

Introduction: The Strange Career of Melchizedek
Melchizedek in Genesis 14

Melchizedek is a strange fellow.

Who is he?

Where does he come from?

Unlike most of the characters in Genesis

Melchizedek is not connected to anyone else.

(That's why Hebrews will say that he has no father or mother).

In Genesis 14, we see the blessing of Abraham in action.

God is *with* Abraham,

and so therefore Abraham becomes a blessing to the nations.

Those who bless Abraham are blessed.

Those who curse Abraham are cursed.

And in Abraham all the nations of the earth are blessed.

But that's precisely where Genesis 14 turns strange.

Because Melchizedek, whose name means, "King of Righteousness"
who is the king of Salem, namely, "King of Peace"

brings bread and wine as priest of God Most High,

and as a priest blesses Abraham and celebrates a covenant meal.

As Hebrews will tell us,

it is the greater who blesses the lesser.

So the fact that Melchizedek blesses Abraham

means that Melchizedek is greater than Abraham.

Melchizedek in Psalm 110

Now, if it weren't for Psalm 110, Genesis 14 might have stood simply
as a somewhat strange episode in the life of Abraham.

After all, Melchizedek, king of Salem, disappears from the scene as quickly as he appeared,
and there is no further trace of Melchizedek until you get to Psalm 110.

Psalm 110 speaks of the kingly rule of the Son of David.

But Psalm 110 also speaks of a priest –

but a priest *not* of the line of Aaron –

rather, a priest after the order of Melchizedek,
and Melchizedek was both King of Salem and a priest of God Most High.
David saw with the eyes of faith, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit,
that Melchizedek prefigured something in the future of his own line.

This obscure event in the life of Abraham reveals God's plan for the salvation of the human race.
There must be a priestly king who never dies.

Read Hebrews 7

Melchizedek in Hebrews

Why should you care that Jesus was a priest according to the order of Melchizedek?

Because you need a priest that does not die.
The Levitical priesthood was good,
but the Levitical priests kept on dying.
Every generation there was a new high priest.
You need a priest who lives forever.

In other words, you need a priest who is the Son of God.

This is the central message of the Book of Hebrews.

In Jesus Christ, the Son of God has become a merciful and faithful High Priest.

In verses 1-3, Hebrews says that Melchizedek has neither father nor mother,
“having neither beginning of days nor end of life,
but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.”

This does not mean that Melchizedek was never born and never died.
A person is called “fatherless” in Greek, when his father is unknown.
We have a similar usage in English.
We say, “poor motherless child” when referring to an orphan.
We don't mean that there was *never* a mother –
but that the mother is not in the picture.

The point is that in the book of Genesis, everyone fits into the story somewhere –
everyone, that is, except Melchizedek.

Melchizedek comes out of nowhere and disappears whence he came.
Who was this “priest of God Most High” who ruled in Salem?
We don't know.

But there is another reason to point out that he is without genealogy.

In Israel, how did you become a priest?
Did you go to seminary and study theology?

No.

You became a priest because you were born a priest.
It was all about genealogy.
If you were descended from Aaron, then you would be a priest.

If you know someone with the last name “Cohen,”
they are most likely descended from the priests –
because “cohen” is the Hebrew word for priest.
(I say “most likely” because there *are* instances of people who took the name “Cohen”
in order to *pretend* that they were of a priestly family!)

So the fact that Melchizedek has no genealogy gives him a unique status.
In fact the very phrase “order of Melchizedek” is somewhat ironic,
because the “order of Melchizedek” is an order of one.

And that’s precisely the point!

The order of Melchizedek, by its very nature, can have only one member.
A priest in the order of Melchizedek can have no priestly genealogy.
If your son becomes a priest after you, then you are not in the order of Melchizedek!

This is especially poignant because the word translated “forever” (you are a priest forever)
is a dynastic word, suggesting an uninterrupted lineage
(Your priesthood will continue without interruption).

But notice how Hebrews says this.
He doesn’t say that Jesus resembles Melchizedek!
No.
He says that Melchizedek resembles the Son of God.
You can only understand what Melchizedek is doing in Genesis 14
after you have seen the Son of God revealed in his full glory in Jesus.

In short, Hebrews is saying that if you read Genesis 14 in the light of Psalm 110,
you get the surprising result that the Levitical priesthood must be replaced.

Why do I say surprising?
Because God made a covenant with Phineas, the grandson of Aaron,
saying that he would grant to his descendants a perpetual priesthood
(Num 25:12-13),
the same word that he used when he told David that he would
“establish his throne forever.”

Both are perpetual/eternal covenants.
Both use the same word—“olam” which means “forever” or “a long time.”
Why is the covenant with Phineas temporary, but the covenant with David eternal?

Or to ask it another way,
why was the Messiah from the tribe of Judah, but not from the tribe of Levi?

Because long before the covenant was made with Phineas,
back in the days of Abraham,
God had revealed a priesthood that was greater
than any that would come from Abraham.
In order for the final sacrifice to truly remove the sins of his people,
the sacrifice must have the power of an indestructible life.
In other words,
only the Creator could be the Redeemer.

We're looking at the Shorter Catechism's treatment of the offices of Christ.

Q. 23. What offices does Christ execute as our Redeemer?

A. Christ, as our Redeemer, executes the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.

Last week we looked at how Christ executes the office of a prophet,
by revealing to us, by his Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.

Today we turn to question 25:

Q. 25. How does Christ execute the office of a priest?

A. Christ executes the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us.

The whole of Hebrews 7-10 is devoted to this –
but we'll focus on the latter part of chapter 7,
because in verses 11-28,
Hebrews gives us three contrasts between Christ's priesthood
and the Levitical priesthood –
which demonstrate the three points of the catechism:

namely, that Christ once offered himself as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice,
that Christ's sacrifice reconciles us to God,
and through that sacrifice, Christ continually makes intercession for us.

1. **“The Power of an Indestructible Life”: How Jesus Reconciles Us to God (7:11-19)**
 - a. **The Levitical Priesthood Was Weak and Useless**
 - b. **We Draw Near to God through a “Better Hope”**

First, we see in verses 11-19, that Christ's priesthood gives us a better hope –
“through which we draw near to God.”

[astounding! That we can draw near to God!]

Soren Kierkegaard describes this as what would happen if the king were to tell a commoner

“Come to my palace, marry my daughter, and become my son-in-law and heir!”

If you were the commoner, you wouldn't believe him.

You'd think that the king was playing a joke on you,

and so if you did obey the summons,

you would come warily – distrustful of the motives of the king.

Even so have we treated God.

God has called us into fellowship with himself.

He has united us to his Son that we might draw near to God himself!

But we don't believe him.

If you believed that the God of the universe wished to commune with you,

then you might treat him a little differently than you do!

But this is the point of Hebrews 7:11-19 –

that we *draw near to God* (we come into the heavenly Holy of Holies)

something that only the OT high priest could do.

After all, this limitation demonstrates that the priesthood of Levi and of Aaron was defective.

“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?” (7:11)

In other words, the fact that David spoke of the need for a priest after the order of Melchizedek demonstrates the imperfection of the Levitical priesthood.

If the OT law of the priesthood remained in effect,

then there was no way that Jesus could serve as a priest.

But our Lord, who arose from the tribe of Judah,

plainly did do the work of a priest.

How can this be?

Because God had said that the son of David would become “a priest forever

after the order of Melchizedek.” (Psalm 110)

The Levitical priesthood was based upon “a legal requirement concerning bodily descent”

What is the problem with this law?

It lacks power.

The Levitical priesthood is weak and useless (verse 18).

That is strong language!

In the office here there are some old copies of the building plans for this building.

There was a time when those plans were useful.

They served as the law by which this building would be made.
We loved those plans and the building committee labored over them with care.
Now they sit abandoned and gathering dust,
honored only for what they reveal about the process
by which this building came to be.
Now that the building has come,
the plans are weak and useless.

That is what the Levitical priesthood is like.
It showed the pattern of what our great High Priest would do,
but once he himself came, the pattern is set aside.
There was nothing intrinsically wrong with the old priesthood,
it's just that it was designed as a pattern or shadow.

Jesus is “like Aaron” in that he is able to sympathize with our weakness.
But he is better than Aaron, because Jesus is without sin,
and therefore he is able to do what Aaron could not do:
he can bring *us* near to God.
Aaron could draw near to the throne of grace *on our behalf*,
but he could not bring *us* there.
But now we have this “better hope” through which we draw near to God.

Because Jesus has entered the holy place, not through the blood of bulls and goats,
not on the basis of a legal code that required fleshly descent from a priest,
but through the power of an indestructible life.
It is only when one who is the very radiance of God’s glory,
and the very stamp of his substance,
God of God, light of light, very God of very God,
begotten, not made,
being of one substance of the Father,
by whom all things were made,
it is only when He learns obedience through what he suffered,
and only when HE offers himself as the sacrifice for our sins,
that we may finally now draw near to God.

Do not forget this, beloved.
Do you, now, draw near to God?
Do you thank your Savior for enduring through suffering,
so that you might have access to the Father?

2. “The Guarantor of a Better Covenant”: How Jesus Intercedes for Us (7:20-25)

a. The Levitical Priesthood Kept Dying

b. Jesus Saves Completely because He Always Lives

There is a second way in which Christ’s priesthood is shown to be superior to Aaron

His priesthood is rooted in God's oath.

Hebrews 6 teaches us the importance of an oath.

A promise is good, but an oath is better.

When you promise to do something, the penalty for non-performance
is merely that you lose your credibility.

But when you swear an oath you open yourself up to more serious consequences.

To lie under oath is to commit perjury.

Even so, God has sworn an oath that the son of David would be a priest forever—
at whatever cost to himself.

This oath, in Psalm 110:4, is at the very heart of Hebrews argument about Jesus's priesthood.

Because it is *this oath* that makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

What is a guarantor?

A guarantor (the old word was "surety")

is one who promises to pay another person's debts.

This is a stronger word than "mediator."

A mediator is one who stands in between two parties and reconciles them.

Jesus is certainly the mediator of the covenant.

But he is more than a mediator.

He is the guarantor—he is the surety of a better covenant.

A mediator may just step in and help reconcile two parties, and then bow out.

A guarantor has staked his person and his character on fulfilling his word.

A mediator says,

"I will find some way of helping Joe work out his difficulties with his landlord"

A guarantor, or surety, says,

"If Joe is unable to pay his rent, I will certainly pay it for him."

What does this mean for God?

His oath to David, swearing the eternal priesthood,

makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

By his oath, God obligated himself to deliver his people,

because as the history of the house of David demonstrates,

the only way that God's oath could be fulfilled was if God himself
came in the flesh.

The implications of God's oath then follow in verses 23-28,
and in this we see the full power of Christ's indestructible life!

First, the oath states that he will be a priest forever.

The death of the Levitical priest demonstrated the ultimate futility of their order.

God gave to Phineas the covenant of a perpetual priesthood—

a line of priests passed down from father to son,

but God swore to Jesus that he would hold his priesthood permanently,
because he has the power of an indestructible life.

Consequently (v 25), 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.

Jesus *saves to the uttermost*.

Yes, we *are* saved –
but we also still await our salvation.

Our salvation is our inheritance in Christ–
an inheritance in which we have already begun to participate,
but for which we still long.

And Jesus saves “to the uttermost.”

That is, both fully and finally.
This is no partial salvation,
nor is it a temporary salvation.

He saves to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him,
since he always lives to make intercession for him.

Jesus is the sure and steadfast anchor of our souls.

He does not save us part way.

He saves to the uttermost—both fully and finally—
those who draw near to God through him.

3. “Once for All”: How Jesus Satisfies Divine Justice (7:26-28)

a. The Levitical Priesthood Had to Offer for Their Own Sins

b. Jesus Is the Perfect High Priest and the Perfect Sacrifice

And finally, in verses 26-28,

we hear about how Jesus satisfies divine justice.

Why is Jesus such an effective high priest?

The high priest in the OT was separated out from his brothers.

He could never leave the temple area.

He could never mourn the loss of his relatives.

He had to remain ceremonially clean for his whole life.

Jesus is such a great high priest, because

he was “holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners,
and exalted above the heavens.”

You might say,

but Jesus didn’t remain ceremonially clean.

He mingled with tax collectors, prostitutes—even touching lepers!

According to the law of Moses, Jesus was contaminated by uncleanness!

He even touched dead people—something forbidden to the High Priest!

So how can Hebrews say that Jesus was “unstained, separated from sinners”?

Well, in the OT, the unclean contaminated the clean.

The impure contaminated the pure.

The unholy contaminated the holy.

But in Jesus the world is turned upside down.

Jesus touches lepers, which should have rendered him unclean. (Mt 8)

But instead, the lepers were instantly cleansed—

and you’ll notice that no one suggested that Jesus therefore became unclean.

It was too obvious that there was a “cleanness” about Jesus—

a holiness that purified everything he touched.

If the High Priest had touched a coffin or a grave, that would render him unfit for office!

(Lev 21:10-15)

But Luke 7:14 makes a point of saying that Jesus touched the bier of a dead man.

There you have it!

Jesus is unfit to be high priest, right!?

But Jesus touch brings life to the dead.

What does it mean that Jesus, as high priest, is holy, innocent, unstained,
separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens?

You might think at first blush, that these words are designed to put Jesus at a distance from us.

But that’s not the point at all!

It is only because we have such a high priest that we can draw near to God!

This is what separates Jesus from the Levitical priesthood.

The Law appoints weak men as high priests—

sinners who need to offer sacrifices for themselves—

but the word of the oath appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

But Jesus only became a *perfect high priest* when he offered up himself,

bringing his own blood as the perfect sacrifice to satisfy divine justice

and remove our sins.

The Levitical priesthood demonstrated the need for bloody sacrifices –
that a death was necessary to replace *our death*.

But the OT sacrifices were insufficient – they were ineffective –

how do we know? –

because they had to be offered daily!

But Jesus offered himself once for all as the atoning sacrifice that satisfies divine justice.

How do we know that divine justice is satisfied forever?

Because he *lives* forever –

because any time anyone tries to say,

“this believer in Jesus is a sinner!”
Jesus stands up and says, “but I died for him.”

And God says, “Yes, my Son, you did.”
Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!

So, how do you draw near to God through Christ?

Listen to how Hebrews applies this in chapter 10, verse 19,
“*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*”

Hebrews gives us three applications of this doctrine of the priesthood of Christ:

First, let us draw near!

If Jesus has opened the way to God, then let us go to him –
let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith;
we have been consecrated as priests in our baptism,
that we might draw near to God through Jesus.
Christ sweetly calls you to himself!
Will you not come?

Second, let us hold fast.

He who promised is faithful.
You are tempted daily to set aside the confession of your hope.
Your hope is Jesus – who sits at the right hand of the Father.
Don’t set Jesus aside!
Because there is *nothing* apart from him!

And so therefore, third, let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good deeds.

How are *you* stirring up someone else to love and good deeds?
How are *you* encouraging one another?
If you neglect to meet together, then you cannot stir up and encourage each other.
You need one another!
Because you need to be stirred up *by* one another!

I am so thankful to those of you who have stirred *me up*
to love and good works.
I need you to stir me up!
I need your encouragement.

If you don't encourage me, challenge me, *stir me up* to become more of the man,
the husband, the father, the pastor
that God has called me to be –
then all of you will suffer,
because all of you will have to put up with half-hearted preaching!

And I don't know about you, but I don't like hearing half-hearted sermons –
especially when they're coming out of my own mouth!

And finally, notice the *order* of these three applications:

First comes communion with God himself:
draw near to *God* –
(this has to come first, or else the others *won't work*),
Second comes the content of what we believe:
hold fast the *confession* of our hope
(this has to do with content –
what we believe *matters*),
and third comes our practice:
stir each other up.

You could say it another way:

Love God
Believe in Jesus
Love each other