

**International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
October 23, 2016**

**Lesson Text: Hebrews 7:1-3, 19-28
Lesson Title: The High Priest Forever**

Introduction

In the book of Hebrews, Jesus the High Priest is likened to Melchizedek, whom we first meet in Genesis 14. The circumstance of Melchizedek's introduction is Abraham offering him tithes after defeating some foreign kings. There is much debate about this mysterious figure's identity and nature, but the author of Hebrews mentions him to show us the superiority of our High Priest, Jesus Christ.

In order to be a Levitical priest, a man must be a descendant from Levi. An unknown genealogy would prevent a person from the priesthood. In Jesus' case, His genealogy traced back to Judah, not Levi (Hebrews 7:14). So the author of Hebrews wants to show, like Jesus, another high priest (Melchizedek) was without genealogy and still was not disqualified from the priesthood. The point is Jesus is superior to every priest and everything. The message to the Jewish readers is simply, drop all the traditions, come to Jesus Christ, and remain with Christ.

Christ is Superior (Hebrews 7:1-3)

Hebrews 7 is part of an extended section in Hebrews, reaching into chapter 10, in which the superior priesthood and covenant of Jesus Christ are revealed. The author of Hebrews is building the case for his declaration that the Law of Moses, under which his Jewish Christian readers had been brought up, had been done away with in Christ.

Verse 1-3

“For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; 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; 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 to the Hebrews reached back into the Old Testament and presented to his readers a story which had been hidden for nearly two thousand years. It is the story of “Abraham” and “Melchisedec” (Genesis 14). To understand the

writers purpose, we must understand the context of the story of “Abraham” and “Melchisedec.” Lot, Abraham’s brother, had been captured by some Canaanite kings, and he, his family and his possessions are taken captive. Abraham rallies three hundred of his men and they go to rescue Lot. Abraham defeats Lot's captors and brings Lot and his family back. But when he returns, he is met by this mysterious person, “Melchisedec.” The name “Melchisedec” means, “king of righteousness.” He is identified as the “king of Salem.” That is, he is the king over the territory in which the city Jebus will one-day rest. The Jebusites occupy the site which later became the city of David, the city of Jerusalem.

“Melchisedec, King of Salem” comes out, appears before Abraham, and blesses Abraham. The fact “Melchisedec” blesses Abraham is important. In Genesis 12 verses 1 to 3, we are told it was God who blessed Abraham and He blessed Abraham so he would be a blessing to all the families of the earth. So when you have an encounter between this Canaanite king, “Melchisedec,” and Abraham, you expect Abraham to bless the king because Abraham had received God's blessing. Now Abraham's job is to be a blessing to the ends of the earth, yet it is “Melchisedec” who blesses Abraham.

“Melchisedec’s” blessing of Abraham shows he is greater than “Abraham.” “Abraham’s” giving a “tenth” to “Melchisedec” also shows the greatness of “Melchisedec.” Since Jesus is a priest according to the order of “Melchisedec,” and if “Melchisedec” is greater than Abraham, then Jesus is greater than Abraham. That is the first part of the author’s argument.

“Melchisedec’s” was “Without father, without mother, without descent...” meaning he had no genealogy. There is no record of his predecessors or successors. Unlike the High Priest in Aaron’s lineage, nothing is recorded in Scripture about “Melchisedec’s” birth or when he was appointed by God to become a king-priest. Israel placed great importance on a priest’s genealogy. Priests had to be able to prove their genealogy to function as priests in the Levitical system.

“Melchisedec” had no “beginning of days, nor end of life...” There is no record of his birth or death because like “Christ,” his priesthood is “continual.” In contrast, the Levitical priesthood began and ended at a specific time in history.

The words “made like unto the son of God” does not mean “Melchisedec” was a preincarnate appearance of Christ. The words “made like” simple means he was merely a man who was a “king” and “continually a priest.” No other person in Scripture is identified as a king-priest apart from “Melchisedec” and Jesus Christ.

Christ is Surety (Hebrews 7:19-22)

Hebrews 7:13-19 provides a number of reasons why Christ's perfect priesthood is superior to Aaron's. Christ was not from the tribe of Levi like Aaron and his descendants. The priesthood of Aaron was according to "*the law of a carnal commandment*" (Hebrews 7:16). That means all the priests in the Old Testament became priests because of their fleshly descendant from Aaron. If Christ were to be a Priest, He would need to be from a different order. Thank God He was!

Verse 19

"For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God."

For the priesthood of Aaron to change, it was necessary to change the Law (Hebrews 7:12). It was not possible for the animal sacrifices offered by Aaron's priesthood to take away sin (Hebrews 10:4, 11). Consequently, "the law made nothing perfect" or complete. The "law" was incapable of bringing people into a right standing before God. However, when the new priesthood of Jesus Christ came into the world it was a "bringing in of a better hope."

The new priesthood of Christ opened a way of access "by the which we draw nigh unto God." The "law" never brought people near to God; it kept them far from Him. Only through Christ, the "better hope" can "we draw nigh unto God."

Verse 20-22

"And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: (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:) By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament."

The "oath," which was a promise that a priest's priesthood would be forever (Hebrews 7:2-21) is one reason the new covenant Jesus established is better than the old. The Law of Moses did not require an "oath" from its priests so their priesthood would last forever. Even if those priests had been required to swear their faithfulness, their oath would have lasted only as long as they lived. Every new priest would have had to swear a new "oath."

The priesthood of Jesus forever settled the issue of an oath; God Himself took an oath that Jesus would be "a priest for ever" (Hebrews 7:21). This verse and verse 17, quotations from Psalm 110:4, show God made this promise long before Jesus came to earth to fulfill His ministry. Since the "oath" of God cannot be changed, Jesus is guaranteed an eternal priesthood. The whole Levitical system had a sense of impermanence about it that nothing could fix, except a totally different priesthood and a perfect High Priest!

“The Lord swears and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek” (Hebrews 7:21) are words God never said to Aaron or to any of his descendants. When God established Christ as priest He promised that His priesthood would be forever. Therefore, Christ’s priesthood was “a better testament” (Hebrews 7:22). Aaron’s priesthood was always temporary, imperfect and daily decaying because it was designed to be temporary. Christ’s priesthood is eternal and perfect. Aaron’s priesthood could only cover sin. Christ’s priesthood canceled sin.

Christ is Savior (Hebrews 7:23-25)

Verse 23-25

“And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. 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.”

Jesus is like Melchisedec in that He also is a priest forever. One major problem with the Levitical priesthood was the priests eventually died (Hebrews 7:23). Jesus, in comparison, “hath an unchangeable priesthood” (Hebrews 7:24). Unlike the Levitical priests, Jesus is able to intercede continuously for those who come to God through Him. We need a priest like Jesus! We need One who offered a perfect sacrifice and One who intercedes for us.

“And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death” simply means the priests from Aaron’s lineage were disqualified because they died. None of them could serve indefinitely. In fact, Numbers 20:23-29 records the death of the very first priest, Aaron, which took place “*in the sight of all the congregation*” (Numbers 20:27). God wanted everybody to know no priest from Aaron’s lineage could save them or live forever.

“Many priests” is a significant statement. There were at least 83 priests from Aaron until 70 A.D. Thirteen ministered in the Tabernacle prior to King Solomon, eighteen ministered in the first temple, and the remainder until the final destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. “Death” was the reason for all of them being replaced. It is not unreasonable to think the Jewish people loved their priests just like church members love their pastor. But then one day the priest died and it must have touched the hearts of the people.

“But this man” is a reference to Jesus Christ as priest. “He continueth ever” means the people will never see their priest die again or ever again be disappointed in their priest. “Continueth” means Christ’s priesthood can never come to an end. “Unchangeable priesthood” means much the same as

“continueth” but with more emphasis on the fact Christ’s priesthood is not capable of anything but permanence.

Jesus Christ was the priest of every Christian who has ever lived. He was the priest of the Apostle Paul. He is the priest today and forever for all who have trusted Him for salvation. There will never be news of His death! He will be the priest of everyone who calls upon His name for salvation. Is He your priest? He can be today if you will ask Him to forgive your sin and save your soul.

“Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” is one of the most beautiful verses in all the Word of God. No priest in Jewish history ever came close to doing what this verse describes. No One but Jesus Christ can take us all the way to God and anchor us there.

“Wherefore” means because of what has just been said about Christ, He is “able to save.” What do the words “he is able to save” mean? Salvation is the theme of the Bible and it means to deliver. The type of deliverance offered in Christ is deliverance from sin and its consequence. The greatest danger a man faces in life is sin. Other priests were never able to save, not even partially or temporarily. But Jesus was and is “able to save.” He saves totally and eternally.

Christians are often criticized for claiming Jesus Christ is the only way to God. Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6). Not only is Jesus able to save, He is also willing to save. He is the only One who has the power of salvation (Acts 4:12).

“Uttermost” means Christ will bring us to full salvation and keep us there. Salvation is eternal and forever. “Them that come unto God by him” reminds us no man is ever saved until he comes to Jesus Christ. Having Jesus Christ as priest is no benefit unless men come to him in faith and repentance. Man is not saved by being confirmed, baptized, or joining the church. Man is saved when he comes to Jesus Christ for salvation.

“He ever liveth to make intercession for them” is a reference to the security we have in Jesus Christ. Not only does Christ save you initially, He keeps saying, “Father, my child has just sinned. Put that on my account.” Can a believer lose his salvation? Not as long as Jesus is your Savior. As long as Christ lives, we live if we have trusted Him for salvation.

Christ is Sinless (Hebrews 7:26-28)

Verse 26-27

“For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; 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."

"Became" means "fitting, or, it was fitting." Jesus was a "fitting" high priest. He fits the requirements for high priest. He is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Hebrews 7:26). "Holy" was a requirement for the high priest. The word "holy" comes from the Greek word "*hosios*" {hos'-ee-os}. It refers to personal holiness of character. When Christ was born He was called "*that holy thing*" (Luke 1:35). "Harmless" is from the Greek word "*akakos*" {ak'-ak-os}. It means Christ never harmed others.

"Undefiled" means free from moral or spiritual blemish. Christ was also "separate from sinners" which refers to his nature. He was not "separate" in the sense that He did not make contact with sinners, but in the sense He was not like sinners in His nature. "Made higher than the heavens" is a reference to His exaltation because He is "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners."

Verse 27 is a comparison between Christ and "those high priests" who were not holy and sinless. The priests who descended from Aaron had to "offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's," but not Christ's. Sinlessness needs no sacrifice. Jesus offered only one sacrifice, and it was not Him, but for others. A perfect sacrifice by a perfect Priest and it was done "once" and for all time.

Verse 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."

"For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity" is a summary statement concerning "high priests." When God established the Levitical priesthood, He appointed men priests who had "infirmity" or, was weak. But when God introduced the priesthood of Jesus, "the Son," He did it with "the word of the oath" and it was "consecrated for evermore" which means it was perfect forever.

Conclusion

It is difficult for most of us today to understand the mindset of these Jewish converts whose forefathers had practiced Judaism for thousands of years. They had been taught the Hebrew Scriptures through which God had revealed Himself and they were comfortable with their religious practices, especially the priesthood of Aaron. They were tempted to stay in their comfort zone of the Old Testament priesthood which was inferior to what they now had in Christ.

The author of Hebrews confronted this spiritual challenge by presenting the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who was in every way better than every man and every thing. With all his greatness, Melchisedec was only a type of the true High Priest, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was better than angels, better than Moses, a better priest than Aaron, and better than Melchisedec!

Amen.