

Hebrews 7**Lesson 7
The Priesthood Of Christ Is Superior To The Levitical****Outline****I. Priesthood of Melchizedek Was Superior to the Levitical** (vv. 1-10)

- A. *Was king and priest* (v. 1a)
- B. *Appointed priest – not through descent* (v. 3a)
- C. *No predecessor or successor* (v. 3b)
- D. *Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek* (vv. 1b-2; 4-8)
- E. *Levi (through Abraham) paid tithes to Melchizedek* (vv. 9-10)

II. A Change in Priesthood (vv. 11-19a)

- A. *Because of imperfection of the Levitical priesthood* (v. 11)
- B. *Required a change in the law* (vv. 12-19a)
 1. For Christ was not of the tribe of Levi (vv. 12-14)
 2. Yet, God said he would be priest (vv. 15-17)
 3. Old law was annulled (vv. 18-19a)

III. Priesthood of Christ is Superior to the Levitical (vv. 19a-28)

- A. *Because it provides better hope* (v. 19b)
- B. *Because he was made priest by an oath* (vv. 20-22)
- C. *Because he is a continual High Priest* (vv. 23-25)
- D. *Because of his superior character* (vv. 26-28)
- E. *Because of his superior offering* (v. 27)

Key Verse that Summarizes the Chapter**Hebrews 7:11**

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?

Here the author takes up the subject of Christ being a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek that he left off at Hebrews 5:10 as he launched into a warning about not maturing. Even though the Hebrews were lacking in maturity, he presses on with the subject that “is hard to explain” (Heb. 5:11).¹

Priesthood of Melchizedek Was Superior to the Levitical (vv. 1-10)

The writer has previously stated that Christ is a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (5:6-10; 6:20). His point in these ten verses is to show that the priesthood of Melchizedek was superior to the Levitical priesthood. Thus, if the priesthood of Christ is after the order of Melchizedek, then his priesthood is superior to the Levitical.

Was king and priest (v. 1a). Melchizedek is only mentioned twice in the Old Testament (Gen. 14:17-20; Psalms 110:4).² He was king of Salem³ and priest of the Most High God.⁴ No priest under the Levitical priesthood was king as well as priest.

Appointed priest – not through descent (v. 3a). “Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life” means that there is no record of his birth or his death. Thus, he did not become priest because of lineage or descent. In contrast, under the Levitical priesthood those who became High Priest were in the lineage of Aaron (Exo. 29:9, 29; Num. 25:12-13).⁵ In this way, Melchizedek was made like the Son of God. “For it is very obvious that the Holy Spirit has intentionally thrown an impenetrable veil over both the birth and the death of Melchisedec, over both his parentage and his posterity, for the purpose of making him a more perfect type of Christ.”⁶

No predecessor or successor (v. 3b). He remains a priest continually. That is, he had no predecessor or successor. His was a one-high-priest priesthood.

Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (vv. 1b-2; 4-8). As Abraham returned from the battle where he rescued Lot (Gen. 14:1-20), he met Melchizedek and received a blessing from him and then gave him a tithe (vv. 1b-2).

The name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness” (v. 2). Since the name Salem means peace, then being king of Salem means he is “king of peace”. This indeed makes him a type of Christ.

These verses establish that Abraham acknowledged that Melchizedek was superior by two things: (1) giving a tithe to him, and (2) receiving a blessing from him. Abraham gave

- 1 The answer to immaturity is to push forward into the meat of the word.
- 2 The only mention of him in the New Testament is in three chapters of Hebrews (5, 6, 7).
- 3 “The general opinion among the Jews was that Salem was the same as Jerusalem, as stated by Josephus (Ant, I, x, 2), who adds (VII, iii, 2) that it was known as Solyma (Saluma, variants, according to Whiston, Salem and Hierosolyma) in the time of Abraham” (*International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by BibleSoft). Also Psalms 76:2 equates Salem with Zion.
- 4 Jesus is king and priest (Zech. 6:12-13).
- 5 In the post-exile period some were excluded from being priest because their lineage could not be established (Ezra 2:61-62; Neh. 7:63-64).
- 6 Robert Milligan, *Vol. IX – Epistle to the Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary, 195.

a tenth of the spoils (v. 4).⁷ The Levitical priest received tithes because it is commanded (Num. 18:21, 24, 26-29). Their ability to collect the tithe from their brethren was by the law and not based on superiority. However, there was no such law that Abraham had to give a tithe. Neither was there any kindred to the king of Salem. Thus, the basis for giving the tithe was superiority.

Melchizedek blessed Abraham (vv. 1b, 6, 7). He blessed him as a priest of God (one who had authority to bestow God's intended good upon another). The conclusion of the author is that the lesser is blessed by the greater (v. 7).

Under the Levitical priesthood tithes were paid to men who died and another priest took his place (v. 8). But, the picture of Melchizedek is that he lives (v. 8). Since there is no word on his death or the end of his priesthood, the record is that he lives.

Levi (through Abraham) paid tithes to Melchizedek (vv. 9-10). Since Levi was a descendant of Abraham, he (through Abraham) paid tithes to Melchizedek "so to speak."⁸

A Change in Priesthood (vv. 11-19a)

If Christ is a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, then there has to be a change in the priesthood.

Because of imperfection of the Levitical priesthood (v. 11). A change was necessary because of the inability of the Levitical priesthood, with its sacrifices, to remove sin (cf. Heb. 10:4). "Under it the people received the law" that is, "on the basis of it the people received the law" (NASV). The Levitical priesthood was the basis of the law being given. Various regulations of the law were carried out by the priests. The priesthood and the law were inseparable.

The author proves his point about the imperfection of the Levitical priesthood by appealing to Psalm 110:4 (which he doesn't quote until verse 17). If the Levitical system had been perfect why would there be a need for another priest like Melchizedek as promised in the Psalm?

Required a change in the law (vv. 12-19a). Since the priesthood and the law are inseparable, a change in the priesthood requires a change in the law (v. 12).⁹

For Christ was not of the tribe of Levi (vv. 12-14). The reason the law had to be changed is that Christ was not from the tribe of Levi (v. 13). Rather, he arose¹⁰ from the tribe of Judah "of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood" (v. 14).¹¹ The point is

7 Literally the top of heap, "chief spoils" (ASV), or "choicest spoils" (NASV).

8 "As I may so say-to preclude his words being taken in the mere literal sense; I may say virtually, Levi, in the person of his father Abraham, acknowledged Melchisedek's superiority, and paid tithes to him" (*Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft).

9 This is a powerful point to make to those who claim we are still under the Old Testament. If the law has not changed, the priesthood has not changed (thus Christ is not our High Priest). If the priesthood changed, then the law has changed.

10 The KJV says "sprang" out of Judah. This is a reference to Christ being a Branch out of the root of Jesse (Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5,6; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12).

11 Here we learn the silence of God is not permissive, but prohibitive.

that Jesus, being from the tribe of Judah, could not be a priest under the Levitical system and the old law.

Yet, God said he would be priest (vv. 15-17). It is “far more evident” that the law must be changed when we consider that Christ was to be priest in the likeness of Melchizedek (v. 15). Christ did not become priest by “the law of fleshly commandment” (v. 16), that is by law of physical descent. He became High Priest by the power of an endless¹² life. The expression, “power of an endless life” is in contrast to the “fleshly commandment” (physical descent) that was just mentioned. The fact that Jesus is alive (since he was raised from the dead) enabled him to become High Priest.

The passage from which the author makes his point is Psalm 110:4. There God promised that he would be a priest. From that we have to conclude there must be a change in the law.

The idea of his being a priest *forever* is best explained by Robert Milligan, “As he is the only begotten Son of the Father, so also he is now the only king and high priest that is appointed by the Father; and as such he will set as a priest upon his throne until the purposes of God in reference to the redemption of mankind shall have been fully accomplished. Then, and not until then, will he deliver up both the kingdom and the priesthood to the Father. But that epoch, like the beginning of his administration, is concealed from the eyes of mortals. In the representation of his priesthood, therefore, as given by the Holy Spirit, there is neither beginning nor ending. Like Melchizedek, he abides a priest perpetually.”¹³

Old law was annulled (vv. 18-19a). The old law has been annulled (set aside, NASV)¹⁴ because of its “weakness and unprofitableness” and it “made nothing perfect”. All three of these expressions describe the inability of the law to remove sin (cf. v. 11).

Priesthood of Christ is Superior to the Levitical (vv. 19a-28)

This section gets to the heart of what this chapter is saying—the priesthood of Christ is superior to the Levitical priesthood. He has already told us that Melchizedek’s priesthood was superior to the Levitical (vv. 1-10) and that the priesthood of Christ is in the likeness of Melchizedek (vv. 15-17). Therefore, the priesthood of Christ is superior to the Levitical. Now the author gives us five reasons why the priesthood of Christ is so much better.

Because it provides better hope (v. 19b). The better hope is in contrast to the weakness and unprofitableness (v. 18) of the old priesthood and law. The priesthood of Christ does what the old could not do – it removes sin so that man can draw near to God.

Because he was made priest by an oath (vv. 20-22). The sons of Levi were made priest without an oath which shows that their priesthood was subject to change. Christ, however, was made High Priest with an oath (Psalm 110:4) which shows his priesthood was not subject to change.¹⁵

12 ESV translates this “indestructible.”

13 *Ibid.*, 207-208.

14 The word translated “annulling” is used only here and in Hebrews 9:26 where it is translated “put away” with reference to sin.

15 “...it was God’s purpose of old, even in the time of David, to set aside the Old Economy and introduce the New; thereby proving indirectly from Psa. cx 4, the very great superiority of Christ’s priesthood over that of Aaron” (Milligan, *ibid.*, 209).

By this oath Jesus became a surety (“guarantor” ESV; “guarantee” NKJV footnote) of a better covenant. The promise of a different High Priest (Psalm 110:4) was a promise of a better covenant (since the priesthood and covenant are inseparable).¹⁶

Because he is a continual High Priest (vv. 23-25). There were many High Priests under the Levitical system for the simple reason that one would die and another took his place. In contrast, Jesus, because he lives forever, continues his priesthood. Being an unchangeable High Priest he is able to save to the uttermost (completely) because he is always living and making intercession for his people (v. 25).¹⁷

Because of his superior character (vv. 26-28). Jesus as our High Priest is “fitting for us” (“meets our need” NIV) because of his characteristics. He is **holy** (pious, devout, pure), **harmless** (innocent, blameless), **undefiled** (without spot or stain), **separate from sinners** (sinless and exalted above them), and **higher than the heavens** (passed through the heavens cf. 4:14).

Jesus does not need to daily offer sacrifices as those High Priest did (v 27).¹⁸ “...this statement means that Jesus’ daily intercession does not require a daily sacrifice, in contrast to the Levitical high priests who had to offer a sacrifice every time they approached God (even if it was only yearly). That is, ‘daily’ does not describe the duties of the high priests in the Levitical system, but simply refers to Jesus’ high priesthood. As Guthrie explains, ‘He has no need in his daily ministry to offer sacrifices for himself as those priests did.’”¹⁹ This is because of his superior character – he is sinless (Heb. 4:15).

Note the contrast: the high priest of the old law were men who have weakness (v. 28). However Jesus has been perfected forever. Jesus was appointed by an oath (Psalm 110:4) which is more recent than the law pertaining to the Levitical priesthood, showing that God indeed intended to change the priesthood to one that is superior.

Because of his superior offering (v. 27). The sacrifice Christ offered as our High Priest is Himself, thus making his priesthood superior.

Use of the Old Testament in this Chapter	
Verse in Chapter 7	Old Testament Reference
v. 17	Psalm 110:4
v. 21	Psalm 110:4

16 The NIV renders verse 22: “Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.”

17 As our High Priest, Jesus didn’t just act on our behalf in the past (his sacrifice), but he is working on our behalf even now.

18 This verse is difficult. On the surface it seems to be saying that the high priests offered daily sacrifices (which the priests did, but not the high priests). One explanation could be that the high priest stood at the head of the Levitical system and had oversight of the daily sacrifices. Also, the daily sacrifices were for him (the high priest) as well as everyone else, for he was a sinner. However, the explanation given seems to better explain the text.

19 David McClister, *A Commentary on Hebrews*, 268-269.

Questions

1. Who was Melchizedek?
2. What does "Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life" (v. 3) mean?
3. What does the name Melchizedek mean?
4. What two things happened when Abraham met Melchizedek that prove that Melchizedek was superior?
5. How does Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek prove that Melchizedek's priesthood is superior to the Levitical?
6. In what way was the Old Testament imperfect (v.11)?
7. Why did the law have to be changed?
8. What is the better hope that comes with a change in priesthood?
9. What does the oath (vv. 20-22) prove about the priesthood of Christ?
10. What characteristics of Christ does the Hebrew writer give that makes him superior to the Levitical priests?