

WitnessKit 3

God and Religions

Integrating the Worldviews of the Old and New
Testaments,

Guided by the Book

Letter to the Hebrews

Class 20

Hebrews Chapter 7—Melchizedek and Building Spiritual Muscles

I Thessalonians 5:21



But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good.

Hebrews 4:14-16

14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens,
Jesus the Son of God,
let us hold fast *our* confession.

15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses,
but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*,
yet without sin.

16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace,
that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in
time of need. (NKJV)

Now for some solid food at our dinner.

In our previous lesson from Hebrews chapter 6, we defined various topics as “milk of the word,” suitable for “babes” in Christ. In chapter 7, the author of Hebrews serves solid food suitable for building spiritual muscle.

Remember in the previous passage, that the author of Hebrews wants the readers to become mature in their faith. “Solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”

Hebrews 5:14

Now for some solid food at our dinner.

Being able to discern the difference between good and evil is a clue of spiritual maturity, and also a clue about the rightness of a religion. True religion will teach its followers to discern good and evil properly.

A religion which is foggy about good and evil is not in tune with God.

The topic of Hebrews chapter 7 is Messiah's priesthood. We want to read the chapter and ask ourselves, "What does this have to do with spiritual maturity?"

Now for some solid food at our dinner.

The question the chapter answers: Why did God, through the Psalmist's work, describe Messiah's priesthood as "after the order of Melchizedek?"

What does this obscure reference, 1000 years older than the New Testament, mean? Why is it an example of "solid food of the word?"

Does it have anything to do with discerning the difference between good and evil?

We can sense the perfect harmony of Scripture

The perfect harmony of Scripture

By understanding this reference to Melchizedek.

- 1. Melchizedek's identity**
- 2. Melchizedek's importance in his generation**
- 3. Melchizedek's importance to us**

1. Melchizedek's identity



Melchizedek is mentioned only three times in all of Scripture.

The first mention, Genesis 14:18, was written about 1400-1500 BC regarding an event that took place about 400 years earlier.

The second reference is in Psalm 110:4, which was written around 1000 BC.

The third reference is in Hebrews chapters 5-7, written before 70 AD. This obscure king, hidden in the mists of antiquity, has meaning for us today, as the author of Hebrews explains.

1. Melchizedek's identity

Genesis 14 reports that 5 Mesopotamian kings and their armies attacked five cities of the plain of Canaan during Abraham's era. Abraham's nephew and his family lived in one of the cities. (The Ebla archives from northern Syria refer to the same five cities of the plain: Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela or Zoar, in the same sequence. The Ebla tablets are older than Abraham's era, since Ebla was destroyed in 2250 BC.) Abraham's era was around 1900 BC.

1. Melchizedek's identity



The kings of the cities of the plain lost the battle. Their cities were overthrown by these marauding armies, and the armies looted the cities. Abraham's relative Lot was taken captive by the Mesopotamian kings, along with Sodom's food supply and all that belonged to Lot, including his family.

When Abraham learned his relative was taken captive, he gathered a small army of his employees and neighbors, and went to rescue Lot and his family.

Notice Abraham's courage in this battle where he was outnumbered by a victorious army.

Abraham was successful.

- Abraham rescued the captives and brought back all the stolen goods.
- It was customary for the victors to share the spoils.
 - Instead, Abraham paid a tithe of the spoils to Melchizedek, King of Salem, who was priest of the Most High God.
 - Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and praised God for delivering the enemy into Abraham's hand. This small volunteer force of friends and neighbors and employees defeated foreign invaders.

1. Melchizedek's identity

Abraham allowed the neighbors to keep their part of the spoils.

After freeing the captives, Abraham gave his entire remaining share (after the tithe) back to the king of Sodom, because he did not want that king—of a city described as wicked—to think he had made Abraham rich.

The word “wicked” includes a range of ideas from evil to treacherous to deadly. A review of the Biblical information about the pagan religions of that region reveals that those religions—supposed to guide the people to choose good over evil—involved all kinds of immorality and even murder.

Discerning Good and Evil



Abraham's life was far from perfect. His family was involved in polygamy, divorce, concubinage, and surrogate motherhood. Archaeology reveals that those matters reflected the culture of the Hurrians where his family had lived for a time. The fact that Abraham rejected wealth from Sodom's king shows that its wickedness went far beyond the failures of the culture of Haran and Ur.

People are influenced by the cultures around them. Abraham refused to be influenced by Sodom. We all need to become wise in discerning the difference between good and evil.

The Tithe

- Abraham was thankful that God had spared his relatives and had given him victory over the foreign kings against all odds. Melchizedek brought out a celebration meal and gave credit to God's help in that battle.
- Abraham gave a tithe of the spoils to Melchizedek, King of Salem. Abraham's action implies the righteousness of Melchizedek, in contrast to the other wicked king.
- In Genesis 15 God expressed that He was pleased with the direction Abraham's life was going.

Hebrews Chapter 7

- ¹ 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,
- ² 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," ³ 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.

1. Melchizedek's identity



Melchizedek's name and political office were symbolic of the priestly work of Messiah.

His name means *king of righteousness*. His office as king of Salem means *king of peace*.

No genealogy or parentage is written in Scripture for him, and that absence is symbolic of the perpetual nature of Messiah's priesthood—from eternity past through eternity future.

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2. Melchizedek's importance in his generation

Abraham was considered one of the greatest men in his generation, as the Bible evaluates lives, because

- ▣ God gave him righteousness in response to his faith,
- ▣ And God promised to make him a great nation and a multitude of nations,
- ▣ and God promised to make him and his family a blessing to the whole world.

□ Yet Melchizedek can be considered greater than Abraham, according to Hebrews 7.

2. Melchizedek's importance in his generation

Melchizedek can be considered greater than Abraham for these reasons:

- Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek.
- Melchizedek blessed Abraham.
- The author of Hebrews explains that these two actions demonstrate Melchizedek's greatness before God. The greater blesses the lesser. The lesser gives tithes to the greater.

Hebrews Chapter 7

- **⁴ Now consider how great this man *was*, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. ⁵ And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham; ⁶ but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.**

Hebrews Chapter 7

- **⁷ Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better. ⁸ Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he *receives them*, of whom it is witnessed that he lives. ⁹ Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, ¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.**

2. Melchizedek's importance in his generation

Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. The Levitical priesthood came later, from the lineage of Abraham's son Levi.

1. Abraham was more important than Levi, being his great-grandfather and due Levi's respect. Abraham founded the family of Israel, and Levi was leader of one tribe in that family.
2. Melchizedek was more important than Abraham, as shown by the fact that he blessed Abraham and by the fact that Abraham gave him tithes.
3. If Messiah's priesthood is "of the order of Melchizedek," by this chain of reasoning it is more important than the Levitical priesthood.

"Messiah is a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

2. Melchizedek's importance in his generation

- The people of Israel had a obligation to respect the work of the Levitical priesthood. They had an obligation not to allow people to serve as priests in their temple who were not appropriately qualified by being members of the family of Levi.
- The Roman overlords, at the time Hebrews was written, desired to bestow political power on their favorites, including the office of high priest. The people had an obligation before God to respect His system of priestly requirements above the Romans'.
- If Messiah is acceptable as priest, not being of the family of Levi, a Scriptural basis is needed. A Scriptural basis is right. The passage in the Psalms about Melchizedek provides that Scriptural basis.

2. Melchizedek's importance in his generation

- This meets a need for consistency among all the portions of the Scriptures. Truth is self-consistent.
- Instead of viewing this matter as a technical detail, we should see it as a way the Scriptures perfectly fit together. Even little details can witness about God's concern for the truth.
- This is a character issue with God. He wants us to pursue truth, and not to follow false religions. He makes that pursuit fruitful by providing this amazing Bible, where little details set apart by hundreds or even thousands of years fit together perfectly.

Truth



- The consistency of God's word is important to God. The consistency of God's word is important to us in the process of discerning good and evil.
- Because the little details fit together over thousands of years, we can search for real answers about right and wrong in God's word. We do not have to jump to conclusions about issues. We can search for answers until we find the answers that are consistent with the entire Book.

Truth

- Sometimes people will take a verse here or there to support a false view of right and wrong. We can keep searching for the real answer, which will be consistent with all Scripture as a whole.
- Sometimes people think right and wrong are so hard to figure out that they have to take a human expert's word for it, rather than searching for themselves.
- The Bible supports prayerfully searching for oneself in its pages until a clear conclusion is found. Jesus is our High Priest. His Holy Spirit is our Counselor who guides us into all truth. Read these passages for confirmation: Acts 17:10-12, John 16:5-15, Jeremiah 31:33-34.

Superficial Reading is Discouraged.

- The Bible is organized around God's commands, but not all commands are universals. Some are particulars for a time and place, which are consistent with universals, given the specific situation. For example, some of the harsh laws of the Old Testament are particulars for dealing with the local form of idolatry that involved immorality and murder. They key upon the universals regarding "You shall not murder."
- If we superimpose our current view of issues over the Scriptures, we sometimes misunderstand what they are saying.

Superficial Reading is Discouraged.

- The example of the importance of Melchizedek in the tiny details of Scripture suggests to us that...
 - Superficial reading is not enough to fully understand the difference between good and evil. We have to work to put the ideas together properly... To “rightly divide the word of truth” as the King James Version expresses 2 Timothy 2:15.
- The example of Melchizedek also reveals that there are universals that transcend culture. Culture is not adequate to determine right from wrong. The Hurrian Culture was not adequate, nor was the culture of Sodom.

Superficial Reading is Discouraged.

- If a philosophy of life says “Culture defines morality,” that will not be an adequate way to understand right from wrong. That view carries huge danger of failure.
- The murderous idolatry of the ancient Canaanite religions was an evil God could not tolerate. Their culture was desperately far from adequate to understand right from wrong.
- All of this implies the need for communication from God about what is actually right and what is actually wrong. We have a general idea written on our hearts, but we need more specifics. The Bible supplies those ideas, and we must study carefully.

In Every Generation



- The Culture throws new ideas about right and wrong at people. People have lists of rules of what a good person is like, often handed down from the traditions of their parents. The culture challenges those rules, large and small, all the time.
- Sometimes the culture tries to correct wrongs from the past. But sometimes even the correction has unintended consequences if it misses moral universals.
- The Bible is a true compass helping us to find real right and wrong. It helps us reset our thinking and put things into proper perspective. It helps us to withstand the wrong ideas from all sides.

Superficial Reading is Discouraged.

- At the beginning of the Ten Commandments the LORD says “I am the LORD Your God. You shall have no other gods before Me.”
- A theme that runs through the Bible is that we are to cling to the real God.
- We cling to Him for our own good, so that we can understand right from wrong and avoid the pitfalls of life.
- One of the ways we cling to Him is by carefully studying His word.

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3. Melchizedek's importance to us

- Messiah's priesthood is more important than the Levitical priesthood because it is eternal, as was symbolized by Melchizedek's priesthood.
- King David wrote the prophetic word about Messiah's eternal priesthood around 1000 BC. This was about 400 years after God gave the Law to Moses.

Hebrews Chapter 7

- **¹¹ Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), 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? ¹² For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. ¹³ For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar.**

Hebrews Chapter 7

- ¹⁴ For *it is* evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.
- ¹⁵ And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest
- ¹⁶ who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life.

Hebrews Chapter 7

- ¹⁷ For He testifies: *"You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek."*

Hebrews Chapter 7

- **18** For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness,
- **19** for 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.

3. Melchizedek's importance to us

- The law was good. But because the law made no one perfect, we need a Priest who lives forever to make intercession for us.
- The new eternal priesthood, announced by King David in the Psalms, was provided for us because God loves us. Our better hope is built on His lovingkindness.
- This is a better hope than the law of Moses could give us. Messiah's righteousness is perfect, and His righteousness is given to us through faith. We can draw near to God through Messiah's righteousness.

One of Messiah's Titles

According to Jeremiah 23:6

Is *The LORD Our Righteousness*.

And God declared Messiah our Priest forever with an oath.

Hebrews Chapter 7

- ²⁰ And inasmuch as *He was not made priest without an oath* ²¹ (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'*"), ²² by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.

3. Melchizedek's importance to us

We have God's solemn promise—His oath—about this, because God swore with an unbreakable oath that Messiah would be our priest forever.

Messiah's priesthood is totally dependable, because He lives forever.

Messiah's priesthood is totally dependable because it is based upon God's solemn promise—His oath.

Hebrews Chapter 7

- **²³ Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. ²⁴ But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.**

3. Melchizedek's importance to us



The order of Melchizedek answers the question about the lineage of Levi and the lineage of David. It shows the Hebrew Scriptures to be correct in both kinds of priesthood. The perfect fit of Jesus' life with the Scripture's predictions validates both. Jesus' priesthood is consistent with God's honesty revealed in Scripture.

Therefore, Jesus is able to completely, totally, to the uttermost—beyond all limitations—save us. He is able to save us forever.

Hebrews Chapter 7

- **25 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 7:1-28 (NKJV)

3. Melchizedek's importance to us



That is exactly what we need. Therefore, Jesus is able to completely, totally, to the uttermost—beyond all limitations— save us forever.

We are secure in Him.

His infinite sacrifice was enough to cover all sins for all time and eternity.

And we can trust His word.

Hebrews Chapter 7

- ²⁶ For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; ²⁷ who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

Hebrews Chapter 7

- **28 For 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.**

“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul.

- A hope both sure and steadfast, and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us.”**
- Hebrews 6:19-20.**
- We have a secure hope. We do not have to be tossed about by circumstance. Our hope is eternal and sure and steadfast.**
- Christ’s one infinite sacrifice on our behalf is enough for all sins for all time and eternity. Death has been defeated by eternal life.**

Ancient Truths with Modern Meaning

- It's worth repeating: Messiah as our Priest forever in heaven helps us make sense of the Law of Moses today.
- His priesthood gives us hope of heaven.
- His priesthood explains the early tabernacle system in terms of a heavenly universal and an earthly particular.
- The Bible itself treats the tiny details of Scripture as true and meaningful and dependable.

Messiah is forever!

In the Scriptures, Messiah is our Priest forever, and our King forever. He is also presented as Prophet—like Moses—and we must listen to Him. He is our Source of spiritual truth.

- Jesus Christ's resurrection opens our understanding of heaven, and gives us a glimpse of an eternal future.
- His heavenly Priesthood ties earth and heaven together. He becomes "Jacob's Ladder" for us. This explains John 1:51.



Homework

In 3 sets

Homework Lesson 20 Set 1

- Moses prayed a very important prayer, related to the work of the promised Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15-19), who would be like Moses. Read Exodus 32:1-35.
- What did Moses ask God to do in verses 31-32?
- Did God accept Moses' offer?
- In what way was Jesus like Moses in this prayer? How are they different in this regard?

Homework Lesson 20 Set 1

- What does I John 1:8 and 10 say about ordinary people who claim to be without sin, and why?
- What does this imply about Jesus?
- What does verse nine say about sins?
- What does verse 7 say cleanses us from all sin?

Homework Lesson 20 Set 2

- Jesus Christ gave us two example prayers in the Gospel record –
- the Lord’s Prayer, also called the Model Prayer, to teach His followers how to pray, found in Matthew 6:5-25 and in Luke 11:1-13 as repeated on another occasion—
- and the chapter of prayer in John 17 where He prayed fervently for Himself, His disciples, and us.
- In Matthew 6:5-8, how would you describe a requirement for prayer expressed in these verses?
- In verse 9, what attitudes are expressed toward God?
- Why would Jesus qualify “Thy will be done,” with the words “on earth as it is in heaven?”

Homework Lesson 20 Set 2

- What is the focus of the verses following the Lord's Prayer in Matthew, and what do they list as a requirement for being forgiven?
- What is another requirement to receive God's forgiveness?
- How does this combination of requirements work out for the other party if they are NOT repentant?

Homework Lesson 20 Set 3

- Read John 16:32-33 and chapter 17.
- What is the setting of chapter 17?
- The prayer ends His discourse with His disciples recorded from John 13:31 through 17:26. This is His longest recorded message during His life on earth. To whom does Jesus Christ say He gives eternal life in verse 2 of chapter 17?
- What is eternal life, according to verse 3?
- How do you explain that?

Homework Lesson 20 Set 3

- In John 17:4-5, Jesus looked past the cross to the glory of His future – the restoration of the glory He already always had – and the accomplishment of the resurrection.
- Because of what He did for us, we will have the similar privilege of looking toward glory when we face our final days. We can choose to look that direction, or we can choose to look at circumstances.

Homework Lesson 20 Set 3

- Jesus was facing death as He prayed in John 17. How many humans are exempt from death?
- Everybody will go through trials like Job in the Old Testament, at some point in life, because we all have an appointment with physical death by virtue of human mortality. The path toward that appointment is often marked by suffering. Faith and courage are intertwined. Note that the focus of this entire passage in John 17 is LIFE, not death.
- Think now about the book of Job.

Homework Lesson 20 Set 3

- God required Job to choose life, even when circumstances were very hard. To do otherwise would have been to reject God—to “curse God and die.” Job was righteous to resist that temptation. In today’s world, we don’t talk about euthanasia as choosing “to curse God and die,” but Job was right and we are right to resist such evil.
- Jesus laid down His life to save us, not to get out of suffering for Himself. But in the process of that suffering, He looked toward glory.
- In John 17:6-9, what does *keeping God’s word* have to do with this subject of choosing life?

Homework Lesson 20 Set 3

- What was one source of His glory that Jesus mentioned in verse 10?
- What two things does Jesus ask God the Father to do for His disciples, in verse 11?
- Why did Jesus pray out loud, where His disciples could hear, according to verse 13?

Homework Lesson 20 Set 3

- What next thing does Jesus ask for us, in verse 15?
- In verse 17, what does Jesus say about God's word, and what does He ask for us?
- How does verse twenty demonstrate that Jesus was asking these things for us who are alive today?
- What was Jesus' goal for the world as He prayed verse 21-23?

Homework Lesson 20 Set 3

- What goals did Jesus pray for His disciples in verses 24-26?
- What similar requests can we pray for those we care about?
- How does resisting manipulation from the world's point of view fit with Jesus' prayer?
- How does Romans 12:2 fit this topic? What does it direct us to do? How is choosing life intertwined with Romans 12:1-2?