

INTRODUCTION

As we come to Hebrews, chapter 7, we enter into the “heart” of Hebrews. For in chapters 7-10 we discover this simple outline:

Chapter 7	A Better Priesthood	
Chapter 8	A Better Covenant	
Chapter 9	A Better Sanctuary	
Chapter 10	A Better Sacrifice	Commit it to memory!

This is the heart of what the author has been speaking, when he says he wants to feed us spiritual “solid food” to eat (5:14) and have us “press on to maturity” (6:1). The 3 themes of PREEMINANCE, PERSEVERANCE and PRIESTHOOD all come together in this power-packed section of Hebrews. So “hunker down” and immerse yourselves in this “graduate course” on Jesus’ greatness, and on how the Old and New Testaments come together as one great plan of God in providing our access to Him through Jesus our great high priest.

The Hebrew author has dropped the name of Melchizedek in 5:6, 5:10 and 6:20 where we have heard that Jesus is a “high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” But in chapter 7 we are now to learn all that this means – and especially what it means for you and me as believers.

There are only 3 places in all of Scripture that the name “Melchizedek” is found: in Genesis 14, Psalm 110 and in the book of Hebrews. It is important to study them all to get a full picture of what God has revealed about this mysterious Melchizedek. And hopefully he will become less of a mystery as we learn how these teachings come together under the skillful and Spirit-led tutelage of the Hebrew author.

Genesis 14:17-20 *Then after [Abram’s] return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” And [Abram] gave him a tenth of all.*

Summary of context: 5 kings, including the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, fought against 4 other kings, including Chedorlaomer.

Result: the 4 kings under Chedorlaomer won the battle and took as hostage Lot, the nephew of Abram, who had been living in Sodom.

Then: Abram took 318 of his trained men and went out to defeat Chedorlaomer and the other victorious kings and recovered Lot and his possessions.

Unusual visitation: That is when priest/king Melchizedek meets Abram on the battle ground ministering bread and wine, gives a blessing, and receives a tenth of the spoils (a tithe) from Abram.

This is an account that would probably be dismissed as an unusual but insignificant detail, were it not for King David’s reference to it in the 110th Psalm:

Psalms 110:1-4 *[David:] The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.” The Lord will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, “Rule in the midst of Your enemies.” Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power; In holy array, from the womb of the dawn, Your youth are to You as the dew. The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”*

Here, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David sees the account of Melchizedek in Genesis not as an insignificant detail, but as pointing to the person of the Messiah to come. He sees Melchizedek as the priest of an order after which the Messiah would follow as a priest forever. Inspired by David's observation, and again led by the Holy Spirit, the author of Hebrews gives us God's definitive interpretation and explanation of what the Genesis appearance of Melchizedek really means:

Hebrews 7:1-10 *For 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, to 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. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually.*

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

In verse 1 and the first part of verse 2, the author simply recalls the details of the Genesis account regarding Melchizedek:

1. King of Salem (Jerusalem)
2. Priest of the Most High God
3. Met Abraham (then called Abram) after the battle of the kings
4. Blessed Abraham
5. Abraham gave him a tenth (tithe) of the spoils

Then beginning in the second part of verse 2, we get some interpretation:

1. "Melchizedek" = "king of righteousness" (Zedek = righteousness)
2. King of Salem = king of peace

And in verse 3 we get inference from silence in the Genesis account. This is a normal Hebrew principle of interpretation – that is, not only interpreting from what is said, but interpreting from what is not said:

1. No father or mother (mentioned) – i.e. no genealogy as credentials of priesthood
2. No birth or death (mentioned) – i.e. no beginning or ending of life
3. In these two ways, like Jesus the Son of God (i.e. of the "non-priesthood" tribe of Judah) and having come from eternity and returned to eternity, therefore a perpetual priest

Then in verses 4-10 we get interpretation of the significance of the tithe given to Melchizedek:

1. Receiving of it from a patriarch shows Melchizedek's greatness (v.4)
2. Not given to a son of Levi (yet to be a descendent of Abraham) (v. 5)
3. Not given by commandment, but as an act of will and worship (v. 5)
4. Received, as it were, by a non-mortal who is eternal (v. 8)
5. Levi the earthly priest, in the loins of Abraham, paid a tithe (v. 9-10)

And of the blessing given by Melchizedek:

1. Given to the possessor of the promises of God (v.6)
2. Given by one who was greater than the recipient (v. 7)

OBSERVATION

So the SUPERIOR PERSON of this Melchizedek is seen by his:

1. Person of RIGHTEOUSNESS (from the meaning of his name)
2. Person of PEACE (from the city from which he came)
3. Person of ROYALTY (for he was a king)
4. Person OUTSIDE HUMANITY (for he was without mother or father)
5. Person of ETERNITY (for no birth or death)

And the SUPERIOR PRIEST of this Melchizedek is seen by his:

1. Ability to receive a tithe of worship
2. Ability to bestow God's blessing

And only Jesus is worthy to receive our tithe and worship, and bestow God's blessing

Now so far in Hebrews 7 there has been no mention of Jesus as relating to Melchizedek. This will come in the remainder of the chapter.

But for now,

1. It is easy to see that righteousness, peace, royalty, being outside humanity and eternity are all characteristics of Jesus the Christ
2. And likewise, only Jesus is worthy to receive our worship through tithes and bestow God's blessings upon mankind

WHO WAS MELCHIZEDEK?

√ Was Melchizedek a human who embodied the characteristics of Jesus and whose genealogy and birth/death records were withheld in the Genesis account?

√ Or was Melchizedek a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus?

We can't know for sure – but here are some thoughts that point to my belief that Melchizedek was indeed a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ.

1. There are no other Biblical examples of one being both a king and a priest
2. The phrase "priest of the Most High God" is not a title given to any other earthly priest
3. The Jewish tithes of a later generation were brought to the temple and given as to God; this tithe was received by an individual. The text reads: "observe how great this man was."
4. The book of Genesis typically gives details about an individual such as genealogy and birth/death dates. To mention nothing of where this Melchizedek comes from is mysterious at least. And the phrase in Hebrews "made like the Son of God" is certainly provocative to link Melchizedek with Jesus
5. That this Melchizedek brought out "bread and wine" with no further explanation is also provocative. We can't help but think of Jesus instituting communion in the upper room with these same elements. It is as if there was a moment of "communion" instituted between Abraham and Melchizedek.
6. And remember that the earthly priesthood had not yet been instituted at the time of the Genesis account of Melchizedek. That would not happen until Levi, Abraham's great-grandson would be the father of the priestly tribe, and then still years later Moses' brother Aaron would be the one to bear the name of the "Aaronic priesthood." So who was this priest Melchizedek and who gave him his priestly credentials unless he was indeed Jesus – our King of Righteousness and King of Peace?!

Remember - We don't worship and revere Melchizedek – but we DO worship and revere Jesus, who has give us free access to God by his office of Great High Priest.