

**HEBREWS 23
(Hebrews 7:1-18)**

**JESUS, A PRIEST AFTER THE ORDER OF MELCHISEDEC
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(March 7, 2012)**

TEXT: Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made a high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

Hebrews 6:20

INTRODUCTION

If you had been a Jew when Jesus came and died, you might have had several difficult questions to ask yourself.

- Should I continue to bring my sacrifices to the temple?
- Should I continue to follow all of the ceremonial requirements of the law?
- Should I continue to obey the Sabbath requirements?
- Should I continue to honor the Levitical priesthood?
- Should I continue to pay my tithes to support that Levitical priesthood?

And all of these requirements under the law were integral to their whole way of life. It was all they knew. They were punished severely or even stoned to death if they disrespected these laws.

But when Jesus came he began telling them things like:

1. See that temple over there? it is going to be torn down. I am the temple. (John 2:19)
2. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. (John 4:21 – Jesus to the woman at the well)
3. When Jesus died the veil was rent in two signifying the way unto God had been opened up and the old requirement of having a Levitical Priest go in for you was undone.

This is a major theme in the book of Hebrews – that the old way of worship, that old system of Judaism, that old Mosaic covenant, that old religion, those old sacrifices, those old priests have passed away.

Example: When I get a new car I trade my old one in or else it goes to the junk pile and they put it in the compactor and they crush it.

That old system is done away. It was engaged in the time of Moses and it was disengaged in the time of Christ.

The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.

Hebrews 9:8-10

It is very clear that that old system was a temporary system. That old house was a temporary dwelling place until the new house was built.

That old system had a purpose and a function, but it was a temporary purpose.

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ . . .
Gal.3:24

Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.
Gal. 3:19

There was always a chance that these new Jewish converts would fall back into these old religious practices.

But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have borrowed upon you labour in vain.

Gal.4:11

Now we come to this portion of Hebrews, the writer will be demonstrating that there is a new Priest in town and his name is Jesus. He is not only a High Priest but he is a great High Priest. He didn't need to offer himself as a sacrifice every year but his sacrifice was efficient. It really atoned for sins and therefore there is no need for repeated sacrifices.

Furthermore, Jesus didn't simply go behind a curtain and enter a little cubicle and sprinkle blood on a gold plated chest where God was symbolically present, but he entered into the heavens where God really is and sprinkled his blood on the throne and he sat down at the right hand of God where he makes intercession continually.

Now we come to a discussion of the priesthood and this man called Melchisedec.

The historical account of Melchisedec

The historical account of Melchisedec is found in Genesis 14:18-20.

Now in Genesis 14 there was a king of the north by the name of Chedorlaomer and he went to war with the king of Sodom and the king of Gemorrah. Now do you remember who is living in Sodom at this time? It is Lot, Abraham's nephew.

And Chedorlaomer prevailed and he took the spoils of Sodom and Gemorrah and he also took some captives and among the captives was Lot.

That turned out to be a mistake because Lot was the nephew of Abraham and God had said, "I will bless them that bless thee and I will curse them that curse thee."

And so, Abraham took out after Chedorlaomer with 318 men. Now surely Chedorlaomer's army was considerably larger than this. Yet, Abraham divided up his men and in the night he smote them. And Abraham chased them away and retrieved the spoil that was taken from Sodom and he also brought back the captives, including Lot.

And on his way back home, the king of Salem came out to meet Abraham. Now this place called Salem is probably the place that was later called Jerusalem.

But, Melchisedec meets Abraham. And it says Melchisedec was a priest of the most high God.

Now let me ask you a question. Were there Levitical priests at this time? And the answer is: there were no Levitical priests. Where was Levy at this time? He was in the loins of Abraham. And so, we see that God had a priest long before Levy was born, long before Aaron and Moses were born, long before there was such a thing as Israel or Judaism.

So, Melchisedec was a priest of the most High God.

Now remember that a sinful man must have a priest. There is no salvation without a priest and that is because God is holy and man is not. And there must be a mediator. And Melchisedec was a priest of the most High God.

And you will notice here that Melchisedec blessed Abraham and that Abraham paid a tithe of the spoil to Melchisedec.

Now this is all we know of Melchisedec. It is notable that we are not told who his father is. We are not told who his mother is. We are not told anything about his physical lineage. We are not told where he was born. We are not told when or where he died.

There is one other mention of Melchisedec in the Old Testament and that is in Psalm 110 where speaking of the coming Messiah it says that he shall be a priest after the order of Melchisedec.

And that's it – four verses in the Old Testament. And yet, the writer of Hebrews devotes an entire chapter to this man.

The Hebrews account of Melchisedec

I. He was a king. He was the king of Salem. His name, by the way, in Hebrew means my king is righteousness. (Malki: king; Tsedec: righteousness) Now when we think of a king we typically think of some

royal figure living in a palace with an army at his command. But in these days, these kings were probably more like tribal leaders. Their kingdom may have been a handful of families. At any rate, this man Melchisedec was the “king” of Salem.

2. He was a priest of the most High God. Even then, God had priests. Now the whole world was idolatrous at this time. Even Abraham’s father was an idol worshipper. Abraham was called out of a family of idolators. The whole countryside was filled with idolators. The land of Canaan where God sent Abraham was filled with them. And out of the midst of all of this, God had a priest – and his name was Melchisedec.

3. Melchisedec was without father, mother and without descent.

Now this has led to a good bit of confusion and speculation. And the question would be, “Was Melchisedec some non-human figure? Was he actually Jesus Christ? Was he the Holy Spirit? Was he an angel? Was he merely an apparition of some sort? We are just not told any more about him. So, let me make a few observations:

A. The general principle that we have learned in Hebrews is that in order to represent men, a priest must be a man.

For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.
Hebrews 5:1

The book of Hebrews takes pains to make sure that we know that Jesus Christ became a man in order to represent them.

Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest.
Hebrews 2:17

And therefore, if someone is to be a priest on behalf of men, he must be a man.

B. Every Levitical Priest had a physical descent. Only children of Levi could be priests. In fact, only sons of Aaron could be priests. All other Levites were merely staffers. They assisted. They helped. But Aaron’s sons

were the priests. And so, you had to have your papers. No one could be a priest without a birth certificate. Now you can be a president of the United States without a birth certificate. But you could not be a Jewish priest without one. That is because God designated priests of Israel to be Levites and Aaronites. This was the great requirement.

C. There was no record of Melchisedec's lineage. When it says that he had no father and he had no mother and he had no descent, the point is that there is no record of it. Remember in Genesis 14, we only had three verses about this man and there was no mention of his lineage. And this is what it means in Hebrews when it says he had no father, no mother and no descent. It means that there is no record of it in the Scriptures.

D. Melchisedec had a descent. (Heb. 7:6)

Verse 3 says Melchisedec had no descent. But in verse 6 it implies that Melchisedec does have a descent, but it says his descent is not from Levy. Now it is the same greek word in verse 3 and verse 7. The word is genealogo and it means to trace by genealogy. There is no tracing Melchisedec's genealogy because there is no record of it. And why is there no record of it in God's providence? It is because it is not important. Melchisedec is not a Levitical Priest. If he were a Levitical Priest then his genealogy would be spread on the pages of Scripture.

So do we know anything about the descent of Melchisedec? Yes. We know (1) that he had a descent (v.6) and we know (2) that it was not from Levy.

So, here is the key idea. There is an order of priests after Melchisedec and there is an order of priests after Levy. Now this is a most astonishing revelation to the Jews. The Levitical Priesthood was everything to them. And now they are told there are two orders of priests.

And now, the writer of Hebrews will blow their mind. He will prove to them that the order of priests after Melchisedec is superior to the order after Levy. And we get a clue of this in verse four.

Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. (7:4)

Here we are told to consider how great this man was. That is, we are to consider how great is his priesthood. So, let's consider:

The Greatness of the Priesthood of Melchisedec

1. It was greater than the Levitical Priesthood because it preceded it. It was not a derivative of it. But it existed before it.

Abraham lived around 2000 BC. And the law came in around 1500 BC. So, when Melchisedec was a priest of the Most High God, this was before the Levitical Priesthood was ever established. Levi was Abraham's great grandson. (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi)

Now it is not an absolute proof that something is better because it came first, but it is a general principle. Certainly, God had priests before Levi was born and before the law came and therefore you would deduce that at one time there was mediation between God and man without Levi. The Levitical Priesthood was added on later. And it was added for a relatively short time.

Not only did the Melchisedec priesthood come first, but it is superior to the Levitical Priesthood because,

2. Abraham paid tithes to Melchisedec.

Now who is greater, the person who pays tribute or the person who receives tribute? The person who receives tribute is the greater.

Abraham paid a tithe of the spoils to Melchisedec. Now it was customary in those days, even among heathen nations, that when they won a great battle, they would offer a tribute of the spoils to their god. And when Melchisedec showed up who was a priest of the Most High God of Abraham, Abraham paid him tribute. This was in essence a gift to Abraham's God.

So, Melchisedec is here pictured as the greater and Abraham the lesser because Abraham paid tribute to Melchisedec.

Now remember, if Melchisedec is greater than Abraham, then he is also greater than Levi who is in Abraham's loins at this time.

And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father when Melchisedec met him. (vs.9, 10)

You see, when Abraham paid tithes to Melchisedec, Levi paid tithes to Melchisedec thereby showing that the greater personage is Melchisedec. Melchisedec is superior to Abraham and he is superior to Levi.

Now remember, the writer is offering proofs that the priesthood of Melchisedec is superior to that of Levi. It is also superior because,

3. Melchisedec pronounced a blessing on Abraham.

Now when a religious figure pronounces a blessing on someone, who is seen as the greater figure? It is the one who blesses. Jesus blessed the littler children and who is greater, Jesus or the little children?

When the Catholic Pope comes out into his window and blesses the people below, who is seen as the greater, the Pope or the people?

And when Melchisedec blessed Abraham, it was a clear sign that Melchisedec was the greater. Melchisedec was a priest of the Most High God. Abraham needed Melchisedec. Melchisedec interceded for Abraham. And this is what our text says.

And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better. (v.7)

4. The Levitical priesthood was not perfect. (complete, the final end)

If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? (v.11)

If the Levitical priesthood was that final priesthood then there would be no need of another priesthood. If the Levitical priesthood were perfect, then there would be no need of another. If the Levitical priesthood could really atone for sins, then there would be no need for another.

But it couldn't atone for sins and it didn't atone for sins. And therefore it was a faulty priesthood. Or, as the writer of Hebrews puts it, it was an imperfect priesthood.

Now what should we learn from all of this?

The writer of Hebrews is claiming that Jesus was the great High Priest. But, Jesus did not descend from Levi. Jesus descended from Judah. Jesus had a lineage. His lineage is recorded in Matthew 1:1-16. And it says Jacob begat Judas (Judah). Nowhere in this line will you find Levi because Jesus came from Jacob's other son, Judah.

Now what conclusions can we draw from all of this.

1. There was a change in the priesthood. (v.12)

Since Jesus is the great High Priest, and he wasn't from Levi, then it is apparent that the law has changed. The priesthood is no longer Levitical. It is Melchisedecian.

There is a new priest in town and all of the other priests are out of business.

2. This new priest is not a Levite, he is after the order of Melchisedec who was superior.

3. This new priest is not temporary, he is permanent. (v.16)

This was one of the characteristics of Melchisedec. There is no record of his death. Now he was a human being and we assume that he died at some point unless he was taken like Enoch. But the point is that there is no record of death. And this typifies an eternal priesthood.

Melchisedec was a type of Christ. Melchisedec was not a Levite and neither was Christ.

Melchisedec was greater than Abraham and so was Christ.

Melchisedec was greater than Levi and so was Christ.

Melchisedec's priesthood is permanent since there is no record of his death and the priesthood of Christ is also permanent.

And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. (vs. 15-17)

4. This new priest was also a king.

Now it was impossible that a Jewish priest could be a king. In fact it was forbidden for a king to do priestly work in Israel.

Example: In I Samuel 13 King Saul was waiting around for Samuel the priest to arrive and offer a sacrifice. And when Samuel was late, King Saul offered the sacrifice instead. And when Samuel arrived he said, "Saul, what have you done?" And Samuel said, "Because you have done this God has ripped the kingdom from you."

You see, God had ordained priests to offer sacrifices not kings. And in the Jewish economy kings enforced the law and priests offered sacrifices for law breakers.

Example: In 2 Chronicles 26 there is the example of King Uzziah. He was a good king (v.4) But one day he went into the temple and he attempted to burn incense and see what happened. (v.16-21)

Now the implications run even deeper. For if the priesthood has been changed, and the priesthood was an integral part of the law, then,

5. There has been a disannulling of the law. (vs. 18, 19)