

## Hebrews 7:1-19: You Need a High Priest....Why?

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### I. Introduction

Theoretically, the job of a high priest is to help you mend your relationship with your god so you could enter their presence and ask for help once again. But Jesus is no ordinary high priest. He does more than give you access to God's power. He first empathizes with your struggles because He knows what it's like to suffer through this life. He then grants you the ability to draw near to God providing you with all the help and answers you need no matter the problem.

### II. Hebrews 7:1-19: Why Do You Need a High Priest?

The audience of Hebrews is tempted to return to Judaism and the Levitical system, so the author goes to great lengths to show Jesus' superiority to angels, Moses, and the Levitical system. He's mentioned Jesus' priesthood already (1:3), and he wanted to explain it in detail but since his audience had grown sluggish, they would have a hard time understanding it. However, he's confident that they will get back on track, so he presses them forward. And for the next 3 ½ chapters (7:1-10:18), he goes on to show just why Jesus' priesthood is so superior and why Jesus is the only High Priest they will ever need.

**7:1-3**, he's already mentioned two reasons why Jesus' priesthood is better: (1) because Jesus functions in the actual temple in heaven, not the copy on earth (4:14-16), and (2) because Jesus' priesthood is after the order of Melchizedek instead of Aaron (5:6, 10; 6:20). He now goes into great detail as to why it's better than the Aaronic priesthood.

There is very little information about Melchizedek, he's mentioned twice in the Old Testament Scriptures, in only four verses (Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 110:4), and only three of those provide any historical information about him. Aside from what the author of Hebrews says, this is all we know of him: in Genesis 14, Abraham rescues his nephew Lot from the four kings. On his return from this victory, as he's bringing all the captives and the spoils of war back, Melchizedek king of Salem met him with bread and wine, blessed him, and in response, Abraham honored Melchizedek with a tithe; he gave him 10% of all the spoils of war. No more is mentioned about Melchizedek, who he is, where he came from, how he came to be the priest of God, there is nothing else in the biblical record. Why is this story here and what does it have to do with Jesus? The reason God included this story in His Word is because of the great similarities between Melchizedek and Jesus and because God had always intended to replace the Levitical priesthood with a priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, in fact, God swore He would (Psalm 110:4).

Notice who Melchizedek was and the points of similarity between him and Jesus: Melchizedek was both king and priest, so was Jesus (Psalm 110). Melchizedek was king of Salem (i.e., Jerusalem, Psalm 76:2), which means "king of peace" (Jerusalem means "city of peace"). The last part of his name, Zedek, was a Jebusite dynastic name (e.g., Adoni-zedek was also king of Jerusalem, Joshua 10:1) which means "justice/righteousness," thus, Melchizedek's name means "king of righteousness." Jesus is known by these two names too: He is called "Prince of Peace" and is a King who will rule with righteousness (Isaiah 9:6-7). Some have taken the next points of similarity to mean that Melchizedek was angelic, divine, or perhaps a per-incarnate appearance of Jesus Himself. Why? Because the author says that he had no father, mother, ancestry, no "beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God," and he remained "a priest continually."

However, these statements about Melchizedek don't mean that he was angelic, divine, or Jesus. In fact he can't be Jesus because in Psalm 110:4, Melchizedek is differentiated from Jesus. The author's point is that Melchizedek's priesthood is like Jesus'. That is, the comments about his father, mother, and ancestry mean that Melchizedek didn't get his priesthood based on his ancestry the way that the Levitical priests did (unless you could prove your ancestry back to Aaron, you were disqualified from the priesthood, Numbers 16-17, cf. Ezra 2:61-63; Nehemiah 7:63-65). The comments about Melchizedek not having beginning of days nor end of life, being like the Son of God, and being a priest continually, don't mean that he was non-human and eternal. They are a comment on the type of priesthood he had, i.e., as far as the biblical record is concerned, his priesthood had no end (no one took over after him). This is similar to Jesus' priesthood which is indeed eternal (Psalm 110:4) since He was resurrected and will live forever. This is in contrast to the Levitical priesthood where you could only serve from age 25 to age 50 (Numbers 8:24-25). Finally, like Jesus' Melchizedek's priesthood was universal, i.e., it didn't just pertain to one nation; he was the priest of God Most High. Similarly, Jesus is Priest and King of the world, Psalm 110, not just Israel. Because of all these similarities, Melchizedek was made "like the Son of God"—notice, Melchizedek was not *thee* Son of God, but *like* the Son of God.

**7:4-10**, Melchizedek's priesthood is superior to Aaron's because Abraham, the father of the Levitical priesthood, and by inference Levi and all his sons (since they were still in Abraham's loins when Melchizedek met him) paid tithes to Melchizedek when it is the Levites who're supposed to receive tithes. This signaled that the Melchizedekian order was greater than the Levitical order. Additionally, Abraham's blessing also signaled the superiority of the Melchizedekian order, i.e., "beyond all contradiction the lesser [Abraham]" was "blessed by the better [Melchizedek]." Finally, Melchizedek's order was eternal, i.e., the Levites who "were mortal men received tithes" but eventually they died. However, the biblical record doesn't mention Melchizedek's death or his priesthood ending. Melchizedek died but there's no record of it, thus, it's as if his priesthood went on continually, which is why Scripture says of him, "of whom it is witnessed that he lives."

**7:11-19**, if you could attain perfection through the Levitical priesthood (for through it the people were taught to obey God's Law), what need was there for another priest to come according to the order of Melchizedek and not Aaron? And since God has changed the priesthood, it is necessary that He also change the Law. Because the One spoken of as the new High Priest is Jesus who is from the tribe of Judah not Levi. Under the Law no one ever served as priest from the tribe of Judah, in fact, Moses never said anything about anyone serving in the priesthood from the tribe of Judah. And it is crystal clear that another Priest has come "in the likeness of Melchizedek," who's come, "not according to the law of a fleshly commandment," i.e., not according to His Levitical ancestry "but according to the power of an endless life," i.e., God swore concerning Jesus and His priesthood when He said, "You are a priest **forever** according to the order of Melchizedek"! That is, when Jesus was resurrected, God declared Him both King and Priest forever (Acts 13:33; Romans 1:3-4; Hebrews 5:5-6, cf. Psalm 2:7). Therefore, God has set aside the Law and the Levitical priesthood because they were weak and useless in making anyone perfect, i.e., obeying the Law never saved anyone from the consequence of their sins, not from the Lake of Fire or from the misery of this life. Instead, God has brought us a better hope (Jesus Christ), through which we draw near to God's power to save both during our life now and eternally (the Law was never meant to save us; it was meant to bring us to the Savior, Galatians 3:24; Hebrews 4:14-16).

**Why do you need a High Priest?** Wouldn't it be great if you had someone who could sympathize with you when you were struggling, someone who could show you compassion and help you when all hope was lost? When God swore that His Son, Jesus Christ, would be priest forever according to an everlasting priesthood, He provided you with such a person. Jesus promises to always be there, to let you into God's presence in order for you to find the help you need, to lead you into perfection, to set everything that is wrong in your life right, no matter the failure, no matter the heartache, no matter the thirst, He's come to fix it all (John 4:1-26; Luke 4:18; Hebrews 4:15-16; 5:1-2, 9-10; 6:17-20; 7:19).

### III. Conclusion

*For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. 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: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." 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; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.*