter the presence of a perfect, holy God on his own. You can only go as far as your priest is able to take you.

This is why the Hebrews were besieged with doubt.

In embracing Jesus they'd been cut off from the only priests they'd known. Yet here they're being assured, *"Its okay, Jesus is a better priest than the Levites."*

Verse 11, *"Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron?"* In Psalm 110:4 David had prophesied that Messiah would be a member of a new priestly order.



If the Levites, and the Law they ushered in, were doing an effective job and really gaining for the people access to God, *why was a new priesthood needed?*

“For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.” This is interesting...

With a new order of priesthood comes a new set of rules governing those priests and their duties.

“For He (or Jesus) of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.” Jesus was born into the royal tribe, Judah. The priests came from the tribe of Levi.

Under the OT, Jesus could've never been a priest.

That's why God established a New Covenant with a new priesthood and new requirements to govern them.

Recall the symbols Melchizedek came bringing... the bread and the wine are symbols of the New Covenant.

“And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. For He testifies...” Here he quotes Psalm 110:4, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” In the OT priestly authority was appointed by the Law of Moses to the tribe of Levi.

But under the New Covenant, authority is earned.

And Jesus earned the role of priest by virtue of His resurrection from the dead and now His endless life.

He overcame death, hell, and the grave - who now is better equipped to usher people into God's presence?

There're two types of authority: **delegated and earned**. When John Wayne rides into town, or when Jack Bauer *shows up* - the bad guys *shape up*.

John or Jack might not be carrying a badge, but it doesn't matter. They're in charge by virtue of *who they are* and *what they've done*. John Wayne is in charge because he's the most respected man in the room.

When you're "*The Duke*" you don't need a badge.

And the same is true with Jesus. He's our High Priest not because of an arbitrary decree from some ancient sage, but because He's the most-qualified for the job!

Levitical authority was a matter of *pedigree*, but Jesus' authority was a matter of *integrity and eternity*.

Jesus didn't *inherit* a position, He *merits* a position!

He lived a sinless life, died an innocent death, rose from the dead, and ascended to God's right hand.

Jesus pioneered His own way to God. Levites were *given* the right to be priests. Jesus *earned* that right!

Verse 18, "For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect

(complete)... The Law got man started with God. It was a remedial class, but it didn't finish anything.

“On the other hand, (in Christ) there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.”

Under the Law the peoples' relationship with God was tenuous at best. There was no real assurance.

Sin was like a grease stain that the Law covered up, but sacrifices had to be repeated, or the stain would bleed through. The Law offered nothing permanent.

Verse 20, “And inasmuch as He (or Jesus) was **not** made priest without an oath (for they (the Levites) have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: "The LORD has sworn and will not relent, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'"), by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.” God never took an oath in regards to the Levitical priesthood. He never pledged Himself to permanently support their ministry for He knew they'd eventually be replaced by Jesus.

But in Psalm 110:4 when priesthood of Jesus is predicted, God swears to support Him eternally.

“*The LORD has sworn... You are a priest forever...*” This is why the hope Jesus brings is so much better!

“Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing.” Here's another weakness of the Levitical system. They kept going to the bullpen. Their starters could never finish a game. Their ministry was transitory since they kept dying off.

The Jewish historian, Josephus, said there were 83 High Priests from the time of Aaron through 70 AD, when the Temple was finally destroyed. The Jewish Talmud held to a higher count - it claimed 18 served in Solomon's Temple, and over 300 in the rebuilt Temple.

The point is that no High Priest was permanent.

You might say, *the Levites were here today and gone tomorrow*. About the time you gained confidence in one he'd die off, and you'd have to develop confidence in another. It was like the injury-prone Atlanta Braves. One player goes down and another guy gets called up.

Verse 24, **“But He (meaning Jesus), because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.”**

Jesus doesn't die, nor pull a hamstring, nor blow out an elbow. He's not here today and gone tomorrow.

If you're trusting in Jesus to secure for you access to God, then you'll have the same confidence a hundred years from now as you do today. He's a priest forever!

Verse 25, **“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”**

Once, an 8 year-old boy came home from school with a stuffed animal he won at the Valentine party.

His dad asked, **“Tell me how you won the prize?”** The little boy recounted, **“Our teacher wrote all our names on pieces of paper, and placed them in a bowl. Then she picked a name out of the bowl, and it was me!”**

That's when the little guy's countenance fell. A guilty look spread across his face. He confessed, "But dad, I cheated." The puzzled dad asked, "How did you cheat?" He looked up and answered, "Dad, I prayed."

Realize, there is tremendous power in prayer!

Sometimes we wonder if God hears and answers our prayers. But that's not the issue that should concern us. Here's what we should ask, "Does God answer Jesus' prayers?" And of course the answer is, "Yes!"

For Jesus is in heaven praying for you and me.

*"He always lives to make intercession for (us)..."*

When I grow apathetic, or get distracted Jesus still stands before the eternal Judge as my righteousness.

When I blow it horribly Jesus reminds the court His blood paid for my forgiveness... When I need strength, or plead for mercy, or desire patience, or long for love... Jesus intercedes and secures for me a blessing.

Because Jesus occupies eternity and *"always makes intercession He is able to save us to the uttermost."*

Often verse 25 gets misread. Instead of *"save us to the uttermost,"* we read it *"save us from the uttermost."*

It's true, Jesus' blood can save the most disgusting, despicable sinner. He can save the underbelly of society - drug dealers, prostitutes, child molesters, serial killers. He can save *from the uttermost, even the gutter-most*, but that's not what this verse teaches...

The writer says that Jesus is able to save us *“to the uttermost.”* The emphasis here is not the extent *from which He saves*, but the extent *to which He saves*.

I’ve heard people remark, *“Oh, he was saved by the skin of his teeth. He just barely made it to heaven.”*

But that’s not true! Jesus never saves anyone by the skin of their teeth. No one *“just barely”* makes it to heaven. When Jesus saves you - you’re saved to the uttermost. You’re as saved as saved can get! All your sin - *past, present, and future* - gets blotted out!

Jesus’ forgiveness is complete, total, permanent.

As long as you trust in Christ your standing with God is as sure and steady and unchanging as it can be.

There are things in life that occur incrementally and gradually - *buying a house for example*. You prequalify for a loan. You find a house - then you offer a contract. The buyer counters. You counter back. Contingencies get added. The contract is signed... Then you actually qualify for the loan. A survey has to be done, a title search, an inspection, a termite letter... on and on...

Thankfully, a relationship with God doesn’t develop gradually. You don’t have to prequalify. There’re no counter offers, or inspections (*Wow, aren’t you glad He takes you “as is”*). There’s no waiting and wondering if you’ll be accepted - if the deal will actually go through.

No, when you embrace Jesus with your whole heart God closes the transaction immediately, and He moves in spontaneously. From the first moment you believe

you're as saved as you can get! Yes, He saves us *from the uttermost*, but He also saves us *to the uttermost*.

“We’re saved from the *gutter-most* to the *uttermost*.”

Verse 26, “For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens...”

Jesus is our High Priest by virtue of His intrinsic worth and value - not just His pedigree like the Levites.

“Who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up **Himself.**” Realize, a cleanser's potency is seen in the number of required applications.

The OT priests went back daily to offer sacrifices.

Jesus on the other hand, offered His sacrifice once for all! He never needs to spill another drop of blood. His one sacrifice permanently cleansed us of our sin.

The blood of Jesus includes a degreaser.

It not only paints the wall, but it eradicates the spot. Jesus has cleansed our sin, not just covered it!

“For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.”

Levitical priests were mortal men. Jesus is God's Son. **Who would you rather have as your Priest?**

You'd think the case would be closed, but...

Yet, there's another argument to be answered.

A priest is only as good as the Temple in which he works. You can be the best ice skater in town, but if there's no ice... or the best swimmer in town, but if there's no pool... Likewise, for a priest to be effective he needs a Temple in which he can ply his trade.

And chapter 8 tackles the subject of Jesus' temple.

Verse 1, "Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man."

The Levitical priests ministered in a man-made earthly Temple in Jerusalem - but Jesus now ministers in *the heavenly Temple*, the very throne room of God.

The Temple in Jerusalem was the center of Jewish life and religion, and these Hebrew believers had been barred from its courts because of their faith in Jesus.

That's why the writer of this letter wants them to understand they have access to a far greater Temple!

Verse 3, "For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things..."

In other words, the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and then later, Solomon's Temple, were actually copies - or small-scale models of God's throne room in heaven.



It's interesting that in Revelation we find the real deal of what was modeled in the Temple. In the outer court of the Temple there were bronze bowls for washing - it was called "the brazen sea." In the New Jerusalem, stretched out before God's throne, is the "glassy sea."

The same is true with the Ark, altar, lamp stands, etc.

Verse 5, "As Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." Here's a quote, Exodus 25:40.

On Mount Sinai Moses was shown a "*pattern*" of the heavenly throne room and all of its furnishings.

How Moses was shown this heavenly pattern was a matter of great speculation among the rabbis. There's a passage in the Talmud that comments, "An ark of fire and a table of fire and a candlestick of fire came down from heaven. These Moses saw and reproduced."

Some rabbis taught that Gabriel appeared to Moses in a carpenter's apron, holding models of the sacred furniture. He then showed Moses how to build them.

The Bible doesn't give us specifics, but it's certain that when Moses descended from Mount Sinai he not only held the two tablets of the Ten Commandments under one arm, but a set of blueprints under the other.

The point of the author here is that the Jewish priests worshipped God in a toy model - a cheap copy.

Like a kit car. The body looks like a Ferrari, but it sits on a VW chassis and the windshield is from a Ford Pinto. Likewise, the Temple in Jerusalem was nothing but a

kit car copy of God's heavenly throne. The OT priests drove a replica. Jesus serves in the real deal.

Verse 6, "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises."

Again, with a new priesthood came new and better promises. The Levites served under an inferior system.

But Jesus is a priest under the New Covenant.

The rules by which He operates - the promises He is allowed to make - are far better than the OT priests.

"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second." If the Old Covenant had worked - and reconciled man to God - a New Covenant would've never been initiated.

But God did promise a New Covenant. And here the writer quotes a lengthy passage from Jeremiah 31...

"Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah - not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD." The two stone tablets of Moses were *imprinted* with God's Law, but they couldn't *impart* God's power to keep His Law.

It was **stipulation**, without **motivation**. The Law was like an X-ray. It diagnosed the break, but it did nothing to heal. A better covenant was needed to bring healing.

Verse 10, still quoting from Jeremiah, “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 in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people...”

Under the New Covenant, God no longer writes on stone tablets. He now etches His intentions and desires into human hearts. When a person becomes a Christian they're a new creation. You receive new instincts and passions. God gives you a new heart!

Dr. Christian Barnard was the first surgeon to perform a human heart transplant. Once, he asked a patient if he wanted to see his old heart. Barnard took Philip Bailberg into a room and opened up a cabinet.

The doctor took out a glass jar and handed Philip his old heart. For a moment, there was nothing but silence.

Philip Bailberg was the first man in history to hold his own heart in his hands. Finally, he asked Dr. Barnard a few technical questions about the procedure. That's when Philip picked up the jar, and took a last, long look at his heart. He said, “So this is my old heart that caused me so much trouble.” He sat it down on the counter and walked away - leaving it behind forever.

This is what happens to a person who embraces Jesus as Lord and Savior. A heart transplant occurs.

God cuts out your *defiant heart* and replaces it with a *compliant heart*. You receive new desires. You get a heart that's impulse is to love God and loves others.

And you're also placed on intimate terms with God.

Verse 11, "None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them." Under the New Covenant there are no second-hand experiences with God. You know God not by *proxy - or priest alone - but personally through Jesus!*

"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." This is beautiful - **what God forgives He forgets!**

When you come to Jesus He forgives all your sins. He cleans the slate. You receive *a brand new start!*

Verse 13, "In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."

The author of Hebrews is assuring these Hebrew Christians that its no longer necessary to live under the Old Covenant. Judaism, with all its rules and rituals and requirements - it's priests and penalties - are now archaic, and out-dated with the dawning of Christianity.

God has struck a New Deal with His people.

He promises to give us **a new heart, a new start,** and we have **a new part** – all we have to do is believe!