

THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST AFTER THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK

Chapter 7 of the letter to the Hebrews is a passage of the utmost importance. Its imagery and its format of argument seems strange making it difficult for us to understand. Our difficulty arises because of the character of Melchizedek. Abraham and Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Elijah are well known figures in the Old Testament, but so little is known to us of Melchizedek.

The writer of Hebrews used Melchizedek as a type of Christ. This type of typology was familiar to the early believers – most of who were converted from Judaism.

Hebrews 5:1-10 commences with Christ as being designated by God to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Heb 5:6 As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

Heb 5:10 Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.

Chapter 6 ends with this profound statement that Christ had been made FOREVER after the order of Melchisedec.

Heb 6:20 Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

And now finally after a three fold introduction of Melchizedek, the writer devotes the whole of chapter 7 to deal in detail as a reminder to the early Hebrew Christians that now Christ has become THE High Priest FOREVER after the order of Melchizedek.

He does this to present the Hebrew Christians with the clear understanding of the SUPERIORITY of the priesthood of Christ in contrast to that of the Levitical priesthood of Aaron.

Let us examine how the concept - the order of Melchizedek develops:

The writer of Hebrews got this concept from 2 passages of the Old Testament:

Gen 14:17 And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale.

Gen 14:18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.

Gen 14:19 And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:

Gen 14:20 And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.

Psa 110:4 The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou [art] a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

In the Genesis account, the incident relates to Abraham when he returned victorious from a military encounter with the Canaanite kings. Fresh from the scene of victory and laden with all the battle spoils, Abraham is met by the King of Salem (Jerusalem) Melchizedek.

Melchizedek offered bread and wine to the victor – Abraham (This detail the writer of Hebrews did not mention despite its potential typological value).

Melchizedek pleaded God's blessing on Abraham while also praising God for Abraham's victory.

Abraham offered Melchizedek a tenth of the battle spoil and at this point Melchizedek disappears from the scene of ancient history for a long while.

Melchizedek's second appearance is in Ps 110:4

To scholars of Old Testament and even Christian interpretation of Scripture there are 4 types of meanings.

The Jewish rabbis would give different names to the 4 meanings:

1. *Literal and factual meaning – Peshat*
2. *Suggested meaning – Remaz*
3. *Analytical and investigative meaning – Derush*
4. *Allegorical or inner or spiritual meaning –Sod*

The inner or spiritual meaning (Sod) was the most important to the early Hebrew Christians.

How does the priesthood of Melchizedek differ from the Levitical priesthood of Aaron?

The writer of Hebrews seeks to elaborate the Eternal and Unique aspect of Christ's priestly work as he makes typological use of 4 related points:

1.The Status of Melchizedek 7:1:

Heb 7:1 For this Melchizedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him;

Melchizedek was King of Salem.

And so was Christ. He is King of Kings and King of Peace.

The concept of a kingly priest may seem unfamiliar to us, however in the ancient world kings acted as priests and vice –versa.

The concept of Christ as Priest dominates the central theme of this letter to the Hebrews.

Although this title is confined only to this letter there are indications in the New Testament regarding the priestly work of the Lord Jesus.

Rom 8:34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

1Jo 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

1Jo 2:2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

2.The name of Melchizedek – 7:2:

Heb 7:2 To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace;

The name 'Melchizedek' signifies a priesthood of righteousness.

It is a royal priesthood of Peace (He was king of Salem).

It is a personal name and it is not inherited as it had no recorded genealogy.

It is Eternal as he had no recorded birth or death.

And so is the Priesthood of Christ which has no beginning or ending.

3. The uniqueness of Melchizedek – 7:3

Heb 7:3 Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.

The writer of Hebrews including the Jewish rabbis felt completely justified to interpret not only the utterances of scripture but also the silences of scripture.

Hence the writer based this passage on what scripture does not mention about Melchizedek.

Melchizedek has no recorded genealogy.

This is one of the arguments drawn from the silence of scripture which does not provide Melchizedek with any list of genealogy. He just arrives on the scene seemingly from nowhere.

He is in fact a reverse of the rules laid out in the Levitical priesthood which dictates that there MUST be an entirely dependable recorded descent.

Under Jewish law a man could not be a priest unless he produced a documented proof that he has descended from the lineage of Levi (Aaron).

When the Jews returned from exile from Babylon to Jerusalem certain priestly families could not produce their genealogy records and thus were barred from the priesthood (Ezra 2:61-63, Neh 7:63-65)

So the silence of scripture regarding the genealogy of Melchizedek is a fitting type of Christ.

This priest king in this sense is limitless and as such he resembles the Son of God who continues as priest forever.

Regarding Typology – it is not Jesus Christ that resembles Melchizedek but Melchizedek who resembles Christ. This Melchizedek is the exact copy of which Christ is the reality

4.The Superiority of Melchizedek 7:4-10:

Heb 7:4 Now consider how great this man [was], unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils.

Heb 7:5 And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham:

Heb 7:6 But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises.

Heb 7:7 And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.

Heb 7:8 And here men that die receive tithes; but there he [receiveth them], of whom it is witnessed that he liveth.

Heb 7:9 And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham.

Heb 7:10 For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him.

How can we prove that the priesthood of Melchizedek is more superior to that of the Levitical priesthood of Aaron?

Abraham gave a tenth of all his spoils to Melchizedek.

Priest exact tithes but there is a difference here.

The Levitical priests tithed their fellow Jews as a result of a legal enactment.

But here Abraham tithed to Melchizedek who had no racial connection with him.

He exacted tithes not because of law – as the law had not yet been given but because of His Personal Right as priest king.

Melchizedek blessed Abraham.

It is always the superior who blesses the inferior.

Melchizedek was superior to Abraham although Abraham was the founder of the Hebrew nation.

Then the writer to the Hebrews proceed to present Jesus Christ as the priest not from the Levitical line of Aaron but after the order of Melchizedek.

If the ministry of the Levitical priesthood had been spiritually effective it would not have been necessary for God to send another priest after the order of Melchizedek.

When the Lord was on earth, He was from the tribe of Judah, and Judah was not entitled to the Levitical priesthood which descended from Levi (Aaron).

However the old Levitical order of priesthood was set aside by God because of its inadequacy and its weakness and its imperfections – for the law made nothing perfect.

It is the SAVING WORK of Christ that has introduced to us a better hope.

It is by this hope that we can come into the presence of God.

PART 2

The priesthood of Christ presents a more excellent ministry than the Levitical priesthood.

Jesus Christ mediates a far better covenant which is far superior to that of the Levitical priests.

The priesthood of Christ is based on 3 factors as set out by the writer to the Hebrews in the following verses:

1. The oath of God 7:20-21

Heb 7:20 And inasmuch as not without an oath [he was made priest]:

Heb 7:21 (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou [art] a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:)

The writer here quotes Ps 110:4 because it contains GOD'S OATH..

This distinctive priesthood will be permanent and changeless.

The first part of the oath declared that "The Lord has SWORN ..."

It must be remembered that in Jewish thought that when God had said something it was done – Gen 1:3.

It was not just mere words. Those words had the power to initiate or commence an event.

The second part of the oath declares its RELIABILITY.

It declares that God will not change His mind. He will not go back on His Word.

So when in past eternity God took upon Himself this priestly work on our behalf, the PERMANANCE of His Ministry was confirmed by GOD'S OATH..

2. The Lord Jesus is the Guarantor – 7:22

_Heb 7:22 By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the pledge/guarantor of a better Covenant/Testament because God took an oath that His priesthood would be an everlasting priesthood with the Lord Himself as Guarantor!

So the new priesthood (Christ's) is better than the old priesthood of Aaron as the old priesthood had NO guarantor.

a) BETTER is the keyword in the letter.

At the beginning the writer declares that Christ has a better name than the angels (1:4), for He is the Son of God.

*In Christ there is a better hope because it is based on a better Covenant with better promises.
The once and for all offering of Christ's life is a better sacrifice.
So in times of persecutions and trials when some have lost their homes and properties they can rejoice in heaven for they have a better possession.
They set their hopes not on earthly materials but fix their eyes on a better country.*

b). The Word 'Covenant' or Testimony appears many times:

In chapters 8 and 9 this word is described in greater detail.

It signifies the Covenant of God with us.

In His merciful goodness God entered into a Covenant with us through the Work and Merit of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is a Better, New and Eternal Covenant.

c). Surety (Guarantor/Pledge)

This Word appears only here in the entire New Testament.

It is the assurance not only for the future but the present – though unseen.

The Guarantor – the Lord Jesus Christ knows all our needs having lived amongst us mortals.

Now HE sits in God's presence as our Surety and Guarantor.

3. Jesus Christ is the Great High Priest 7:23-28:

There are 3 portraits of Christ in this passage as our:

- *Present Guarantor.*
- *Our Great High Priest*
- *Our Effective Sacrifice.*

We shall direct our attention to the Superiority of Christ's priestly office over the Levitical priesthood.

There are 5 aspects of His Person and Work:

1 – His Permanent Achievement 7:23-24

Heb 7:23 And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death:

Heb 7:24 But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.

The priesthood of the Lord Jesus which is after the order of Melchizedek is therefore to make intercession for the believer forever.

Hence Christ is able to save us COMPLETELY, whereas the Levitical priests were compelled by death to transfer their ministry to the next priest in succession.

So by reason of Christ's eternal ministry as High Priest He is able to save the believer in totality - in the believer's spirit, soul and body.

This is based on Christ's ONCE AND FOR ALL OFFERING OF HIMSELF AS A SACRIFICE.

2- His Limitless Power – 7:25 a.

Heb 7:25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

We are not saved by a 'little believing' plus a 'little doing'.

Nothing is necessary to supplement or add to our salvation.

Christ achieved it ABSOLUTELY by His Victorious Work.

3. –His Present Ministry – 7:25 b:

Heb 7:25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him ...
Seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

*Christ Redemptive Work is based on the Cross. It is in the past, and it is a FINISHED WORK.
NOW Christ supports and sustains us through His Intercessory Ministry.*

Jewish rabbis maintain that intercession on behalf of the Hebrew nation was entrusted to the angels – especially the arch angel Michael.

The Roman Catholics have supplemented the Virgin Mary as their intercessor.

Here in Hebrews 7: 25 we have clearly stated to us that Christ is the ONLY INTERCESSOR.

Christ the far more Superior than the angels of the Jewish tradition.

Christ intercedes for us meaningfully, for unlike the angels He has experienced our trials and temptations.

Christ intercedes for us compassionately, for unlike the angels He knows exactly what we need.

Christ intercedes for us effectively, for unlike the angels He has the power to meet our needs.

4.- His Sinless Character 7:26:

Heb 7:26 For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;

The priests of the Old Testament were required to live holy lives, but as humans they were sinners like the rest of mankind.

Levitical priesthood stressed on outward cleansing and internal purity but Christ's priesthood is effective because it is based on His inward purity and sinless perfection.

5.- His Perfect Offering – 7:27-28:

Heb 7:27 Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.

Heb 7:28 For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.

Christ does not need to offer sacrifices everyday as the Old Testament high priests had to – first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people.

Christ's Sacrifice was ONCE AND FOR ALL when He offered Himself.

The Law appointed men as high priests who were weak, however the promise of the oath which came after the law appointed the Son who has been PERFECTED FOREVER.

Christ's ONCE AND FOR ALL OFFERING OF HIMSELF on the cross as a sacrifice for sin is contrasted to the repetitive sacrifices that needed to be offered by the Levitical high priests.

The word 'daily' shows it belongs to Christ and not to the Levitical priesthood.

So the phrase would mean - "Who has need day by day to renew the sacrifice as the Levitical high priest did year by year".

Christ does not need to renew the sacrifice day by day and year by year as did the Levitical high priests.

The Levitical priests had to offer repeated sacrifices because the blood of animals could not pay for sin.

Christ needed to offer just ONE SACRIFICE.

Furthermore, unlike the Levitical high priests He did not have to first offer a sacrifice for His own sins for He has NO SIN.

Christ as our High Priest is pure and spotless and hence efficacious (effective).

Under the Law, the Jews had to be content with the service of a weak priesthood who were frail and fallible as they were mere humans – imperfect and sinful.

Conclusion:

What are the practical implications which are derived from this Chapter?

Our eternal salvation does not depend on our changing feelings or our wavering experiences.

All our confidence is in God who will NOT GO BACK ON HIS WORD.

We may disappoint Him and fail Him from time to time, but He does not cast us off.

God is true to His Word for ALL TIME.

Christ is our Great High Priest whom we love and trust.

In times of uncertainty and doubt we are encouraged by this passage to take God at His Word as He has SWORN ON OATH that the Son of God is our Great High Priest forever.

Christ has dealt with man's triple problem: - Sin, death and the devil and having dealt effectively with ALL THREE of them He is able to keep those who come to God through Christ secure in His love and grace.

We are saved by the FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST, but we should not neglect the continuing efficacy (effective work) of our Lord as our Great High Priest.

He rescues us not only at our initial commitment but also day by day and moment by moment by interceding for us.

We must constantly renew our trust in Him knowing that HE will never fail us, and in doing so we will grow in our faith and move closer and closer to Him regardless of our trials, temptations and sufferings.

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Notes taken by Judy