

1. Melchizedek and Abraham (Heb 7:1-3)

Melchizedek has long been a somewhat enigmatic and mysterious character, a shadowy figure who generates a lot of head scratching and blank stares. But we may simplify the author's present reference to him in the following manner: Melchizedek simply represents a priestly order which predated the Levitical priesthood and was superior to it. Jesus, he asserts, was made a priest after this Melchizedekian order, rendering the Levitical priesthood defunct. The facts concerning Melchizedek are these: 1) He served as king and priest simultaneously (Heb 7:1); 2) Abraham gave a tenth of his war spoils to Melchizedek (7:2); and 3) Melchizedek's priesthood was not dependent upon lineage, neither was it transferred to his posterity (7:3). His priesthood was a unique appointment and was bestowed singularly upon him by God. It is in this sense that he *"remains a priest continually."* His was a position of honor never revoked or transferred to another.

1. What is the "slaughter of the kings"?
2. What did Melchizedek do for Abraham (Hebrews 7:1)?

2. Melchizedek and Levi (Heb 7:4-10)

Several arguments set forth the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood: 1) Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek was voluntary whereas tithing for Levitical priests is commanded by law (7:5a); 2) Abraham was not related to Melchizedek whereas Levitical priests receive tithes from their own brethren (7:5b-6); 3) While Abraham was a great man to whom God issued the redemptive promises, he received a blessing from Melchizedek (7:6b, 2). *"Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better"* (7:7); 4) When Levitical high priests die, they cease to be priests and the honor passes to their descendant. However, no such succession occurred with Melchizedek's priesthood, *"of whom it is witnessed that he lives"* (7:8). Again, this is not some mysterious statement about Melchizedek's immortality but simply the acknowledgement that his priesthood was unique to him. He did not die and leave his priesthood to another after him; 5) Levi even representatively paid tithes to Melchizedek through his ancestor Abraham (7:9-10).

This argument carried more force in the ancient past when ancestry was so important and the representative behavior of illustrious ancestors was of great significance. However, we make similar comparisons when we say, "Before you were even thought of ..." or "Before you were a gleam in your parents' eyes ...". The Hebrew author's point is that, long before the tribe of Levi and the Aaronic priesthood, there existed a greater man than Abraham who had a unique priesthood peculiar to him. Levi was not the be-all and end-all of priesthood; in fact, as the author will show, the priesthood that originated with him was flawed.

3. What was given to the Levites instead of a portion of land (Num 18:21-24)?

3. The Change of Priesthood and Law (Heb 7:11-19)

This is a crucial moment in the argument of the epistle. The implication of Jesus' Melchizedekian priesthood is that the Law of Moses has been abrogated. The Levitical priesthood and the Law are inseparable, for the national existence of Israel depended upon their observance of sacrifices, feasts and other worship under the leadership of the priests. *"For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law"* (Heb 7: 12). Why was the law changed? *"Because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect"* (7:18b-19a; comp. Rom 3:20, 28; Gal 2:16; 3:10-13). The unspoken conclusion of this is: These Jewish brethren *have nothing to go back to!* The Law of Moses is defunct. It is the law and priesthood of Christ *or nothing*.

4. What psalm is again quoted to substantiate the eternal nature of Jesus' priesthood?

5. What precludes Jesus from serving as a priest under the Mosaic covenant?

6. What does our "better hope" in Christ allow us to do?

4. An Unchangeable Priesthood (Heb 7:20-24)

To what is the superiority of Jesus as high priest attributed? He is priest *"according to the power of an endless life"* (Heb 7:16b); *"He, because He continues forever, has an un-changeable priesthood"* (7:24). Further, His priesthood is bestowed upon Him by divine oath (7:20-21), and the author has already stressed the force of such an oath (6:13, 17-18). Upon this better priesthood rests *"a better covenant"* (7:22). Why, then, would these brethren wish to go back to the defunct, the inferior, the weak and unprofitable?

7. What is a "surety"? Who is the surety of the new covenant?

8. Levitical priests were appointed without what?

9. Why were there many Levitical priests?

5. Jesus: The Quintessential High Priest (Heb 7:25-28)

The author now begins to draw all his points together in praise of Jesus. His eternal nature ensures true salvation and effective intercession for the believer (7:25). His holiness and purity has allowed His exaltation *"higher than the heavens"* (7:26). His perfect sacrifice – of Himself – does not need repetition as did the animal sacrifices of the Mosaic Law (7:27). These all qualify Jesus to be forever appointed as high priest by the un-changeable oath of God, Himself (7:28). Jesus is all there is, all there will ever be, all we will ever need in finding acceptance before God.

10. Did the word of the oath come before or after the Law? Of what significance is this?