

Sermon Series on Hebrews

By John Atkinson (May 2000)

Sermon 5

Outline

In the first address I dealt with the key theme of the sermon recorded in the book of Hebrews. Jesus is incomparably better than all that went before Him. Hebrews actually uses the term superior twelve times throughout the letter when referring to Jesus. This is the key message of Hebrews. Jesus is superior, He is greater than anyone or anything to which He might be compared.

In the second address in this series we looked at the issue of rest as a fundamental aspect of true spirituality – the kind of Spirituality that the Holy Spirit establishes in us.

We saw how the preacher to the Hebrews stressed that two things keep us from this Sabbath-rest

- A Unbelief – the refusal to believe and
- A A Hardened Heart – a heart used to refusing God.

In the third address the preacher to the Hebrews looked at Jesus our High Priest. The preacher considered the example of Jesus' submission to His Father, even to death. He called us to enter with confidence, because of Jesus our High Priest, into God's throne room to receive grace and mercy.

In this fourth section the preacher paused to deal with a problem he perceives in his audience. He would have gone into the spiritual significance of Jesus being a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek but he is aware that there is a hindrance to their appreciation of this and other spiritual truths.

Melchizedek

- A. The Greatness of Melchizedek (7:1-10)
- B. The Royal Priesthood of Melchizedek and of Christ (7:11-14)
- C. Christ's Priesthood Superior
 - Because of:
 1. His life (7:15-19)
 2. The divine oath (7:20-22)
 3. Its permanence (7:23-25)
 4. His better sacrifice (7:26-28)

Introduction

The preacher now turns his attention to a character from the book of Genesis named Melchizedek. He is convinced that this character is of fundamental importance if we are to understand the high priesthood that Jesus exercises for us. Melchizedek may seem a curious choice. He is only mentioned twice and in both cases fleetingly.

- A. The Greatness of Melchizedek (7:1-10)

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Gen 14:18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High.

Gen 14:19 He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;

Gen 14:20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." He gave him a tenth of all.

The other reference is

Psa 110:4 The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek."

Melchizedek was obviously a person of renown and influence, which are alluded to by the scripture reference. His name is made up of two Hebrew words Melech which means king and Tzedaka which means righteousness. He was the king of Salem or Shalom – Peace. Therefore he is King of Righteousness and Peace. He is probably from Jerusalem as the parallelism of Psalm 72 indicates.

Psa 76:2 His tabernacle is in Salem; His dwelling place also is in Zion.

The bare bones of the incident in Genesis are that Abram, whilst returning from successful military campaign against some Canaanite kings, is met by another king called Melchizedek. He offers bread and wine to Abram, thereby acknowledging his victory, praises God for that victory, and asks God to bless Abram.

The preacher to the Hebrews does not pick up the offering of bread and wine even though it would seem to us a relevant aspect of the encounter.

Abram's response is to accept Melchizedek's authority and to offer him a tenth of the battle spoils.

Melchizedek then disappears from the Biblical narrative until a single Psalm mentions him. The Psalm is a very significant Psalm which is a Messianic Psalm pointing to the coming Messiah. The preacher quotes this Psalm a little later in the chapter.

There are several clear areas in which Jesus is presented as relating to Melchizedek. Melchizedek was a **PRIEST** appointed by God as a bridge-builder between God and people. The priestly ministry is basic to the life and work of Jesus. But Melchizedek was also a **KING**, having royal authority over his subjects. Jesus is also a king and He has authority over the whole created order as well as being the legitimate King over the Jewish People. His kingship is based on **RIGHTEOUSNESS** and **PEACE**. This is underlined by one of the most important messianic passages in the Hebrew Bible.

*Isa 9:6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, **Prince of Peace**.*

Isa 9:7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and

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righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

Melchizedek embodies the Kingly and Priestly role in one person.

There is a potential problem here. Although Priest-Kings were common in other cultures among the Israelites their priests came from the tribe of Levi and their rightful King would come from the tribe of Judah. This has the effect of making it impossible to be both a priest and a king because you cannot descend from both.

This is why the preacher focuses on Melchizedek rather than King David and Aaron the High Priest. Melchizedek was the priestly head of the succession to which Jesus belonged, Jesus is the son of David from the tribe of Judah thus satisfying the royal requirement. However he does not get His priestly credentials from the tribe of Levi, and so it is not crisis that He is not a Levite. He is a priest in the order of Melchizedek.

At this point the preacher adds another important analogy between Jesus and Melchizedek. When we meet Melchizedek in Genesis we are not told who he descends from. Given the Jewish preoccupation with genealogies, and the fact that a priest was only qualified to function as a priest and to receive tithes on the basis of his lineage, it is strange that nothing is said in Genesis. The preacher sees this lack of genealogy, and the lack of a record of Melchizedek's death, as a sign of the **ETERNAL** nature of his priesthood. He is like Jesus who existed before His birth and continues to exist after His death. The preacher is using a Jewish method of interpreting scripture known as midrash, (expositions of the text) which is perfectly respectable in the Jewish community to whom he was speaking. So to re-cap Melchizedek illustrates these important truths about Jesus our high Priest.

A He is a King.

A He is a Priest.

A He is Righteous.

A He is Peace.

B. The Royal Priesthood of Melchizedek

Why is this issue so important? It is not reconcile people to God. Only the priesthood of Jesus could do this. A He is Eternal. could for the Levitical priesthood. So the preacher takes some time to make this point.

C. Christ's Priesthood Superior (7:15-28)

1. His life (7:15-19)

Heb 7:16 *one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but **on the basis of the power of an indestructible life.***

2. The divine oath (7:20-22)

Heb 7:21 *but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'"*

Heb 7:22 *Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.*

God's personal promise makes this priesthood superior to the one before. The priest of the Old Covenant came into office without any Divine Oath or promise. They were priests

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by accident of birth. The Torah never claims that they were able to bring p[erfect reconciliation

3. Its permanence (7:23-25)

Heb 7:24 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.

Heb 7:25 Therefore he is **able to save completely** those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

4. His better sacrifice (7:26-28)

Heb 7:27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people.

He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

Heb 7:28 For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made **perfect forever**.