

THE EPISTLES TO THE HEBREWS

HEBREWS 4:14-10:18, THE SUPERIORITY OF THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

- A. Outline of Hebrews (to be finalized at completion of Hebrews study)
1. The superiority of the person of Christ (1:1-4:13)
 - a. Christ has the superior message (1:1-2a)
 - b. Christ is the superior person (1:2b-3)
 - c. Christ is superior to angels (1:4-2:18)
 - d. Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-4:13)
 2. The superiority of the priesthood of Christ (4:14-7:28)
 - a. A superior confession (4:14-16)
 - b. Superior qualifications (5:1-10)
 - c. A warning to keep moving forward (5:11-6:20)
 - 1) A dangerous spiritual condition (5:11-14)
 - 2) A call to spiritual maturity (6:1-12)
 - a) An encouragement to become mature (6:1-3)
 - b) A warning concerning apostasy (6:4-8)
 - c) An encouraging prospect (6:9-12)
 - d) Encouragement from God's promises (6:13-20)
 - d. The superior priestly ministry of Christ (7:1-10:18)
 - 1) Christ is the superior priest (7:1-28)
 - a) The priesthood of Melchizedek (7:1-10)
 - b) The priesthood of Jesus (7:11-28)
- B. Review of Hebrews 6:13-20
1. Warren Wiersbe, . . . *be sure to lay hold of the main lesson: believers must go on to maturity, and God has made it possible for us to do so.*
 2. R. Kent Hughes, . . . *we have reason to be optimistic—we have an anchor for the soul.*
 3. This section prepares the readers to move on to the *spiritual meat* of Jesus' high priestly ministry.
- C. Introductory comments on Hebrews 7
1. Zane Hodges, *The real resource of the readership, in the midst of their pressures, is the high priesthood of Christ. They must realize the greatness of that priesthood, its superiority to the Levitical institutions, and the perfect access they have to it on the basis of Christ's death.*
 2. Raymond Brown, *The priesthood of Jesus was after the order of Melchizedek and as such is contrasted sharply with the Jewish priesthood which was after the order of Aaron. One was eternal and effective; the other temporary and imperfect, now set aside because of its weakness and uselessness.*
 3. R. Kent Hughes, *Imagine for a moment that you are the writer of Hebrews writing to encourage the soon-to-be persecuted Jewish church. Also imagine yourself reflecting both on Melchizedek's history and this prophecy—and then you make the connection! Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the prophecy! He is a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*
 4. Ray Stedman, *The chapter establishes Melchizedek's historic identity; his precedence and superiority to the Levitical priesthood; the consequent need for a radical replacement of the Law; and the remarkable advantages which the Melchizedek ministry affords.*

A. A description of Melchizedek (1a, 2b-3)

1. His name, function and character (1a, 2b), *For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God. . . He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace.*
 - a. His name: Melchizedek
 - 1) The name and title come from Genesis 14:18.
 - 2) The writer gives the translation of his name as *king of righteousness*.
 - 3) It could be a title instead of a proper name for one who was head of a priestly order.
 - 4) Thomas Constable, *The writer began by explaining the significance of Melchizedek since understanding him is foundational to appreciating Jesus Christ's high priestly ministry.*
 - b. His function
 - 1) *king of Salem*
 - a) The writer gives the translation of *Salem* as peace.
 - b) It may be regarded as an honorific name.
 - c) *Salem* may also be the name of a place.
 - 1] Some, including Josephus (1st C. historian) think it is the ancient name of Jerusalem, Psalm 76.2, *His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion.*
 - 2] Others believe it is ancient Shechem.
 - d) R. Kent Hughes, *For starters, the author of Hebrews has noted that Melchizedek's titles foreshadow the character of Christ. Melchizedek bore the title of king, and this is mentioned four times in verses 1 and 2. Jesus is, of course, the ultimate "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS," as will be written both on his robe and thigh when he returns (Revelation 19:16).*
 - 2) *priest of the most High God*
 - a) *priest*
 - 1] Thomas Constable, *The fact that Melchizedek was a priest is clear from two facts: he blessed Abraham, and Abraham paid tithes to him of all the spoils that he had taken in war (v. 4; cf. Gen. 14:23–24).*
 - 2] As noted by the writer in Hebrews 6:20, Jesus is a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.
 - a] One might understand *order* as *class* or *type* where *order* was qualitative in that the uniqueness of Melchizedek was comparable to that of Jesus.
 - b] Verses 1-3 show that Melchizedek is a prototype of Jesus Christ. The distinctives of Melchizedek emphasize the same distinctives in Jesus which should encourage the readers not to turn away from Jesus but to hold fast to Him.
 - 3] R. Kent Hughes, *Significantly, Melchizedek was a priest-king, something which by law no Levitical priest could ever be. But Jesus became the ultimate priest-king, fulfilling to the letter what was promised through Zechariah regarding the Messiah. Note Zechariah 6:13, It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.*
 - 4] Raymond Brown, *Although precise references to Christ's title as priest are confined to this letter, there are indications elsewhere in the New Testament of the priestly work of Jesus. His present ministry of intercession is mentioned by both Paul and John. Note Romans 8:34 and 1 John 2:1-2.*
 - b) *the Most High God.*
 - 1] Mark 5:7, *And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me."*
 - 2] Acts 7:48, *Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says,*
 - 3] Donald Hagner, *This God is seen to be the same as the God of Israel, as is evident from his description as the "Creator of heaven and earth" and the one who gave Abraham his victory. . .*

- c. His character: *king of righteousness . . . king of peace*
 - 1) Psalm 85:10, *Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other.*
 - 2) Romans 5:1, *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
 - 3) Colossians 1:20, *and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*
 - 4) The note of the priority of *righteousness* gives emphasis to its foundational quality which enables *peace*.
 - 5) Philip E. Hughes on Jesus' kingship and priesthood, *As king he is just, and as priest he justifies all who trust in his atoning sacrifice.*
 - d. Comments
 - 1) Warren Wiersbe, . . . *in the Old Testament economy, the throne and the altar were separated. Those persons who attempted to invade the priests' office were judged by God. But here is a man who had both offices—king and priest! Aaron never had that privilege.*
 - 2) R. Kent Hughes, . . . *Melchizedek foreshadowed the character of Christ—his kingship, his priesthood, his righteousness, and his peace.*
 - 3) Charles Spurgeon, *He is said to be King of righteousness, but that is by interpretation, by the toning down of His character to our comprehension.*
2. His unique attributes (3)
- a. Interpreting verse 3
 - 1) Some accept the characteristics of Melchizedek as indicators of a heavenly being, even the pre-incarnate Christ.
 - 2) Others take the view that Melchizedek resembles the never-ending ministry of Jesus because there is no record of Melchizedek's birth or death.
 - 3) William L. Lane, *The primary purpose of the statement is not to establish a factual point but to exhibit the radical difference that existed between the priesthood of Melchizedek and the more familiar Levitical line of priests. In this context, the silence of the Genesis narrative concerning Melchizedek's parents or line of priestly descent was significant because of the contrast it posed with the Levitical priesthood, where recorded line of descent was required for accession to the priestly office (Exod 28:1; Lev 21:13–15; Num 3:10; 18:1; Ezra 2:61–63; Neh 7:63–65).*
 - 4) R. Kent Hughes, *His point is that the Genesis account does not mention Melchizedek's parents or genealogy or when he was born or died, thereby providing a fitting type of what would be fleshed out in the qualifications of Christ.*
 - b. He had no recorded genealogy or record of birth or death (3a), ***He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life,***
 - 1) Concerning genealogy
 - a) The fact that Melchizedek had no record of his *genealogy* concerns lack of priestly qualifications and not miraculous existence.
 - b) Leon Morris, *When nothing is recorded of the parentage of this man, it is not necessarily to be assumed that he had no parents but simply that the absence of the record is significant.*
 - c) Kent Hughes, *The point is, Jesus' priesthood, like Melchizedek's, was based solely on the call of God, not on heredity. Jesus and Melchizedek were both appointed as "priests of God Most High."*
 - 2) Concerning record of birth or death
 - a) Thomas Constable, *It was essential that the Levitical priests be able to prove their ancestry (cf. Ezra 2:61–63; Neh. 7:63–65). Since Moses did not record Melchizedek's death, this writer could say that he continued as a priest forever, another respect in which he was like Jesus Christ.*
 - b) R. Kent Hughes, . . . *all Levitical priests served limited terms of office—no more than thirty years. But with Melchizedek, there was no set beginning or end of his life. . . What was foreshadowed in Melchizedek's having no beginning or end was fully realized in Christ's eternal priesthood.*
 - c) Concerning the Son of God, Chrysostom (4th C.), *We know of no beginning or end in either case; in the one, because none are recorded; in the other, because they do not exist.*

- c. He is a prototype of Jesus Christ (3b), **but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.**
- 1) *resembling*
 - a) It means *made like*, or *similar* and is only used here in the New Testament.
 - b) William L. Lane, . . . *it is not that Melchizedek sets the pattern and Jesus follows it. Rather, the record about Melchizedek is so arranged that it brings out certain truths, that apply far more fully to Jesus than they do to Melchizedek.*
 - c) Raymond Brown, *It is not Jesus who resembles Melchizedek, but Melchizedek who resembles the Lord Jesus.*
 - d) G. F. Hawthorne, *Melchizedek thus was the facsimile of which Christ is the reality.*
 - 2) *forever*
 - a) Thomas Constable, *It was essential that the Levitical priests be able to prove their ancestry (cf. Ezra 2:61–63; Neh. 7:63–65). Since Moses did not record Melchizedek’s death, this writer could say that he continued as a priest forever, another respect in which he was like Jesus Christ.*
 - b) Zane Hodges, *The word “forever” translates a phrase that occurs only in Hebrews (here and in 10:12, 14) and means “continuously” or “uninterruptedly.” It seems more natural that the author meant that Melchizedek belonged to an order in which there was no end to the priesthood of those engaged in it.*
 - c) Another possibility is that Melchizedek was an angel which will be addressed in Hebrews 7:8.
 - d) William L. Lane, *Melchizedek’s sudden appearance and equally sudden disappearance from recorded history evoked the notion of eternity, which was only prefigured in Melchizedek but was realized in Christ.*
 - e) R. Kent Hughes, *No one had ever seen all of this until the writer of Hebrews presented it. His heart is full, and he expects his Jewish hearers will feel the same as they reflect on their unsure situations.*

B. The meeting of Melchizedek and Abraham (1b-2a), **met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything.**

1. Biblical texts

- a. Genesis 14:18-20, *And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram by 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 everything.*
- b. Psalm 110:4, *The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”*
- c. Douglas Mangum, *Whereas Ps 110:4 was the initial point of reference for Melchizedek (5:6), here the author is drawing primarily from Gen 14:18–20, which is the only other place in the OT that mentions Melchizedek. This interpretation of the Genesis passage lays the foundation for what follows, where Jesus and his priesthood are compared with Melchizedek and contrasted with Aaron and his priesthood.*

2. The context of the meeting between Melchizedek and Abraham

- a. Melchizedek met Abram after he rescued Lot and a large number of hostages from a group of four Canaanite kings as told in Genesis 14:5-12. The meeting took place before the King of Sodom’s offer of riches to Abraham which he would refuse.
- b. Ray Stedman, *Abraham has accomplished a remarkable and widely effective feat—with only 318 followers he successfully repelled an invasion of Palestine by a great coalition of the superpowers of that day. He has released many prominent citizens whom the invaders had captured and was returning home with wagons loaded with the treasures of Sodom which he had recovered.*
- c. R. Kent Hughes, *Can you see him proudly astride his lumbering camel, smeared with the dirt and blood of battle, leading his 318 proud men plus Lot and all the captives and all the plunder through Jerusalem? If so, you have the “feel” necessary to begin to appreciate Abraham’s strange, mystic encounter with a shadowy figure of immense grandeur—Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem. . . That was around 2000 B.C. and for a millennium there is no mention at all of Melchizedek, not even in retrospect. But in the tenth century B.C., when the Psalmist David was King of Israel, the Holy Spirit inspired him to write this prophetic word: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek’ ” (Psalm 110:4).*
- d. Raymond Brown, . . . *we must look at the Genesis account of the incident used here by our author. It simply relates the story of Abraham’s return from a military encounter with some Canaanite kings. Fresh from the scene of victory and laden with the battle spoil, Abraham is met by a king named Melchizedek who offers bread and wine to the victor . . . Melchizedek implores God’s blessing on Abraham and also praises God for Abraham’s success. Abraham offers him a tenth of the spoil; thereupon Melchizedek disappears from the narrative.*

3. Their meeting
 - a. Melchizedek met Abraham and blessed him.
 - 1) Ray Stedman, . . . *he is refreshed physically and morally by the ministry of Melchizedek . . . So Jesus strengthens and refreshes those who come to his throne of grace for help (4:16).*
 - 2) William Newell, . . . *He calls the blessing of God Most High upon Abraham.*
 - b. Abraham gave one-tenth (a tithe) of his plunder to Melchizedek.
 - 1) Warren Wiersbe, *Abraham practiced tithing long before the Law was given. In fact, archeologists have discovered that other nations also tithed in that day; so the practice is an ancient one.*
 - 2) Ray Stedman, *In gratitude for this timely help, Abraham gives Melchizedek a tenth of the plunder he has won . . . So believers are to acknowledge Jesus as the one who has bought us with a price, and to recognize we are no longer owners of ourselves or all we possess (1 Cor 6:19–20)!*
 - 3) That Abraham pays tithes to Melchizedek shows superiority to the Levitical priesthood.
4. Comments
 - a. David Dockery, *Because the priesthood of Aaron did not bring people into obedience to God, He changed the priesthood. He installed Christ as the Priest after a new order, that of Melchizedek.*
 - b. R. Kent Hughes, . . . *You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4). There God declared that he was going to do something new. . . What an intriguing prophecy! God was going to establish a totally new priesthood.*
 - c. Ray Stedman, *To a modern congregation, this passage should be presented as a vivid picture of the help which is available for believers today from our great high priest who can give us righteousness and peace from within if we “come to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

To be continued, Lord willing!

C. The significance of Melchizedek (4-10)