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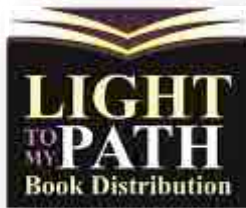
The Order of Melchizedek

An Examination of what
the Bible Tells us about
Melchizedek and his
Relation to the Lord Jesus



The Order of Melchizedek

*An Examination of What the Bible Tells us about
Melchizedek and his Relation to the Lord Jesus Christ*



F. Wayne Mac Leod

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The Order of Melchizedek

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Preface

There is no Bible character so mysterious as the person of Melchizedek. We meet him in Genesis 14 when Abraham returned from battle. This is the only mention of anyone personally meeting him in the Bible. It would be easy to forget him were not for the fact that his name appears in four other Bible passages (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews:5-6-10; Hebrews 6:20; Hebrews 7:1-17). What is significant about Melchizedek is not only his description but his connection to the Lord Jesus. Jesus was a priest in Melchizedek's order. Hebrews tells us that his priesthood is better than the Aaronic priesthood of the Old Testament.

My purpose in this study is to examine the passage of Scripture related to Melchizedek. We will break them down to see what they tell us about this strange character. I hope that the truth we discover in these passages will bring some clarity and a deeper awareness of the Lord Jesus' work as a priest in his order.

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Chapter 1 - Abraham Meets Melchizedek

Abraham lived in uncertain times. Small kings clamoured for authority and were suspicious of anyone whose power began to rival theirs. Under the blessing of God, Abraham was one who would rouse the ever-watchful eyes of insecure kings in those days.

Genesis 14 describes the fragile alliances that existed between kings in Abraham's time. Verses 1-4 describe how the kings of Shinar, Ellasar, Elam and Goiim joined forces to defeat the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar. After twelve years of subjection, these defeated nations rebelled.

During that time, Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, rallied another alliance of kings to wage war on the Rephaim, the Zuzim, the Horites, the Amalekites and the Amorites. When the nations who had rebelled against Chadorlaomar heard of his victories, they rallied to face him in the Valley of Siddim.

Among those who stood against Chedorlaomer was the king of Sodom. Abraham's nephew Lot, who lived in Sodom when Chedorlaomer's forces came to the region, was taken captive in the ensuing battle.

One of the men captured with Lot managed to escape and told Abraham what had happened. Abraham immediately gathered 318 men and pursued the enemy. By the grace of God, Abraham defeated Chedorlaomer's men and took back what his forces had looted.

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The king of Sodom came out to meet Abraham at the Valley of Shaveh as he returned from the defeat of Chedorlaomer. Present that day also was Melchizedek, the king of Salem. This is the first time we meet Melchizedek. Let's take a moment to see what Genesis 14 has to say about him.

His Name

Notice first the name Melchizedek. The name means "king of righteousness" or "the king is righteous." Names in Bible times were significant. In fact, they were often changed to more accurately reflect the character of the individual bearing them. The writer to the Hebrews specifically mentions the meaning of Melchizedek's name in Hebrews 7:2:

1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. (Hebrews 7)

Notice the phrase "He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness." In other words, the name Melchizedek was not just a name but an accurate description of his character—"he is ...king of righteousness."

King of Salem

18 And Melchizedek king of Salem (Genesis 14)

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Genesis 14:18 tells us that Melchizedek was king of Salem. The Bible mentions Salem four times. Three of these references are in conjunction with Melchizedek as its king. The only other reference to Salem in the Bible is in Psalm 76:1-2:

1 In Judah God is known; his name is great in Israel. 2 His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion. (Psalm 76)

Notice from Psalm 76 that Salem is referred to as Zion – “*His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion*” (verse 2). The implication here is that Salem and Zion are the same places. 2 Samuel 5:7 identifies Zion or Salem with the city of David:

7 Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David. (2 Samuel 5)

Finally, 2 Kings 14:20 tells us that the city of David is Jerusalem:

20 And they brought him on horses; and he was buried in Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David. (2 Kings 14)

Salem is, therefore, the city we know today as Jerusalem. Salem went through many hands before it was conquered by David and become the principal city of Israel. What is significant to note is that way back in the days of Abraham, Melchizedek, king of righteousness, ruled as king in this city.

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Bread and Wine

18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (Genesis 14)

The second detail about Melchizedek found in Genesis 14 is that he brought bread and wine to Abraham. Bible scholars believe that the Valley of Shaveh or the King's Valley, where Melchizedek met Abraham, was located just south of Jerusalem. By bringing bread and wine to Abraham, Melchizedek refreshed Abraham's soldiers and established a good relationship with them. As a king of Salem, Melchizedek wanted a friendly relationship with the man who had conquered this powerful alliance of nations in the name of God.

Priest of the Most High God

*18 And Melchizedek (He was priest of God Most High.)
(Genesis 14)*

Not only was Melchizedek the king of Salem, but Genesis 14:18 tells us that he was a "priest of God Most High." In the Bible, there is only one God Most High. The God of Abraham bore this title. He alone ruled over all gods and was the one to whom all gods were to bow the knee. He ruled over heaven and earth. No other God would be worthy of this title. Melchizedek worshipped the God of Abraham.

We do not have any indication in the Bible of how Melchizedek came to know the God of Abraham. In Genesis 12, the Lord God appeared to Abram in Ur for the first time and told him that He would make his descendants into a great nation. God revealed Himself to Abraham. Obviously, this

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was also the case for Melchizedek, although we no record of this in the Bible.

Melchizedek was not a descendant of Abraham but a Gentile who had come to know the Lord God of Israel. God's work has never been limited to the Jewish people. Here in the Old Testament, we have evidence of how God revealed Himself to the Gentiles. God sent the Old Testament prophets to pagan nations. Jonah saw the conversion of the city of Nineveh and the pagan sailors on His ship. God's heart has always been for the entire world. In Melchizedek, we catch a glimpse of the work of God among the Gentiles of Abraham's day. Melchizedek's priesthood predated the priesthood of Aaron and the Levites. God called him to serve in this capacity in the Gentile city of Salem.

Melchizedek Blesses Abraham by God Most High

19 And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth (Genesis 14)

In Genesis 14:19, Melchizedek blessed Abraham when he returned from his battle. Notice the blessing of Melchizedek. He blessed Abraham by the name of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth. Melchizedek blessed Abraham in the name of the God he served. He served God Most High, who possessed heaven and earth. Melchizedek worshipped the Creator of heaven and earth and recognized Him as His Lord.

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Melchizedek Blesses God Most High

20 and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" (Genesis 14)

Notice also that Melchizedek also blessed God Most High. In Genesis 14:20, Melchizedek recognized that God Most High delivered Abraham's enemies into his hands. In other words, it was not because of Abraham's military might that he had come back victorious but because of the grace of God Most High who fought for Him.

Melchizedek recognized that God Most High was a personal God who cared for His people. He was a great and mighty God who possessed heaven and earth, but He also extended His hand to help those who belonged to Him.

More than this, however, we see in verse 20 how the heart of Melchizedek is moved by what He saw the Lord God do for Abraham. His heart exploded with thanksgiving to God Most High for delivering Abraham from a much superior force. He blessed God for what He did in the life of Abraham. There appears to be here in Melchizedek a genuine heart of worship.

Abraham gives a Tithe

20 And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. (Genesis 14)

In verse 20, Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe. In later years, when the people of God demanded a king, God told them through Samuel what their kings would require of them:

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15 He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. 16 He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. 17 He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. (1 Samuel 8)

One-tenth of the grain, vineyards, and flocks went to the king. This fact has led some commentators to conclude that Abraham recognized Melchizedek as the rightful king of Salem. His tithe sealed peace between the two parties.

There is another possibility for why Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek. Consider the words of the Law of Moses as recorded in Numbers 18:21:

21 "To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service that they do, their service in the tent of meeting, (Numbers 18)

From Leviticus 18:21, we understand that the priest received a tenth of Israel's possessions. This tithe enabled the priests to continue the work God had called them to do. Possibly Abraham gave this tithe to Melchizedek as a priest. In doing so, he offered his gift to the Lord as a means of thanksgiving for the victory He had given him. What is vital for us to note here is that Abraham recognized Melchizedek as the righteous king and priest of Salem.

We have in Genesis 14 an interesting picture. The father of the Jewish nation and Melchizedek, the Gentile priest, meet to worship the God of heaven and earth. That day they shared bread and wine and confessed that the Most High was the one true God, Possessor of heaven and earth. They

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acknowledged Him as the God who delivered Abraham from his enemies and recognized His hand on their individual lives.

In time, God blessed Abraham and made his descendants a great nation. For a time, it seemed like God focused exclusively on the nation of Israel. Israel came to see the salvation of the Lord as theirs alone. God, however, was the Possessor of the heavens and the earth. He was not the Possessor of the Jewish nation only. Gentile nations also belonged to Him. That encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek was prophetic. God demonstrated that both Jews and Gentiles would one day worship together and that Melchizedek and Abraham would play a vital role in this grand vision.

Melchizedek was a Gentile priest and king who worshipped the Lord God Most High. He reminds us that while the story of the Old Testament traces the roots of the Jewish faith, God's work was much broader than this. He was also working in the lives of Gentiles, bringing them to Himself. His plan was not for one nation alone but the entire world. Jews and Gentiles would one day gather to confess Him as Lord and Saviour –the Most High God.

For Prayer

Father, I want to thank you for how You made Yourself known to Abram in the land of Ur. Thank you for how You led him and revealed Yourself to him. Thank you also that You did not limit Yourself to Abraham and his descendants. You also spoke to a Gentile king by the name of Melchizedek and revealed Your purpose to him as well. I am grateful that You

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take the initiative to introduce Yourself to us. Father, I recognize that I would be lost if You did not take that initiative.

Thank you for the picture we have in Genesis 14 of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation worshipping with Melchizedek, the Gentile priest of the Most High God. Thank you that through the blood of Your Son Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles have been joined together as one family under God. Thank you, Father, that we have this glimpse of your heart from the very beginning –that both Jews and Gentiles would surrender to you and experience Your deliverance.

Chapter 2 - The Order of Melchizedek

It is in Psalm 110 that we meet Melchizedek for the second time.

4 The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." (Psalm 110)

To understand this verse, let's take a moment to consider it in its context. Psalm 110 is a Psalm of David. The psalmist begins by saying:

1 The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." (Psalm 110)

The context of the psalm relates to David's struggle with his enemies. In verse 1, the Lord God of Israel invites King David to sit at His right hand until He dealt with all those who opposed him. With the Lord at his right hand, David would rise in victory over every foe:

5 The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath. 6 He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will shatter chiefs over the wide earth. (Psalm 110)

The Lord God of Israel would not only allow David to rule over his enemies, but He would also do a mighty spiritual work among them:

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*2 The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter.
Rule in the midst of your enemies! 3 Your people will offer
themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy
garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your
youth will be yours.*

Notice the three-fold nature of the work of God in the people of that day.

His people would offer themselves freely.

Psalm 110:3 tells us that God's people would offer themselves freely. A brief examination of the history of God's people in the Old Testament shows us that this was not usually the case. God's people always struggled with their Lord. They complained about His purpose and wandered from His plan for their lives. The story of the Old Testament is about a people who resisted their God and longed for other gods.

Psalm 110:3 describes a time when resistance to God is broken, and His people surrender to Him and His purpose. They "offer themselves freely" on the day of His power. God would do a mighty work on that day that would break the hardness of the human heart and bring His people into submission to Him and His plan for their lives.

His people would dress in holy garments

Notice also in Psalm 110:3 that the people of God would offer themselves freely "in holy garments." The reference to holy garments speaks of the character and heart of the people.

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They would come to God in purity and righteousness. They would be holy and clean before God. The only way that this would be possible was through the forgiveness of their sin. The psalmist speaks about a powerful work of cleansing in the lives of God's people.

Listen to the account about Joshua, the priest in Zechariah 3:

3 Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. 4 And the angel said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments." 5 And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD was standing by. (Zechariah 3)

As Joshua the priest stood before the Lord in filthy garments, the angel of the Lord called for his clothes to be removed, saying: "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you" (Zechariah 3:4). The priest was then given clean garments. This is what is happening here in Psalm 110. God is taking away the sin of His people and giving them garments of righteousness.

His people would experience the dew of their youth

The final work of God in Psalm 110:3 was that of blessing. The psalmist tells us that the day was coming when his people would experience the dew of their youth. Dew is often a symbol of the blessing and refreshing of the Lord. Just as the morning dew waters the earth, so the blessing of God comes to refresh His people. This dew is referred to here as

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the dew of youth. In our youth, we are filled with strength and vitality.

Under this blessing, God's people surrendered willingly to Him. They would experience the forgiveness and cleansing of God and walk in the strength of His blessing and enabling.

As David writes this psalm and reflects on the victory and revival God promised, he assures his readers that what the Lord promised would undoubtedly come to pass. He bases this on two essential facts. First, that God had sworn this promise and would not change His mind. Second, that the one guaranteeing the promise was a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek:

4 The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

What is significant for us in this study is David's second reason for being assured of these promises of God –that He was a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

David speaks here of the order of Melchizedek in conjunction with the promise of God for renewal and revival of His people. By this time in Israel's history, the Old Testament priesthood of Aaron had proven incapable of bringing the kind of revival David prophesied. They made sacrifices year after year, but the people of God were not changed. God's people continued in their rebellion against God. The psalmist knew the rebellion of his own heart and often cried out to God for release from its bondage.

If there was to be a victory over sin, and if God's people were to be clothed in holy garments, then God needed to do a

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mighty work in their midst. David found hope in the promises of a God who could not lie and the priesthood of Melchizedek.

In Matthew 22, Jesus asked the Pharisees a question:

41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, 42 saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." (Matthew 22)

The Pharisees, who refused to believe that Jesus was the son of God, had no problem answering Jesus' question about the Christ. They knew that the Messiah was to be the Son of David. When they correctly answered the first question, Jesus asked them a second:

43 He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, 44" "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"? 45 If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?" (Matthew 22)

What is Jesus saying here? He told the Pharisees that David spoke by the Spirit in Psalm 110 about the Christ who would be born as both Lord and son. In other words, this son of David would be divine and human at the same time. Jesus interprets Psalm 110 for us. He told the Pharisees that David spoke prophetically about Himself as the Christ who was from the Father but born of man.

Let's return once again to Psalm 110:4

4 The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." (Psalm 110)

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David, speaking by the Spirit (according to Jesus in Matthew 22:43), prophesied of a time when God's people would willingly surrender to Him, be forgiven of their sin and blessed with the dew of youth. This promise would come to pass because the one who promised it was a priest after Melchizedek's order and could not lie. According to Jesus, He was the priest spoken of in Psalm 110 (see Matthew 22:42, 43).

Speaking under the inspiration of the Spirit (Matthew 22:43), the psalmist connects Jesus with the order of Melchizedek, a priesthood that differed from the priesthood of Aaron. It was also a priesthood that would achieve what the Old Testament priesthood did not—a change of heart, righteousness, and the dew of youth (Psalm 110:3).

Is it not easy to see from what we know about the Lord Jesus that He did fulfill this promise of David? Consider what the New Testament tells us about the Lord Jesus and His ministry.

The apostle Paul spoke to the Corinthians about the transforming work of the Lord Jesus when he said:

*17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.
The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2
Corinthians 5)*

Speaking to the Ephesians, he reminded them that through the Lord Jesus, they had also received the forgiveness of their trespasses:

*7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the
forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his
grace. (Ephesians 1)*

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Jesus told His disciples that whoever believed in Him would find rivers of living water flowing from their heart:

38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' (John 7:38)

All of the promises of the Lord God in Psalm 110 are fulfilled in the person of the Lord Jesus, who is a priest forever, according to Melchizedek's order.

Notice one final detail from Psalm 110:4. David tells us that the Lord Jesus is a priest "forever" after the order of Melchizedek. In other words, His priesthood will never end. Unlike the Aaronic priests whose ministry ended in death, the Lord Jesus would never die. He would always intercede for us and assure us of forgiveness. His priesthood is eternal. As long as He intercedes for us and stands in the gap for us, we will be secure. The God who never lies promises to heal, forgive and bless. That promise will stand as long as the Lord Jesus stands and intercedes on our behalf.

Psalm 110:4 is a prophetic word of David. Through the inspiration of the Spirit, David proclaimed the blessing of God through a new priesthood. This priesthood of Melchizedek was a priesthood that would last forever. This priesthood would bring spiritual healing to those dead in sin and forgiveness for those overcome with guilt. It would refresh the perishing and cloth them with the dew of youth. The Lord Jesus tells us that He is the fulfilment of this promise of God through David. He alone can fulfil this purpose in us. As a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek, He will do what the Old Testament prophets could never do.

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For Prayer:

Father God, thank you for the prophetic word of David in Psalm 110. Speaking by inspiration of the Spirit, David proclaims a new priesthood –the priesthood of Melchizedek. This is a priesthood apart from the law of Moses. It is a priesthood that will last forever and guarantee our healing, cleansing and empowering. We thank you, Lord Jesus, for showing us that you are the priest of this order. Thank you for Your life and ministry that fulfilled the promises of the Spirit through David and applied them to my life personally.

Chapter 3 - Jesus and the Order of Melchizedek

The first reference to Melchizedek in the New Testament is in Hebrews 5:1-10. This passage contrasts the priesthood of the Old Testament with the priesthood of the Lord Jesus. The writer begins by sharing some insights about the Old Testament priesthood, its obligations and qualifications.

Notice that the high priest was chosen from among men.

1 For every high priest chosen from among men (Hebrews 5)

As a human being, the priest was "beset by weakness" and needed to offer sacrifices for his own sins because he also fell short of God's standard:

2 He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. 3 Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. (Hebrews 5)

Even though they were sinners themselves, the priests acted on behalf of the people by offering gifts and sacrifices for sin:

1 For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. (Hebrews 5)

Not just anyone could be a priest. Only those God called were given this privilege.

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4 And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. (Hebrews 5)

The Old Testament priesthood was a role given by God to specific individuals who represented the people by offering gifts and sacrifices for sin. These men were "weak" and often fell into sin themselves. God chose them, imperfect as they were, however, to be His representatives. There was no end to the sacrifices these priests made. Every day they confessed their own shortcomings and then repeated the endless cycle of sacrificing animals for the sins of God's people.

Hebrews 5 goes on to compare and contrast Jesus with the Old Testament priesthood. Verse 5 begins by telling us that Christ did not exalt Himself by taking on this role of His own accord. Just like the priest of the Old Testament, He too was appointed by God to that role.

5 So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you" (Hebrews 5)

As a priest, Jesus understood our pain. Verse 7 tells us that He prayed and offered supplications with loud cries and tears for His own grief.

7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. (Hebrews 5)

Although He was the Son of God, the Lord Jesus learned obedience as a man through the things He suffered.

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8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. (Hebrews 5)

In other words, He felt the same temptations and struggles that every man or woman feels. He faced sin head-on and wrestled with it as you and I do. He knows what it is to face temptations. While the struggle was no less intense than what we face, the Lord Jesus, unlike the Old Testament priests, overcame those temptations.

9 And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him (Hebrews 5)

As a perfect High Priest, He offers hope. He conquered sin and tore down the barrier between God and man. Hebrews 5:9 tells us that He is the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.

Jesus did what no Old Testament priest could do. He lived a life of complete victory over sin and laid down Himself as a perfect sacrifice for the sins of the entire world. There was no need to repeat that one-time sacrifice of Jesus. It covered, for all time, the sins of everyone who would come to Him and trust in His work.

Notice what the author of Hebrews tells us about this priesthood of Jesus. He quotes from Psalm 110 and the prophecy of David:

6 as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5)

In quoting from this prophecy, Hebrews 5:6 is telling us that Jesus is its fulfillment. He is the priest who would come from the order of Melchizedek. He fulfilled the three-fold prophecy of David to restore the hearts of the people to God, bring

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forgiveness, and refresh His people with the dew of youth (see Psalm 110:2-4).

Notice also that just like the priests of the Old Testament, the Father designated His Son to be the High Priest of this new order:

10 being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5)

There is no question that Jesus Christ is a high priest. He is not a high priest in the same order as Aaron of the Old Testament, however. He is a priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews will explain this more fully but let's take a moment to examine what we have discovered to this point about Melchizedek and his priesthood.

Melchizedek was not an Israelite, although he ruled in a city that would eventually become part of the Jewish nation. He represented God as a priest before the law of Moses and the establishment of the Aaronic priesthood.

The Father did not send His Son to be a priest in the order of Aaron. The Lord Jesus could undoubtedly have fulfilled the Aaronic priesthood by living a perfect life and satisfying the demands and requirements of this priesthood, but the Father chose to make Him a priest of an entirely different order. Though Jesus was born in Israel, his priesthood was not an Israelite priesthood. It predated Israel and the Law.

The roots of Jesus' priesthood are not traced back to Aaron but to Melchizedek. They are traced back to an older priesthood than Aaron's. They go back to a godly Gentile priest who represented not just one nation but all nations. The

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Aaronic priesthood was temporary. God established this priesthood and chose the nation of Israel to represent Him to the world, but this was not His end goal. His purpose was to reveal Himself through Israel to all the nations of the world. The purpose of God would ultimately be accomplished not through Aaron's priesthood but the priesthood of Jesus in Melchizedek's order.

For Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for leaving the glories of heaven to come to earth as a priest of the order of Melchizedek. Thank you that You did what no Aaronic priest could do –You lived a perfect life and brought the guarantee of eternal salvation. Thank you for how You showed us that there is victory over sin and death. Your priesthood predates that of Aaron and the nation of Israel. You have always had a heart for the world. You revealed yourself to the Gentile world even before the nation of Israel was established. You had your priests even before the Law of Moses was written.

Through Aaron's priesthood, you revealed that salvation was not possible by the Law of Moses, and the sacrifices of lambs and bulls. Where the priesthood of Aaron fails, the priesthood of the order of Melchizedek under the leadership of Jesus Christ offers us eternal hope. Set us free from the priesthood of Aaron and the Law. May we surrender freely to the grace and forgiveness of our Great High Priest from the order of Melchizedek and receive the forgiveness He offers. Bless us with the dew of youth promised by David through Jesus Christ as our new High Priest.

Chapter 4 - Hope Beyond the Veil

The next reference to Melchizedek is in Hebrews 6:20:

19 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

(Hebrews 6)

Hebrews 6:20 introduces the subject of Hebrews 7 –the person and priesthood of Melchizedek. Before moving on to chapter 7, I would like to examine the reference to Melchizedek in the context of Hebrews 6:13-20.

The author begins this section of chapter 6 by taking us back to the days of Abraham. In that day, God made a promise to bless the descendants of Abraham and make them into a great nation.

13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, 14 saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you."

(Hebrews 6)

This blessing of Abraham was a choice God made of His own free will. He took an obscure person living in Ur and decided to reveal Himself to him and make his descendants into a mighty nation. Through this nation, God would demonstrate His character and purpose to the world.

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Notice, in Hebrews 6:13, that God swore this oath to Abraham by Himself. When human beings swear an oath, they do so with the backing of another person. The reason for this is because of human nature. Some people are not trustworthy, and to ensure that they will do what they say, they need to have someone to back them up. At other times, a human being needs a backer because of their frailty. For example, a man may swear to pay back a certain amount of money but then become sick or die. In this case, the individual backing him would take on the debt and pay the creditor.

God does not need to swear by anyone. His word is trustworthy. He cannot lie, nor can He fail in His promises because of weakness. God swore to Abraham by His character that He would be faithful to His promise. While Abraham likely felt quite unworthy of this promise, verse 15 tells us that He patiently waited to obtain it (Hebrews 6:15).

Hebrews 6:17 tells us that to convince Abraham and his descendants that this promise would not change, God guaranteed it with an oath:

17 So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath (Hebrews 6)

The author tells us in verse 18 that two “unchangeable things” guaranteed this oath.

18 so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. (Hebrews 6)

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Notice first in verse 18 the reference to the fact that God cannot lie. This is the first of the two “unchangeable things” guaranteeing the oath’s fulfillment. We can have “strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us” because the promise of that hope comes from a God who cannot lie. His Word is sure. No circumstance can prevent Him from accomplishing His purpose. There is nothing more certain than a promise from a God who cannot lie.

Verses nineteen and twenty reveal a second truth that guarantees the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham.

*19 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul,
a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain
(Hebrews 6)*

In Hebrews 6:19, the author tells us that we have a sure and steadfast anchor and a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain. The anchor secured a boat in the water. The boat owner would let down his or her anchor in the hope of fixing it to something that would keep the vessel from drifting. The anchor was only as good as what it was attached to. Notice in this case that the anchor entered the inner place behind the curtain. This is a reference to the Holy of Holies in the temple where the presence of God dwelled. In other words, the anchor was fixed to God Himself. There could be no greater security for a boat. Its anchor was attached to the immovable and all-powerful God.

Notice what the writer goes on to tell us about this Holy Place in verse 20:

*20 where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf,
having become a high priest forever after the order of
Melchizedek. (Hebrews 6)*

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Jesus went into the Holy Place as a high priest for us. He approached the Father and pulled down the curtain that separated us from Him. Because of His work, we now have access to the Father and all the blessings of heaven. Jesus is the anchor. He secures us to the Father and links us with an unbreakable chain to His promises. Nothing can separate us from God and His purpose. Jesus has secured this for us by His work on the cross.

There are two “unchangeable things” that assure us today. The first is the character of God, who cannot lie. The second is the work of His Son Jesus Christ, who anchors us to the Father and secures the promises of God by breaking down the obstacle of sin.

Notice what Hebrews 6:20 tells us about the Lord Jesus who secured these promises. The verse tells us that he went before us as a forerunner, “having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” There are two details I want to point out from this phrase.

First, this phrase tells us that Jesus became a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. The Old Testament priests only served for a short time. Death would come to all of them. Death is the fruit of sin in this world. Every priest in Aaron’s order was under this curse. They ministered on behalf of God’s people, but death, as the fruit of sin, still came to every one of them. Not one of them was able to overcome death.

The priesthood of Jesus, after the order of Melchizedek, however, was not subject to death. The Lord Jesus did what no priest of Aaron’s order could do –He gained victory over sin and death. His priesthood will never end. There is nothing

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that can stop His ministry on our behalf. Throughout all eternity, He will be our great high priest. He will be our anchor, securing our connection to the Father. Nothing will ever separate us from God, for Jesus' intercessory priesthood is eternal. His life pleads for us before the Father. His work continues to keep us. His ministry for us as a priest of the order of Melchizedek is forever. Throughout all eternity, He will be our anchor, guarantee and strong encouragement.

Second, the context of Hebrews 6:20 and its reference to Melchizedek's order is the promise of God to Abraham. That promise was to bless him and make him into a mighty nation. As a chosen nation of God, they would be a blessing to the entire world. Salvation would spread from them to the ends of the earth. The Messiah would come through them. Out of Israel would come a new priest from an ancient order—the order of Melchizedek. When Aaron's priesthood came to an end, another priestly order would take its place. This priesthood would not serve Israel only but the Gentiles as well.

The High Priest of Melchizedek's order would, according to Hebrews 6:19-20, enter the inner place behind the curtain and secure our position with the Father. He would tear down the curtain that separated the Father from His people and guarantee their relationship with Him forever. He would fulfill the promise God made to Abraham—to make his nation great and through them bring the world into a saving knowledge of their Creator.

The order of Melchizedek would accomplish what the order of Aaron could not accomplish. Aaron prepared the way for this new order. He and his descendants revealed the problem of sin and the need for a victory over it. Melchizedek's order

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brought the solution through the Lord Jesus, who became its great high priest. His ministry fulfilled God's promise to bring blessing through Abraham's descendants to the ends of the earth. Jesus, the high priest after Melchizedek's order, now ministers to believers around the world. The priesthood of Melchizedek is worldwide. Jesus, as its priest, ministers to believers in Africa, Asia, America, Europe, Latin America and the farthest reaches of the earth. Through His priesthood, people of all nationalities and languages are entering a relationship with God.

The priesthood of Melchizedek was the plan of God from eternity past. Aaron's priesthood was temporary. Aaron and his descendants prepared the way for a greater priesthood – the worldwide priesthood of Jesus after Melchizedek's order.

For Prayer:

Father, as we examine Hebrews 6 in its context, we see how You promised to bless the world through Abraham's children. We cannot imagine a greater blessing than to be freed from the effects of sin and secured in an eternal relationship with our Creator. Thank you for what You taught us through the Aaronic priesthood about sin and its impact on our lives. We recognize Lord, that even though Aaron and his descendants ministered faithfully in Your name, they were themselves, overcome by sin and death. Thank you that the Lord Jesus, as a priest after Melchizedek's order, overcame sin and death. Thank you that He is a priest forever, not just in Israel but to the far corners of the earth. Thank you that under the priesthood of Jesus, there is victory. Thank you that Melchizedek's order is a worldwide order guaranteeing what

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the priesthood of Aaron could not—hope beyond the veil and an intimate relationship with our Creator.

Chapter 5 - A Tithe to Melchizedek

Hebrews 7 gives us the most detail of any passage in the Bible about Melchizedek. It is also the most complicated passage to understand. The chapter is divided into two sections. In this chapter, we will examine the first of these sections –verses one to nine.

Verse one begins with a brief description of the encounter between Melchizedek and Abraham.

1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him (Hebrews 7)

The writer focuses our attention on a particular incident that took place during that encounter between these two men.

2 and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. (Hebrews 7)

Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe of everything he had brought back from his conquest. The author draws an important conclusion from this in verse 4:

4 See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils!

Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation. Jews held him in high regard because of his role as a founding father. Abraham, however, humbled himself before Melchizedek and surrendered one-tenth of all the spoils of war to him. As great

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as Abraham was, he bowed the knee to Melchizedek. The writer of Hebrews explains this “greatness” of Melchizedek in more detail in verses two and three.

King of Righteousness

2 He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, (Hebrews 7)

The name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness.” Notice that the writer tells us that Melchizedek “is” by translating his name, king of righteousness. The use of the word “is” conveys the idea that this was not just a name. Melchizedek lived up to his title. He lived a righteous life. He served the Most High God with sincerity of heart and deed.

King of Salem

The second point made in verse 2 relates to the translation of the city name where Melchizedek reigned:

2 and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. (Hebrews 7)

The word “Salem” means peace. Melchizedek was king of peace. This peace could refer to peace with other human beings or peace with God. It likely refers to both in this case. By translating his name and the name of the city where he reigned, Melchizedek was a righteous king who reigned over a city of peace.

His Genealogy

In verse 3, we discover that Melchizedek was without father, mother or genealogy.

3 He is without father or mother or genealogy (Hebrews 7)

While there are many ways to understand this phrase, it may be best to interpret it in the context of his priesthood. One of the requirements for any priest of the Old Testament was that they prove their ancestry. Their family line was to be traced back to Aaron and the tribe of Levi. Only the descendants of the tribe of Levi could be priests according to the Law of Moses.

In the book of Nehemiah, we have a record of those who returned to Israel after the exile. Among them were the names of priests whose ancestry could not be proven:

63 Also, of the priests: the sons of Hobaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai (who had taken a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by their name). 64 These sought their registration among those enrolled in the genealogies, but it was not found there, so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. 65 The governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food until a priest with Urim and Thummim should arise. (Nehemiah 7)

These individuals were excluded from the priesthood because they could not prove their family line.

In Melchizedek's case, however, no genealogy back up his claim to the priesthood. His line could not be traced to a family of priests. This shows us that he was not a priest according to the Law of Moses.

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Hebrews 7:3 describes Melchizedek and his priesthood as having neither beginning of days nor end of life.

*3 having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.
(Hebrews 7)*

Some assume from this that Melchizedek had no beginning or end—in other words, he was the Lord Jesus Christ revealed in the days of Abraham. The problem with this is that he was an actual king and priest who lived in Abraham's day ruling over Salem. He does not just appear to Abraham but lived on the earth and ruled a physical city.

It is best to understand Hebrews 7:3 to refer to the priesthood of Melchizedek. As a priest of Melchizedek's order, he was part of a priesthood that could not be traced to any human origin. It was a priesthood that God had established from eternity past and would have no end. In other words, Melchizedek's priesthood was in the heart of God from before the beginning of days. God had a plan for the Lord Jesus to be High Priest of this order, reigning as King of Righteousness in a city of peace. This priesthood would do what the Levitical priesthood could not do—it would restore and maintain peace with God throughout all eternity.

Notice also in verse 3 that Melchizedek resembled the Son of God. This is an important statement. It shows us that he is a picture of an even greater priest—the Lord Jesus. His name, king of righteousness, looked forward to the true King of Righteousness. His city, the City of Peace, prophetically pictured the Lord Jesus's work that brought us peace.

In verse 5 writer returns to the tithe Abraham gave Melchizedek. He reminds us that Levitical priests of the Old

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Testament collected tithes from the people of God (the descendants of Abraham).

5 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 also are descended from Abraham. (Hebrews 7)

By offering Melchizedek a tithe, Abraham treated him as a priest even though he was not a descendant of Levi.

6 But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. (Hebrews 7)

God chose to reveal Himself to the Jews. The Gentile was considered pagan and unworthy of God. They were permitted into the tabernacle, lest they defile it. Abraham, however, offered his tithe to a Gentile priest. Melchizedek received this tithe and blessed Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation.

What does this incident teach us? Listen to the conclusion of the writer of the book of Hebrews in verses seven to ten:

7 It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. 8 In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. 9 One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, 10 for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him. (Hebrews 7)

To understand what the writer is saying, we need to focus on the priesthood they represent. Hebrews 7 compares the priesthood of Melchizedek with the priesthood of the Old Testament Levitical order. By offering his tithe, Abraham

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recognized the legitimacy of the priesthood of Melchizedek. Verses nine and ten shows us that Abraham represented the Levitical priesthood that was to come:

9 One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, 10 for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him. (Hebrews 7)

What we have in Hebrews 7:1-10 is the meeting of two future priesthoods. Melchizedek, from whose priesthood the Lord Jesus would rise, met Abraham, the father of the Levitical priesthood. What happened when these two individuals met? As the representative of Levi's priesthood, Abraham bowed the knee and offered a tithe to Melchizedek, the representative of the Lord Jesus. Notice what verse 7 tells us:

7 It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. (Hebrews 7)

The priesthood of Melchizedek was a greater priesthood than the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament. Levi bowed the knee to the Lord Jesus. Melchizedek blessed Abraham to accomplish its purpose until the time was right for Melchizedek's priesthood to appear.

Hebrews 7:8 further compares the two priesthoods by saying:

8 In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. (Hebrews 7)

The Levitical priests were mortal. They acted on behalf of God and received the tithes of the people. The High Priest of the order of Melchizedek, however, lives forever and cannot die. The Lord Jesus, as High Priest, has conquered death. He is

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an eternal priest who reigns and ministers on our behalf throughout all eternity.

Abraham represented the Old Testament priesthood that would come from his line. Melchizedek represented a priesthood of the Lord Jesus. These two representatives met face to face and made a prophetic statement to the world. Two priesthoods would arise. One would be served by mortal men. The other would be eternal, with a priest who had no beginning or end. The temporary priesthood would give way to the eternal, and the High Priest of Melchizedek's order would reign forever, ministering to His people.

For Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you that You had a purpose before time to reign as a priest over Your people. We thank you also for the lessons you taught us through the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament. You showed us how our efforts to secure our own salvation were futile. You helped us to see that even these Old Testament priests were overcome by sin and death. Their sacrifices did not take away sin. Thank you that you provided a new priesthood in the order of Melchizedek. This was a priesthood to whom the order of Levi itself bowed in respect and worship, for it was a priesthood that did what they could not do. It secured forgiveness and power over sin and death. Thank you Lord God for the picture we have in Hebrews 7 of Abraham, the father of the Old Testament priests, bowing down in reverent respect to a greater priesthood. Teach us Lord to cast aside all effort to secure our own salvation and righteousness through our actions. Help us to put our full confidence in the Lord Jesus as the

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fulfillment of the prophetic encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek. Thank you that in the Lord Jesus, a priest of the order of Melchizedek, we can have complete victory and hope of eternal life.

Chapter 6 - A Better Priesthood

In the first ten verses of Hebrews 7, the author spoke about Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek. By offering this tithe to Melchizedek, Abraham recognized the legitimacy of his priesthood and submitted to it. In verses eleven to twenty-eight, the writer shows us the need for a priesthood superior to Aaron's.

Notice how he begins in verse eleven:

11 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? (Hebrews 7)

The writer to the Hebrews reminds us that the Old Testament priesthood would have been sufficient if it brought perfection. The problem of humanity is that it is not perfect. We are incapable of serving God and His requirements without failure. We regularly fall short of His standard in deed, word and thought. More importantly, we were born in sin, and all our actions are tainted with the rottenness of that sin. We cannot please God as a result.

The Levitical order of the Old Testament offered sacrifices to appease the wrath of God, but these sacrifices did not change the heart. No matter how many animals were offered, humanity continued to fall short. These countless sacrifices did not resolve the problem of sin and our broken relationship

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with God. Like taking a painkiller for cancer, there was temporary relief, but the underlying issue was not addressed. The deadly disease of sin would ultimately take our life. We needed a better solution. The Old Testament Levitical priesthood failed to remove sin and restore humankind to a relationship with God. The answer would come in the form of a new priesthood from the order of Melchizedek.

It was not just the priesthood that needed to change, but also the whole system of regulations and sacrifices. Melchizedek was not a priest over the old order of the Old Testament. He brought with Him a whole new way. Hebrews 7:12 explains this when it says:

12 For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. (Hebrews 7)

The writer to the Hebrews makes it clear the order of Melchizedek brings a change of law. In fact, the existence of this priesthood broke the law of the Old Testament.

13 For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. (Hebrews 7)

Melchizedek was not a descendant of the tribe of Levite. According to the law of Moses, no one could serve as a priest unless they were part of the tribe of Levi. The Lord Jesus was born in the tribe of Judah, not the tribe of Levi. According to the Law of Moses, He had no right to be a priest in Israel.

A Better Priesthood

How did Jesus become a priest if He had no right to do so according to the Law of Moses? Verses fifteen and sixteen address this when they say:

15 This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, 16 who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.

Jesus did not become a priest according to the Law of Moses but on the basis of His life. Hebrews 7:16 describes this as the “*power of an indestructible life.*” It was based on this indestructible life that Jesus became a priest of the order of Melchizedek. Remember that the Bible teaches us that the “wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). The life of Jesus was “indestructible.” In other words, death had no power over Him. The reason death had no power was because he lived a perfect life. He conquered sin and death. He was the only one who was able to defeat these great human enemies. His priesthood was established on this basis. He became a priest not because of His ancestry or according to the Old Testament law, but because He conquered sin and death.

His indestructible life enables Jesus to be our priest forever. Death had no dominion over Him. He will be our priest forever:

17 For it is witnessed of him, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”

The writer to the Hebrews draws some important conclusions about Jesus as Priest of Melchizedek’s order in the concluding verses of this chapter. He begins by telling us that Jesus is the guarantor of a better covenant:

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22 This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

Jesus brings with Him a new and better covenant than the Old Testament covenant. We are no longer under Mosaic law with all its regulations and sacrifices. Jesus established a new and better covenant. He guarantees the effectiveness of this covenant to forgive sin and bring us into a relationship with the Father. He can do this because He has personally defeated sin and death and acts now as our anchor, securing us to the Father.

A Permanent Priesthood

According to Hebrews 7:23, death kept the Old Testament priests from continuing in office. Death, as the fruit of sin, took their lives. Not one of these priests overcome the power of death. Jesus, on the other hand, by His indestructible life and victory over sin, continues to be our priest forever.

23 The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, 24 but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. (Hebrews 7)

Throughout all eternity, Jesus will be our guarantor of eternal life and forgiveness. As long as He lives, our salvation and eternity are assured.

A Better Priesthood

Salvation to the Uttermost

Because sin and death have no dominion over Christ, He will be a priest forever. As long as He serves as our priest, we can know complete and total victory.

25 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. (Hebrews 7)

Throughout all eternity, Jesus will be our guarantor of eternal life and forgiveness. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that “he is able to save to the uttermost.” The word “uttermost” in the Greek language can be translated by “complete,” “total,” “entire,” “forever.” There can be no greater assurance than this.

A Perfect High Priest

As High Priest of the order of Melchizedek, unlike the imperfect priests of the tribe of Levi, Jesus is perfect in every way

26 For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. (Hebrews 7)

Because He is perfect, the Lord Jesus does not need to make daily sacrifices for His sin. Nor does He have to make sacrifices for the sins of His people. He offered Himself once for all time, and that one sacrifice put an end to all other sacrifices. His perfect and sinless body was laid down for us and covered the penalty for all sin for all time.

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27 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.

(Hebrews 7)

The best the Law of Moses could do was appoint sinful priests to offer sacrifices that could never guarantee eternal salvation. According to Hebrews 7:28, however, an oath was given to appoint a Son to be a perfect priest forever.

28 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.

(Hebrews 7)

That oath came in the form of a prophetic word that began in the book of Genesis when Abraham met Melchizedek, the King of Righteousness, who reigned over the city of Peace (Salem). That promise was repeated in Psalm 110:4 when David prophesied that a priest would come after Melchizedek's order. He would do a mighty work in the lives of His people, causing them to surrender willingly to their God. Under this priest, they would be dressed in garments of holiness and experience the dew of youth. God gave these prophetic promises as an oath to His people and fulfilled them in the person and work of the Lord Jesus, who is a priest forever after Melchizedek's order.

For Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for your priesthood. Thank you that you came to establish a priesthood that cannot fail to guarantee eternal life and salvation to all who submit to You and Your

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work. Thank you for the perfect life You lived and the victory You obtained for us over sin and death. Teach us to put our full confidence in You alone for our salvation and eternal life. Thank you that You will be our priest throughout eternity. Our dependence on You will not cease throughout all eternity. You alone will be our hope of forgiveness and eternal life. Thank you that You live an indestructible life, and in this, we place our trust. Our only hope and guarantee are in your life and priesthood alone.

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