

The Book Of Hebrews

Part II

Jesus, Our Great High Priest 4:14-10:18

Lesson 6 (7:1-28)

Outline Thus Far

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Part II - Jesus, Our Great High Priest (4:14-10:18)

- I. Jesus Qualified For Priesthood Hebrews (4:14-5:10)
- II. Digression - Warning Against Apostasy And Encouragement To Faithfulness (5:12-6:20)
 - A. Spiritual immaturity of readers rebuked (5:12-14)
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III. Jesus A High Priest After The Order Of Melchizedek (7:1-28)

Introductory comments.

Hebrews is substantially apologetic in character. It argues for the finality and perfection of Christianity; the old covenant completed, there remained a vacuum. In the New the ultimate in Divine revelation is reached, the Father speaking to us by His Son (1:2). In this chapter the same argument is made concerning the priesthood.

Three shorter allusions/references have been made to Jesus serving as High Priest (1:3; 2:17-18; 3:1). Then a lengthier passage discussed the qualifications needed and showed how Jesus met these (5:1-11; note 6, 10). Then followed the digression in which the writer strongly rebuked his readers for their spiritual immaturity concluding that Jesus has entered beyond the veil acting as a forerunner, having become High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (6:19-20). The context is now set up for the writer to deal with these weightier matters and enlarge upon what was said by the Psalmist concerning Melchizedek (110:4). Christ's Priesthood is superior to the Levitical and his discussion of Melchizedek serves as a basis for making this comparison.

A. The Likeness Between Christ and Melchizedek demonstrated (7:1-3).

Their encounter (1-2)

Melchizedek had only previously been mentioned in the narrative of Genesis (14:17-20) and the Messianic Psalm (110:4).

At the time he was king of Salem and priest of the Most High God. It is thought that Salem was the ancient site of Jerusalem (Psa 76:2). If correct, Jerusalem would be a compound word bringing together its original name and the people who came to inhabit it – the Jebusites (Josh 15:63). Melchizedek means firstly "king of righteousness" and secondly "king of Salem", which is explained as meaning "king of peace".

Two things are mentioned that show that Melchizedek functioned as a Priest.

Blessing: He blessed (eulogeo) Abraham (Num 6:23-26) and when blessing was pronounced God would honour that blessing. However, when the priests were corrupt that blessing became a curse (Mal 2:1-2). Eulogeo means literally "to speak well of"; when addressing God to praise or celebrate His goodness and when directed towards man to invoke God's blessings upon Him (Vine).

A tithe was given (Num 18:21, 26-28).

The genealogy of Melchizedek (3).

"Without father without mother, without genealogy... remains a priest continually." Omitting the parenthetical statement "but made like the Son of God" the meaning becomes clearer. Two points should be noted:

1. Melchizedek is being described as a priest and a key idea of the chapter is what a priest depends on for his legitimacy (11-17). He had no father nor mother as represented to us by the Scriptures; God's word is silent about these details. He is introduced without parentage and the record ends without further enlightenment; he appears on the scene as a priest and departs as a priest and so in our experience of Him from God's word he "remains a priest continually".
2. The fact that the absence of father and mother are not to be taken literally is evident from the comparison with Jesus. Jesus had an earthly mother and a heavenly father and so if literal parents were at issue here there would be no likeness between them.

The design in presenting this historical data was to establish a likeness. If no likeness existed then a comparison could not be made

B. The greatness of Melchizedek (7:4-10).

The line of argument was to establish the greatness of Melchizedek in order to show that a priest of his order is superior to a Levitical priest. The Jews had a profound respect for Abraham and so if it could be shown that Melchizedek out-ranked Abraham it would be easy to make the follow-up point to the unbiased mind that he also ranked in office above Abraham's posterity.

The initial premise (4).

The writer begins by calling the readers to consider Melchizedek's greatness in light of the fact that even the patriarch Abraham paid him a tenth of the spoils. Abraham in so doing recognised his priesthood.

Importance also attached to the office of a Levitical priest (5).

They had a commandment to receive tithes from their brethren (Num 18:26) who themselves were a great people being descendents of Abraham. Nevertheless such a great people as this were to honour these Levitical priests.

Melchizedek's superiority to Abraham elaborated (6-7).

But he/Melchizedek whose ancestry could not be traced back to them/Levi received tithes from and blessed Abraham - the one who prior to this meeting had received such astounding promises (6, Gen 12:1-3, 7).

Having set out the historical facts the writer stated a principle which was to be applied (7). "The lesser is blessed by the better." A ranking contextually established upon office since the office was the thing under discussion.

"The blessing here spoken of,' says Dr. Macknight, 'is not the simple wishing of good to others, which may be done by inferiors to superiors; but it is the action of a person authorized to declare God's intention to bestow good things on another. In this manner Isaac and Jacob blessed their children under a prophetic impulse; in this manner the priests under the law blessed the people; in this manner, likewise, Melchisedec, the priest of the most high God, blessed Abraham'" (Clarke).

Superiority to Abraham elevated him above the Levitical priesthood (8-10).

Within the Mosaic system those who received tithes were subject to death. Therefore in the essential things of physical life they were on a level with their brethren receiving no exemption from sickness and affliction. But in the case of Melchizedek as far as the Scriptural representation of him is concerned - he still lives (8).

Furthermore, even Levi who receives tithes in a manner of speaking also paid them from within the loins of Abraham; he is portrayed as being contained within Abraham when this transaction was made (9-10). Thus the drift of the reasoning is - Melchizedek is superior to Abraham, superior to Levi - Consider therefore how great Melchizedek must be!

C. The superiority of the Priesthood of Jesus to the Levitical Priesthood (7:11-25).

Here the imperfections in the Levitical priesthood are highlighted. There is an incompleteness, a vacuum left unfilled by this priesthood. This void is filled by Jesus, a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Inasmuch then as He accomplished what the Levitical priesthood could not, His priesthood is superior. Thus these six arguments are built upon the implications of imperfection.

Implied by change of law necessitated if change of priesthood (11-14).

If "perfection (teleiosis)" was achieved through the Levitical priesthood, there would be no need for another priesthood to arise according to the order of Melchizedek (11). Thus the argument is founded on the appointment of another priest under a different order.

1. Teleiosis: "Denotes a fulfilment, completion, perfection, an end accomplished as the effect of a process" (Vine). It is used of Christ in its verb form (2:10; 5:9).
2. Here the context is of a priesthood that fully accomplishes everything that is required. If the Levitical priesthood fully served the purpose of priesthood there would be no need for another priest to be called according to the order of Melchizedek. And yet this is what happened (Psa 110:4). In this passage the Levitical priesthood is set aside and another is called according to a completely different order.
3. The question has to be asked and answered, "why the existence of Psa 110:4 if the Levitical priesthood achieved all that was needful?" This is one of those instances where the OT testified to its own incompleteness.

The priesthood being changed there is of necessity a change of the law (12), the reason why being explained in verses 13-14.

The explanation (13-14).

1. He (Jesus) of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe from which no man had officiated at the altar, therefore there was no example (13).
2. Jesus arose from a tribe, Judah, of which Moses spoke nothing in regard to serving as a priest. Since the law was silent in this regard WE MUST CONCLUDE THAT The silence of Scripture in a matter or the absence of a "thou shalt not" does not give authority.

Grounded in the standard used to make the appointment (15-19).

Firstly, the unsatisfactory nature of the Levitical priesthood is made even more evident by the fact that Jesus was appointed not just from a different tribe but according to a different order (15-17). The initial premise is stated (15) and then substantiated in two ways:

1. He arises in the likeness of Melchizedek who gained his legitimacy not from the law of fleshly commandment (the ability to trace lineage back to Aaron) but by the power of endless life (16).
2. This is what had been prophesied concerning the Messiah in the OT (17; Psa 110:4).

Secondly, it brings in a better hope through which we draw near to God (18-19).

On the one hand there is an annulling of a former law because of its weakness and unprofitableness which "made nothing perfect" contrasted to another which introduced a better hope. Note that the weakness of the law was founded in the frailty of the material with which it had to deal (Rom 8:3-4).

Established by Divine oath (20-22).

It was a better priesthood inasmuch as He did not receive the priesthood by descent but was set apart to the office with an oath as testified by Psa 110:4.

By how much better – by this much – Jesus has become a "surety (enguos) of a better covenant" (22). Read verses 20 and 22 omitting the parenthetical statement of v. 21 and the point comes out more clearly. The descendents of Aaron became priests without an oath but His was confirmed by the added assurance of one. God being able to swear by no greater swore by His own life (Num 14:21; 28; Eze 5:11).

Vine says "enguos primarily signifies 'bail,' the bail who personally answers for anyone, whether with his life or his property." In our passage it is used to refer "to the abiding and unchanging character of His Melchizedek priesthood, by reason of which His suretyship is established by God's oath. As the Surety, Jesus is the personal guarantee of the terms of the new and better covenant, secured on the ground of His perfect sacrifice (7:27).

To be concluded from an endless life relative to role in man's salvation (23-25).

His is an unchangeable priesthood (23-24). In contrast within the Levitical Priesthood there were many priests and because of death they could not continue to hold office. Jesus living forever had a priesthood which did not pass from one to another.

By virtue of His continued priesthood He is able to save to the uttermost (25). As He ever lives He does not relinquish His work to another before completion but saves to the "uttermost (ASV marg. completely)". He does not need to pass on the task to another due to the limitations of mortality.

The ideal in priesthood reached in Jesus (26-28).

The general point becomes evident by comparing v. 26 with 8:1. Such a High Priest as has been described is becoming or fitting for God's people; in Jesus we have such a High Priest (8:1).

The connection would seem to be that as priest He needs only to make intercession (cf. 25) and not offer daily sacrifices (26-27).

The explanation is that the Mosaic Law appointed as High Priests men who have weaknesses but the sworn word of God ordained His Son "who has been made perfect (teleioo) forever". The Grk. means "to bring to an end by completing or perfecting..." (Vine).