

Text: Hebrews 7:1-3

Title: The Continuing Priesthood of Melchizedek

Date/Location: February 27, 2011 at FBC

Introduction

At this point, Hebrews shifts into overdrive and leaves the elementary principles of Christ in the dust. We are now going to get immersed in the shadowy character of Melchizedek. In the Bible, he first appears in Genesis 14:18-20, then in Psalm 110:4, and then in Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20; and 7:1, 10, 11, 15, 17, 21. Those are the only verses that mention his name.

I. Who Is Melchizedek?

A. Historical Person about 2075 B.C. Read Genesis 14:1-20, especially 18-20 to get an idea about this character.

B. Normal Man.

Because of the language in Hebrews regarding the lack of parentage and birth and death, some interpreters have suggested that Melchizedek is a preincarnate appearance of the Son of God or even an angel. For several reasons, this cannot be correct.

1. Melchizedek appears to have been a historical king-priest for some time in Jerusalem. Christophanies were very brief.
2. Melchizedek was a man according to Heb. 7:4.
3. Melchizedek had a genealogy, even though it was not recorded, 7:3, 6.
4. Angels do not offer sacrifices nor generally do they do other priestly functions. Now, the text does not say that Melchizedek offered sacrifices. But if he was a priest, then it would seem that he did offer sacrifices as part of his overall ministry.

II. Hebrews 7 Description of Melchizedek, 7:1-3

The first three verses of chapter 7 form a single sentence. The main idea of the sentence is this: "For this Melchizedek...remains a priest continually." I believe 7:1-3 answers a question that arises from 6:20—namely, how is *Christ's* priesthood a forever-type priesthood if it is patterned after Melchizedek? The answer is that *Melchizedek's* priesthood is a forever-type priesthood, after a manner of speaking. We will see this as we walk through each of the descriptions.

Depending on how you divide up the sentence, you could see as many as 11 descriptive phrases here; I've coalesced them into seven.

A. King of Salem and Priest of the Most High God.

1. Melchizedek was a king of Salem, what we know later as Jerusalem. He was also a priest, giving him the distinction of being both a king and priest. In the ancient near east, this was not uncommon. The Egyptian pharaoh, for instance, was considered a god, like the later emperor of Rome. In the theocracy of Israel, there was a sense in which the state and religion were separated in that the king could not take priestly prerogatives to himself. There was a separation of powers even though there was a state religion.
2. It was not unheard of for men of non-Abrahamic descent to offer sacrifices to the true God. The Jews addressed in the book of Hebrews would find the idea somewhat strange that a non-Levitical priest could offer sacrifices, but they would have to admit that it happened in ancient history.
 - i. Melchizedek was like the later Jethro the Midianite who was Moses' father-in-law. He was priest of Midian and he offered sacrifices to God in Exodus 18:12. I believe the appearance of Aaron and the elders at the meal is a sign that this was worship of the true God, and not merely an ecumenical "feel good" gathering of worshippers of different gods.
 - ii. Another example of a non-Abrahamic priest is Job, who offered sacrifices to God that were right and good and pleasing to God (Job 1:5, 42:8).

B. Met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him.

Melchizedek pronounced a blessing from God on Abraham. Abraham had been blessed by God in Egypt (chapter 12); in the promised land (chapter 13), and now in deliverance from his enemies (chapter 14). These seem to be initial fulfillments of the personal aspect of the Abrahamic covenant given in Genesis 12.

Melchizedek also blessed God, meaning that he offered praise to God.

C. Abraham gave a tenth part of all.

1. Of all the plunder that Abraham had won in the battle against the four kings, he gave a tenth of it to the king-priest of Jerusalem. This must have been quite a lot of material goods, given that Abraham had 318 servants to carry it back with him.
2. Issue of tithing. The Christian is not under the Law of Moses. Therefore, he is not required to give a tithe to his church. While a tithe is a good rule of thumb that you can consider using in your giving to the church, you should note that the NT principles of giving may demand more or less than a tithe. We are supposed to give proportionately and

generously. Some who are *very* poor may not have enough to give 10%. Others who are well off would be withholding from God if they gave only 10%. It is also helpful to consider that there were multiple tithes in the OT and freewill or voluntary offerings on top of those. So, 10% is not easy to maintain as a rule for the present era. (For example, Deut. 26:12 speaks of a tithe that is given every third year.)

D. King of righteousness.

1. At this point in the list, the author moves into the more typological or “pattern” kind of descriptions where he will seek to show that Melchizedek is a pattern of Jesus Christ.
2. There are two parts to Melchi-zedek’s name, the first coming from “melek” which means king in Hebrew, and “Tsedek” which means righteousness. Paul here is basically telling us the meaning of the name.
3. The meaning of the name is given with a target in mind—to show the similarity of Melchizedek to Christ. Christ is righteous (Heb. 7:25) as God is righteous (Romans 3:25).

E. King of peace.

1. Salem comes from the word “Shalom” which in Hebrew means peace or prosperity.
2. This shows another similarity to Christ, because Christ provides peace with God (Romans 5:1; Acts 10:36; Ephesians 2:17).

F. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life.

1. This is the most complicated of all the descriptive phrases about Melchizedek. On face value, it says that this fellow, who is a man according to 7:4, has no parents, no genealogical history, was not born, and did not die. That is a very strange person indeed. Even the incarnate Jesus Himself had a mother and two genealogies. In His humanity He had a birth and a death as well. This Melchizedek must be a special character indeed!
2. What is going on here is that the author of Hebrews is telling us that Melchizedek had no *recorded* father, mother, genealogy, birth, or death. And that is true because all we have is three verses about him in Genesis 14. There is not much detail given about him. Again, it is not that Melchizedek doesn’t have a genealogy; it is that he is lacking one in Holy Scripture.
3. But this lack of information should be a surprise to the Jewish reader, and to us. Why? Genesis is all about genealogies! Consider that much of

Genesis chapters 5, 10, and 11 are taken to list genealogies. But there is no “background check” on Melchizedek!

4. Also, priests in Israel had to have a proper genealogy to be accepted into the priesthood—Ezra 2:62, for example. But there is no proof that Melchizedek had a valid priestly genealogy.

G. Made like the Son of God.

This is what our author has been driving at with the last three descriptions of Melchizedek. Since he is all about righteousness and peace and seems to have always been and to continue on, he is like the Son of God in His divine Person. He has no proof of priesthood, and this is similar to Christ who came from the line of Judah, and there was nothing about a priesthood in that line (Heb. 7:14). The Son is from everlasting (Micah 5:2) and is also known as the everlasting Father (Isaiah 9:6). As God He lives forever. As God He has no parents and no genealogy at all. He is self-existent.

III. Conclusion

The remainder of the chapter explains that the Melchizedekian priesthood is superior to that of Aaron, and so Christ is superior to Aaron. But first, the text proves that Melchizedek is superior to Abraham in v. 4-10.

If you are a fan of mathematics, you will like this: the “greatness” relationship is transitive. So,

Melchi > Abe > Aaron (and the Levitical system) => Melchi > Aaron

And since Christ’s priesthood is patterned after Melchi, Christ > Aaron and Christ > Abraham.

We have already seen that Christ > Prophets, Christ > Angels, Christ > Moses, and chapters 5 and 7 of Hebrews have been busy telling us that Christ > Aaron and Abraham.

It is interesting that the author has been working his way chronologically backward through the OT showing that Jesus Christ is superior to all of it. The prophets came last; the angels attended the giving of the Law; Moses is a revered man to the Jews who brought them out of Egypt; and of the fathers, Abraham is the one who God chose as the progenitor of the whole Israelite race.

We should see again that Jesus Christ is the focal point of what we have been studying. He is our ever-living High Priest and only access point to God.