

## A Permanent Priesthood for All

### Hebrews 7:1-28 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, <sup>2</sup> and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, the name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” <sup>3</sup> Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever. <sup>4</sup> Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! <sup>5</sup> Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, from their fellow Israelites—even though they also are descended from Abraham. <sup>6</sup> This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. <sup>7</sup> And without doubt the lesser is blessed by the greater. <sup>8</sup> In the one case, the tenth is collected by people who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. <sup>9</sup> One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, <sup>10</sup> because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor. <sup>11</sup> If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood—and indeed the law given to the people established that priesthood—why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? <sup>12</sup> For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also. <sup>13</sup> He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. <sup>14</sup> For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. <sup>15</sup> And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, <sup>16</sup> one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. <sup>17</sup> For it is declared: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” <sup>18</sup> The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless <sup>19</sup> (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God. <sup>20</sup> And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, <sup>21</sup> but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever.’ ” <sup>22</sup> Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant. <sup>23</sup> Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; <sup>24</sup> but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. <sup>25</sup> Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. <sup>26</sup> Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. <sup>27</sup> Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. <sup>28</sup> For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

Priests in the Old Testament were a big deal. They offered sacrifices to God on behalf of sinners for their sins. They interceded, prayed for the people every morning and every night, helping bear their burdens. They taught people God’s Word, what God required of them, how they should live, that he demands perfection. By default, this also meant that priests judged people, judged them by the Word of God, whether or not they were living up to it. They also blessed people, passing God’s favor and good things to them.

I’m probably biased because I’m a pastor, but these are some appealing things to get to do. Be the person who interacts with God, prays for others, offers sacrifices for them, teaches them about God, blesses them. And while some of you are probably thinking, “No thank you. That’s not for me,” there are others of you who see the priesthood and want it.

Maybe you want it because of the power it affords, the power to communicate to God, the power to sacrifice for someone else, the power to pray for others, to seemingly have a more direct line to God to get your prayers answered more expediently. Maybe you want the power to forgive. In fact, you may already be trying to take the position of a priest with judgment by deciding who’s worthy of your forgiveness, have they shown that they are sorry enough? Have they come to me and asked for it? Have they paid enough back in kindness or even in money to earn it from me? Or we put ourselves on the other side and don’t want any penalties for anyone, and judge that everyone should be forgiven immediately, that it doesn’t even matter if they want forgiveness or know forgiveness, because that would be the truly loving thing to do, right? Do I want these things because I desire power, desire control?

Then again, do I really want to be the final judge? What if someone is upset about me with their judgement? What if they say that I was too harsh or too lenient? What if I make a judgment but don’t have all the facts? What if I make a judgment and they use that forgiveness to sin again or to not listen to me? What if they throw all my sins, all my shortcomings, all my failures in my face? What if they do that when I’m trying to bless them, give them a good thing? Are all my blessings tainted with my sin too, that they are not good enough, not really blessings? Priests are supposed to live a higher standard, be pure and blameless, above reproach.

And on top of that, can I really make the sacrifices for other people? Priests offered sacrifices for other people's sins, not just their own. What is required to pay for sin? With all the Old Testament laws and the Levitical priesthood, it became very clear that God says that the payment of my sin requires blood, that something or someone has to die for every little thing I do wrong. Whether or not you get squeamish about killing animals, the bigger thing weighing on my conscience is that this death is because of my sins, that it's my fault. Can I do any killing knowing that this is dying because of me, for me?

Then there are the duties of praying every morning and every night. It's hard enough to remember to say my own prayers, but now carry on my shoulders the prayers of the whole community, that I'm praying for every person. Where does that even end? There are not enough seconds in a day to offer all those prayers!

How about priests teaching the Word of God? Maybe that thing called a Bible is really intimidating to you. It's a big book! And what if you get it wrong? What if you tell someone the wrong thing and they go and live with the wrong idea and sin against God over and over again because of me? Plus, let's face it, I don't understand everything in the Bible. I know that I wouldn't be able to get it all right all the time. I'm going to fail at teaching that.

While there are appealing things to being a part of the priesthood, being a priest, none of us measure up. We are not good enough. We can't offer all the sacrifices. We can't pray all the prayers. We can't always teach the Word of God rightly and truly. Can I even bless anyone knowing how sinful I am and that I fall horribly short of God's standards? What good is my word? I am not enough. I can't follow enough laws, make enough vows, fulfill enough ordinances to be what God requires. Try all I can, but I'm never there. The law made nothing perfect. (verse 19)

We need a priest instead of being a priest. We need someone to be a priest who is different from us. We need a priest and a priesthood that is better than us. This is why the book of Hebrews in the Bible is so incredible. There is a whole priesthood that is superior. It comes in the form of the person named Melchizedek.

Melchizedek is in the Bible very little and yet means so much. His first appearance is just 3 verses in Genesis chapter 14 during the life of Abraham, round about 2000 B.C. His name, Melchizedek, literally means "King of righteousness." This means that he is the king of being right with God, of being upright. He was also the "king of Salem," which means "king of peace." This King of Righteousness and King of Peace was also priest of God Most High. "He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything." (verses 1,2) Abraham and Melchizedek worshiped the same God even as Abraham gave greater honor to Melchizedek since Melchizedek blessed Abraham and Abraham tithed to him.

It gets more interesting when you realize that we never hear of Melchizedek's origin nor his death nor his family. It's like he always existed and continues to exist. "Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever." (verse 3) There is no other person on earth like this. But that is pointed out so that we see a priest and a priesthood that is far better than anything we could ever do or ever be a part of. Melchizedek resembles the Son of God, the one about whom around 1000 B.C. King David prophesied that a king will judge the nations who is also a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek foreshadows Jesus, a different kind of priest for a different kind of priesthood.

All other priests made sacrifices for their sins day after day, week after week, year after year. But all those sacrifices were never enough. Jesus offered himself as the sacrifice, something no priest has ever done. "Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself." (verses 26-27) He is the perfect sacrifice for our sins, applied to all of us because he's not a sinful man, but because he is God who can actually pay for everyone's sins all at one time and remove them from us. This means that you and I will be judged not guilty before God of any sin, any mistake, any shortcoming. We are cleared of all charged by this priest!

Even after sacrificing his life for our sins, Jesus did not remain in that death; he rose from the dead never to die again. This Melchizedek has an indestructible life. "Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." (verses 23-25) Jesus lives a permanent priesthood for us, always interceding for us, never tiring of praying for us, never lacking in the time needed to pray for all people all over the world all the time. And we know that all of his prayers for us are heard and answered because he is the perfect priest who sacrificed himself for us once for all and still lives forever.

Jesus is a superior priest yet again because he was not born into this priesthood as the Old Testament Levitical priests were. He swore an oath to do God's will, to be his priest. "Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant." (verse 22) This is what Jesus chose. It wasn't a two-sided covenant where we do our part and earn God's favor or his blessings. Instead, he

graciously gives all these good things one-sidedly out of love, all done for us. By his work, his life, he guarantees that we are complete and perfect before God right now. It is finished!

Jesus is the perfect priest and the perfect priesthood. He has done all the things for us. He blesses you. He prays and intercedes for you. He sacrificed himself in your place once for all. He makes you holy. He is your righteousness. He clothes you with his perfection. He is your peace with God. He bears all your burdens. He heals you. He comforts you. He wipes away all your tears with his indestructible life. He gives you the sure and certain hope of eternal life with him. He withholds no good thing from you but blesses you with every spiritual gift. He brings us into God's presence forever. He does this permanently and always for us. This is the best priest we could ever have. We trade him for no one else. You, Jesus, are our priest forever! Amen.

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