

Melchizedek Who?

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Text: Hebrews 7:1-28;

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Link: <https://www.monergism.com/search?keywords=Melchizedek+Who&format=AllOPENING>

OPENING PRAYER:

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the privilege of your presence with us, for the power of your Holy Spirit, for eager desires in our heart to praise you. For anticipations of worshiping you together, on this day you have given to us. How glad we are to see one another, how much more glad, by faith, to see the face of our King. To dwell in the sanctuary of his people. To seek to enthrone him upon our praises. We come to you, our Father, in all the diversity of our lives, and our needs. Only you are able to provide for us. Only you are sufficient for all the needs of all of your people, all of the time. And today you have food for us. We pray that you would break it down; we are but little children. We pray that it may come to us in a way we are able to understand and take in and enjoy and have a sense that it transforms us and that it shows us more of our Savior Jesus Christ. So we do come as little children. And we say to you speak, Lord, for your servants are listening. So hear us we ask, speak through your Word, in Jesus our Savior's name, Amen.

Please be seated.

SCRIPTURE READING:

Now, our scripture reading this morning from Hebrews chapter seven. And the entire chapter is our passage today, verses one through 28. The background to this, of course, is that already in chapter five and verse six, the author of Hebrews has spoken of Jesus by quoting Psalm 110: "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." He had repeated that in chapter five and verse 10. In verse 11, he had told us that there were things that he found difficult to explain to his hearers because they had become dull of hearing, and he had analyzed their sluggishness. And then at the end of chapter six, he had come back to this theme from Psalm 110, describing Jesus as a high priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek. And now, pew Bible page 1004. Children's Bible 1495. We read on. Let us hear God's word.

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, (this is Melchizedek), he is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.

See how great this man was, to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these are also descended from Abraham. But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. In one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it has testified that he lives. One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, but he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it, the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? But when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. For the one of whom these things are spoken Jesus, belong to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." But on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, but this one was made a priest with an oath, by the one who said to him: "the Lord has sworn and will not change his mind. 'You are a priest forever'". This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

The former priest were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

SERMON:

I don't know what has been happening these past few Sundays, in the drive home from church in families where there have been young children, I know what would have been happening and my family if we'd been here 30 years ago. There would have been at least one little voice from the back of the automobile saying, When are we going to get to Melchizedek?

Because it's now a couple of chapters, since the author of Hebrews has brought up this amazing statement in the 110 Psalm, which is one of the great messianic psalms of the Psalter. "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek". And he has thrown out little hints. And then he's pulled them back again, and he's thrown out little hints. And then he's given us a little test. He says, incidentally, I know where you are spiritually. By the way, you listen to Hebrews chapter seven. Are you sluggish? Do you do you get turned off? By the way in which he speaks about Jesus? Or do you have the kind of passion to know the Lord Jesus Christ that makes

you think I am determined to get to the bottom of what this man this pastor is saying about Melchizedek and Jesus, who is a high priest after the order of Melchizedek?

Well, today, it's Melchizedek. But it's very important that we don't get lost in Melchizedek because this chapter, in the last analysis is not about Melchizedek. This chapter It is about our blessed Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. You remember how he has been teaching us that Jesus is both the apostle and the high priest of Christians lives. He is the apostle God sent to do what neither Moses, nor Joshua could give to the people — real spiritual rest and salvation in Jesus Christ. And now he is saying to us for the bulk of this great letter, Jesus Christ is also our Great High Priest.

But he says, you need to know that Jesus is a different kind of high priest. He is not a high priest, after the order of Aaron. He is not a high priest, appointed by the law of Moses. He is a high priest, after the order of Melchizedek. And he has been directly appointed by God.

The fascinating thing, of course, is the author of Hebrews is the only writer in the New Testament, whoever makes any mention of Melchizedek. And Melchizedek is mentioned, for that matter, only twice in the Old Testament scriptures: Genesis chapter 14; and, in these words, to which the author keeps returning in Psalm 110, verse four. And it's obvious, just as when he was reading Psalm two, as he tells us in Hebrews chapter two, that he began to see the connection of Psalm two to the Lord Jesus. And just as he was reading Psalm 95, and began to see the connection of Psalm 95, to the Lord Jesus, he's been reading Psalm 110. And for all I know, he was reading them in that order. And he's asking himself the question, this psalm points to the Lord Jesus, what does it mean for the Lord Jesus to be a high priest after the order of Melchizedek? Abraham, you remember, had gone to the rescue of Lot. And had, after a battle, brought Lot back to the region of Sodom where he was living, and he had been met by the king of Sodom, and by this man, the king of Salem called Melchizedek. And on that occasion, Abraham had paid tithes of the spoils of war to Melchizedek. And Melchizedek had blessed Abraham in a remarkable way.

And he goes on then, to take up these words of the psalmist. And, and help us to see by talking about Melchizedek, help us to see the greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ. And I think this passage will help us to do that, also, if we ask it, if we catechize it, which we Presbyterians like to do to each other, if we catechize it by asking three questions.

Question number one, why does he use Melchizedek as a picture of Jesus? Now you'll notice the key. He gives it to us quite clearly. He tells us, the end of verse three, that Melchizedek resembles the Son of God. So there is the answer to the question people sometimes ask. I've been asked this question, again, recently: Is Melchizedek Jesus? Is Melchizedek Jesus? The answer to that question is, resemblance is not the same thing as identity. And the ultimate answer to that question, actually is Melchizedek is, guess who? He's Melchizedek. That's who he is. He appears in this narrative in Genesis chapter 14. And it's what Genesis says about him within the confines of a few verses. No further reference to him apart from Psalm 110, and Hebrews. It's — he's wanting us to focus on what Genesis says about him, and then to see how there are things about Melchizedek that help us to understand the Lord Jesus because there are particular ways in which he resembles the Lord Jesus.

The first of course, is his name. He is Melchizedek. Which is a compound name, from the Hebrew words for King and righteousness. So his very name means King of Righteousness. But he is also king of Salem. And Salem, of course, is shalom, peace. He is king of righteousness, and he is king of peace. You only need to think, for example, about what Paul says in Romans chapter five and verse one to understand why this would make a connection in the mind of a New Testament Christian, “because we have been justified”, counted righteous,

“by faith”. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the ultimate King of Righteousness, made sin for us as Paul in Second Corinthians 5:21, that we in turn might be made the righteousness of God. He is the King of Peace. He is the one who speaks peace into our consciences when we come to believe in Him. So there's a kind of connection in the name.

There's also a connection, the author notes, in the genealogy of Melchizedek. What does the genealogy of Melchizedek teach us? Well, what it teaches us is he doesn't have a genealogy. That's the point. He appears in the book of Genesis without father or mother being mentioned. Now you think, Well, what's so special about that? Well, you should read the book of Genesis; read the first 14 chapters of Genesis. Nobody who really matters appears in the book of Genesis. Nobody who matters, in terms of the ongoing saving purposes of God, appears in Genesis, unless he has a genealogy. I mean, if a, if you say to somebody in Colombia, who are you? And He gives you their name. And you say, Who's your father? What does he do in town? And you say, actually, he's not from around here. Then you don't figure. Unless I know who your father was I don't know who you are. But Melchizedek appears out of the blue and he goes back into the blue. And you see what he's saying Melchizedek is, is like somebody who comes without genealogy in the past and without end, in the future. Just like the Son of God, who came into the world, the Son, the eternal son of the Heavenly Father, who, as Hebrews says, lives forever. He is undying. That's the point. He doesn't mean that Melchizedek wasn't born. That he didn't have a mum and dad. That he didn't die. He says, When you read the story, you see, you know nothing about his past, nothing about his future. He just seems to come from Everland and he goes to Everland. And so he is a wonderful picture of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who is without beginning and without ending.

And then in his ministry, there is a clue. He is the priest of the Most High God. And this is so interesting, isn't it? It means that somewhere after the flood as the word of promise was held on to in Noah's family, somewhere outside of that stream that comes immediately to Abraham there were people who believed in the true and living God. And this man Melchizedek is one of them. He isn't in the line of the promise. He's from outside the line of the promise but that doesn't mean he's outside of the grace of God. He has come to believe. His very name tells us that he is a man of faith. And his ministry is a remarkable ministry. He is a true and great high priest, although he is not a descendant of the tribe of Levi.

And it's his encounter with Abraham, that is particularly impressive. He receives tithes from Abraham. He receives tithes from Abraham. Now he says, look at these Old Testament priests, what did they do? They receive tithes from their brothers. But this man receives tithes from their ancestor, Abraham. Indeed, he makes this interesting little point. I think he's smiling. He says, we might even say, (can you see it this way?) He says, we might even say, (think about DNA). We might even say that Levi's DNA was already present in Abraham, when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. And not only so he calls Abraham, the great patriarch. He is a massive figure in scripture. But look at what he's saying. He is saying there is no doubt that it is the greater who blesses the lesser. We know none greater than Abraham. And yet, father, Abraham bowed before Melchizedek, in order to receive the blessing of one who was greater than himself, who was King of Righteousness and King of peace.

So in a way, the question is not so much, who was Melchizedek? The question is, look at these amazing ways in which in this story in Genesis 14 Melchizedek gives us a great sense of the sheer superiority of our Lord Jesus Christ, over all other priests.

Now, that leads us to the second question, why is Melchizedek a picture of Jesus? Question number two? Why is Jesus, a high priest in the order of Melchizedek? And if you look at verse 11, you will see the answer immediately. If perfection had been attainable, through the Levitical, priesthood, what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order

of Melchizedek? The answer is very simple. The Old Testament priesthood, the descendants of Aaron, the Levitical, priesthood, did not have the ability to bring what he calls perfection. And in the book of Hebrews perfection is almost the equivalent of what we would probably call salvation. The forgiveness of sins. The transformation of our hearts. Love for the Lord Jesus Christ. The assurance of salvation. The hope of glory. He's saying, Levitical priesthood couldn't deliver that. So there was need for a different kind of priesthood, a different order of priesthood that could deliver that.

And he goes on to explain why that is the case. I hope we understand this. There is nothing in the law of Moses that can actually save you. You cannot be saved by anything the law of Moses tells you to do. The priesthood could not give the forgiveness of sins. And he spells that out. Why was that so? Well? He says, because the Old Testament priests were lacking in qualifications. What was their qualification to be a priest. Their qualification to be a priest was their father was a priest. And his father was a priest. And his father before him was a priest. That was the qualification. It was simply a matter of legal descent. It was formal. It was external, and so the high priest did not have the spiritual power to say to the people, your sins are forgiven, because he was just a priest. Because his father was a priest.

I remember a certain stage in our children's lives. How people would say to one of our boys in particular, you're only a Christian because your dad is a minister. It's simply, it's a formal matter. Our teenagers they face that, don't they? It's one of the great growing points in their lives where they really do ask themselves the question is that actually true, or have I really trusted Christ for myself? But in this instance, they were priests simply because their fathers were priests. They inherited the family business. And they lacked the inner qualification. Which, Hebrews tells us Jesus has. He has the power of an indestructible, resurrection life, to do what none of the priests or their sacrifices or the law of Moses could ever do: bring dead sinners to life, and forgive their sins. Bring paralyzed men and women to walk and to say to them, "Your sins are forgiven you".

So they lacked the qualifications. Second thing they lacked was personal appointment. They were appointed by inheritance. If your dad got the job, you would get the job. But Jesus was not appointed by inheritance. Jesus was appointed, we are told, by an oath from the Heavenly Father, "I have sworn you are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek". It's wonderful, isn't it? It's like God's guarantee. It's like these priests that come along and said, we do all these things. And it's all about the forgiveness of sins. And we said to them, where's your diploma that tells me, that guarantees me that if you do this, my sins will be forgiven. And they would say, I don't have it. That's why when Jesus was anointed into his priestly ministry, by the Holy Spirit, at His baptism, in John, there was a voice from heaven that said, "This is My beloved Son". And he is marvelously a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

And of course, that's the, that's the third great difference, isn't it? The Old Testament priests were lacking in permanence. They'd lacked ministers, actually, they retired when they were aged 50, just in case you're interested in age of retirement. It wasn't because they were exhausted, it was probably because they couldn't see very well. And they didn't have varifocals in ancient Israel, and one of their jobs was to detect leprosy. And so you shouldn't see a 70 year old priest groping around the wall who is blind as a bat. But they died. And so they didn't continue in office. What use is a priest who dies before you do and leaves you priestless. You've got to go off and find another priest. And he says Jesus is a priest who live gloriously, forever, and is able to save.

Who would you say? Who would you say were the prophets and priests and kings of 21st century United States? Well, the kings would be our political overlords, wouldn't they? And the

prophets, well, they would be the ones scratching on the subway walls and tenement halls, for those of you who remember Simon and Garfunkel. Or the pop stars and their Twitter accounts. Or the the media pundits, they would be the prophets. They tell us what to think and believe. And who would be the priests? Well, they would be the psychiatrists and the counselors, and the psychologists, the people to whom you go when you are troubled and in need, and when you are guilty, and life is turned upside down. But they are like the Old Testament priests. They are utterly powerless to forgive your sins and transform your life. They may prescribe medication for you, that balances your body chemistry or gives you breathing space to come back to some kind of equilibrium. But since at the root of everything that troubles man, would to God our society knew it, is the way in which we seek to repress our alienation from God, our knowledge that we were created for eternity, as Ecclesiastes tells us, and that we have not found pardon and peace and forgiveness. They are utterly powerless to help us. And the Old Testament priests were in exactly the same position. But there is one who is able to help us. Who is able to come and say, "Your sins are forgiven, I empower you to live a new life altogether."

And that's why he's going into Melchizedek in this way. You know, people are either fascinated by Melchizedek, or they're turned off by Melchizedek. And if you're fascinated by Melchizedek, you may actually miss the real point of this passage. And if you're turned off, then you will miss the real point of this passage. Because the real point of this passage is the answer to a third question: How is it that Jesus who is in the priestly order of Melchizedek is precisely the priest I need.

And so he says, you notice here in verse 25, isn't it? That great word: consequently. Because these things are true, it's as though he was saying, as we would put it, Jesus' actions have consequences for our lives. So what are those consequences? Well, they're here aren't they? These are, these are some of the greatest words in the whole of the Bible, verse 25, "He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, because He always lives to make intercession for them". He saves to the uttermost. That's the great commission, isn't it? Go to the uttermost parts of the earth. But it means more than that. It means he saves to the uttermost, those who have reached the uttermost. Whether that be in distance from God or in rebellion against God, or the deep, dark stains of sin in our lives, or the chaos and confusion and tragedy and darkness and sense of despair, and overwhelming depression. He has been to every single one of these locations, and into deeper darkness than any of us of ever taste. We learned that already in Hebrews and now because he lives in the power of an indestructible life, at the right hand of the Heavenly Father, he is able to save you to the utmost, if you will come to God through Him, because He ever lives to make intercession for you.

I remember, a dear friend, the late Professor Edmund Clowney, telling me of how, after his dear mother had died, he, he bumped into also the late, great professor John Murray, on the campus of Westminster seminary, and John Murray, put his hand in his shoulder and said, "Let me pray for you." And God took him right into his very heart through that prayer, as he walked away, he says, "It's something. What a thing to be prayed for, in this way by Professor Murray." And then immediately he thought, but what a thing to know that you are prayed for, by the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember how Paul puts it in Romans eight, "Who is going to condemn me? When Christ who died for me, who was raised again, who is at the right hand of God is making intercession for me. Whose coming to me. And he's bringing eternal blessing to me, even as Melchizedek brought blessing to Abraham. So Jesus is a far greater high priest. For what the law could not do, because it was weakened through our flesh and the flesh of those high priests. "God has done", says Paul in Romans eight, "what the law could never do, because of the weakness of our flesh, sent his Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and for sin,

condemned sin in the flesh, that we who are led through the Spirit might live in the righteousness of God". I must say, as I read these words, I thank God for this anonymous author of the letter to the Hebrews. Because perhaps he saw something, that none of the other New Testament writers ever thought about — that we have a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. And no matter who we are, how far down we have sunk in our sin, and in our need He is able to save us to the uttermost when we come to God through Him. I need a high priest. You need a high priest. He is the high priest that together we need. Oh, let's trust Him fully.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, we thank You that You are such a wonderful Savior. Thank you for all that you have done for us in your death on the cross to bear our sins. Your resurrection, in power to transform our lives. Your intercession at your Father's right hand to keep us going. We come. We trust You. We thank you that you receive us. We pray that You would bless us and we ask this in your name. Amen.