

Message Twelve: Melchizedek, King/Priest

Hebrews 7:1-28 — Understanding Hebrews Series, Part 12

By Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

Outside this letter, Scripture says almost nothing about Melchizedek — four verses in Genesis, one line in a psalm, five verses total in the whole Bible. And yet the author of Hebrews already told us that he had "much to say" about this man, more than his readers were ready to hear. Now, finally, he says it. An entire chapter, built almost entirely out of what a handful of ancient verses do and don't tell us, becomes the clearest picture in Scripture of what Christ's still-future reign will actually look like.

I. A Man Named Twice, Explained at Length

"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated 'king of righteousness,' and then also king of Salem, meaning 'king of peace,' without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually" (Hebrews 7:1-3).

Two titles, translated for us right in the text: king of righteousness, and king of peace. Those two qualities show up together across Scripture whenever the coming Messianic Era is in view — righteousness and peace "have kissed each other" (Psalm 85:10); "the work of righteousness will be peace" (Isaiah 32:17); "the kingdom of God is... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). Righteousness and peace cannot fully coexist in the world as it presently runs. But they will, completely, under the reign of the greater King these two titles describe.

II. Without Father, Without Mother

Now notice what the text does not say about Melchizedek — no father, no mother, no genealogy, no recorded beginning or end. Read carelessly, this can sound like a claim that Melchizedek was some kind of superhuman or angelic being. He wasn't. He was a real man, born and buried like anyone else. What Hebrews is doing here is drawing meaning from silence — from exactly what Moses, writing under inspiration centuries earlier, chose not to record. No birth is mentioned. No death is mentioned. No lineage is given. And that deliberate gap in the record becomes the very material the author uses: a priesthood with no recorded beginning and no recorded end, on the page, "made like the Son of God" — resembling Him, not equaling Him — pointing forward to a priesthood that genuinely will have neither predecessor nor successor.

III. The Lesser Blessed by the Greater

"Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils... Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him" (Hebrews 7:4, 9-10). Abraham — the man to whom God's own promises had been given — paid tribute to Melchizedek, not the other way around. "The lesser is blessed by the better" (v. 7). And this happened generations before Levi, Aaron's own tribe, ever existed. In a real sense, the priesthood that would one day descend from Abraham's own body had already, through Abraham, deferred to Melchizedek before it was ever born.

But Melchizedek didn't only receive from Abraham — he brought out bread and wine to bless him. And that detail points forward to a future banquet. Isaiah pictures it: "the LORD of hosts will make for all people a feast of choice pieces... of well-refined wines" (Isaiah 25:6). Jesus Himself pointed to it at His last meal with His disciples: "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:29), and promised them, "I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom" (Luke 22:29-30). The greater King will one day serve His own people bread and wine at His table — exactly as the greater once served the lesser, long before, outside a captured city.

IV. A Priesthood That Requires a Change of Law

"If perfection were through the Levitical priesthood... what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar" (Hebrews 7:11-14).

Christ came from Judah, not Levi. Under the old order, that alone would have permanently disqualified Him from priesthood. The fact that He is nonetheless a priest — and a greater one — proves the old order itself was never meant to be final. "The law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God" (Hebrews 7:18-19).

V. Sworn, Not Merely Appointed

Here is a difference no Levitical priest could claim: "He was not made priest without an oath (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: 'The LORD has sworn and will not relent, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek")... Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant" (Hebrews 7:20-22). Every Aaronic priest simply took up the office by birthright. Christ's priesthood is backed by God's own sworn oath — the same category of unbreakable guarantee we already saw undergirding Abraham's promises.

VI. A Priesthood That Cannot Be Interrupted

"There were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:23-25). Every high priest in Aaron's line eventually died and had to be replaced — an endless, unbroken chain of interruptions. Christ's priesthood has no such gap, because He has no successor. And Jesus, unlike those priests who *did* have to offer up sacrifices for their own sins as well as the people's, does not need daily to offer up sacrifices for Himself, "for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself" (Hebrews 7:26-27). "The law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever" (Hebrews 7:28).

VII. Why Two Priesthoods?

So why did God establish two separate priesthoods at all, rather than moving directly to the greater one? Because the priesthood of Aaron served a real, necessary, but temporary purpose — a bridge spanning the exact distance between Israel's redemption out of Egypt and Christ's first coming, providing ongoing cleansing for an already-redeemed but still-sinning people during that whole interval. It was never meant to be the destination. It was always subordinate to, and pointing toward, the priesthood Melchizedek had already foreshadowed centuries before Aaron was even born.

This is the same distinction we have been tracing since we first studied milk and meat. Aaron's priesthood is the elementary provision — Christ's present ministry, cleansing and sustaining believers now. Melchizedek's priesthood is the meat — Christ's still-future ministry, when He comes forth not merely to intercede but to reign.

VIII. Applying "Melchizedek, King/Priest"

Your present High Priest is not a placeholder serving out a temporary post. He is sworn in by an oath God will not take back, permanent in a way no human priest could ever be, and fully able to save "to the uttermost" everyone who comes to God through Him — not partially, not conditionally, but completely, because He is always, right now, interceding on your behalf.

And the road doesn't end at the mercy seat. The same King who once received a tenth from Abraham outside a captured city has already promised His own people a seat at His table, in His kingdom, drinking the cup new with Him. The present cleansing and the future feast belong to the very same Priest — sworn once, secured forever.

Looking Ahead

Next, we follow the letter into chapters eight and nine, where the author turns from the person of our High Priest to the place of His ministry — the heavenly sanctuary itself, and the new covenant He mediates there.