



Hebrews 7: Jesus and Melchizedek

March 1, 2026
HPC Trinity Class

Spooky question:

What comes to mind when we hear the word “cult” or “cultic?”



Unfortunately, today this word often conjures up fears similar to those of Mickey Mouse...things that are demonic or that have a negative twist; groups that are offbeat, weird, or unusual.



But “cult” can also connote the positive, as it does in the Bible, implying adoration, veneration, or worship. And it is in this sense that we read of Jesus, who “has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

The Bible is full of prophets like Amos, Hosea, and Jeremiah “who were radical in their criticism of the rituals of worship. But every religion must have a cultus—that is, forms in which faith and worship can find expression. A noncultic religion is a contradiction in terms.”¹

Chapter seven flows directly from the ending of chapter six. The author of this letter tells us that Jesus voluntarily went before God the Father (“behind the curtain” {6:19-20}), interceding for us. In doing so, Jesus “has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”



Melchizedek the Priest

7:1-3 is simply a retelling of the story in Genesis, where Abraham’s forces conquer the armies of several local kings.

[READ GEN 14:17-20]—this provides an overview of what the nature of priesthood should be: giving, praising.

At the end of the fighting Melchizedek² brings out wine and bread to Abraham and his victorious troops. In turn, Abraham offers Melchizedek a tithe: 1/10th of the goods and people he’s captured. His host declines the offer, but Abraham refuses to take “no” for an answer. After all, Melchizedek is not only a king, he the priest of God Most High—God’s representative on earth. Melchizedek finally gives in and accepts the tithe.

¹ Anderson, p. 499.

² Melchizedek is Hebrew for “my king is righteousness.”

Our unknown author of Hebrews has a specific goal: he wants to convince us of Christ's high priesthood. He "begins by establishing the great importance of Melchizedek, who resembles the Son of God in many respects and hence serves as a type of Christ."³ In effect, Melchizedek is superior to even Abraham and Levi, the two pillars of what would become the Jewish faith.

The challenge faced by our mystery writer is this: the concept of Jesus as son of God and son of man was somewhat new and was a unique concept for these new Christian converts. Therefore, the author recalls to mind someone with whom they were already familiar—Melchizedek—to open their eyes.

What do we know of this man Melchizedek? Not much, unfortunately. We get only a glimpse of him in Genesis 14:17-20 and Psalm 110:4, which tell us...

- he was king of the city of Salem, which was probably the Canaanite Jerusalem; **[READ PSALM 76:1-3]**
- he was also "priest of God Most High," which would make him a priest of El Elyon, the head of the Canaanite pantheon. This was apparently viewed at the time as being the same entity as the God of Israel.⁴
- he lived some 1700+ years earlier than our author of Hebrews.



Imagine if we today tried to harken back 1700 years...

It's now @380 A.D.

Emperor Theodosius I bans all pagan worship. Christianity becomes the official religion of the Roman Empire.

7:3


Here the author points out that it's unbelievable for anyone who was both a king AND a prophet to have no lineage—no record of his birth or death, no

³ Hagner, p. 101.

⁴ *Ibid.*

genealogy.⁵ Also, no record of any kind that mentions Melchizedek's successors. With no beginning and no end his priesthood would be considered to continue for eternity. In these ways he is like Jesus, the Son of God.

[READ PSALM 110:4]

7:4-6 "Just think how great he was..."(NIV) is similar to the wording of most English translations. This is pretty tame language for such exciting news as our author presents. The International Standard Version (ISV) comes closer: "*Just look at how great this man was!*" This should be a  statement full of excitement! After all, even the great man Abraham was tithing to Melchisedek!⁶

"Now" in v. 5 means "truly" or "indeed," not "today" or "right this minute." The Mosaic Law of tithing ten percent was still in the future. This tithe, which was given to Melchizedek, was based simply upon Abraham's gratitude.⁷

7:7-10 "Lesser person" = Abraham, merely a man who will die someday.

The Levitical priests (those who collected the tithe during the time of Hebrews) will die also. The author even takes a swipe at Levi who was "still in the body of," which literally means "in the loins of" Abraham.⁸

"Greater person" = Melchizedek.

Earlier in this study of the Book of Hebrews we speculated as to whom the author was addressing. Was his audience Jewish converts or was it pagan converts? Chapter 7 dwells heavily upon the Levitical priesthood and the Law—concepts very familiar to a Jew but not a pagan. So, the needle points toward a following of former Jews who have become Christians, but who are now wavering in their new faith.


Side Note

⁵ A literal reading of verse 3 has been misunderstood by some to mean that Melchisedek was a pre-incarnate Christ.

⁶ "How great" (*pêlikos*) is found only in one other place in the NT-- Gal. 6:11, where Paul describes his large handwriting.

⁷ "Tithing" did not refer to a gift of money until hundreds of years later. (e.g., Deut. 14:24-26).

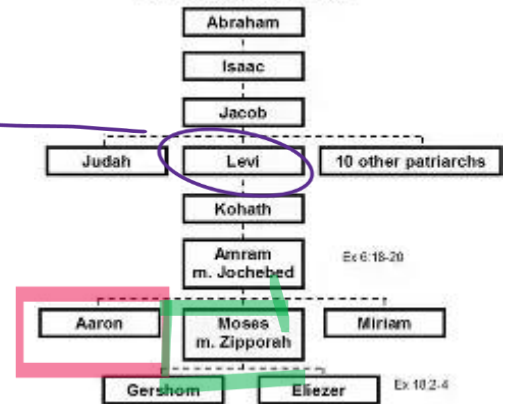
⁸ Ancient writers often depicted children as a physical part of their ancestors, especially their fathers. The logic was this: all men sprung from Adam, who sinned, and the sons inherited that sin. This is known as "federal headship."

Jesus is like Melchizedek

FYI:

To the people of Jesus' time and place, the word "priest" would have meant a man from the tribe of Levi. If he was a descendant of Aaron he would have been in charge of the sacrifice at the altar. If he descended from Moses he would have the task of interpreting the Law to the people.

Genealogy of Moses



7:11 So what's the problem??? **[READ HEB. 7:11]**

For generation upon generation the Jewish people sought religious perfection via an imperfect system: they assumed that God's chosen leader would eventually arise from the existing priests—a man from the house of Aaron or Moses ONLY. Something had to change! The answer lies in Psalm 110:4. [READ IT AGAIN]

They needed a priest in the order of Melchizedek!

7:12-19 Until now the role of priesthood was inherited. One didn't *become* a priest; one was *born* a priest. The only qualifier was that a son must be of Aaron's or Moses' lineage. But that system "was weak and useless." It failed. What was needed was someone like Melchizedek. Jesus, from the tribe of Judah, was the one chosen by God.



"But that's a different tribe, and no one of that tribe has served at the altar."

"Then I guess the rules ("law")
will have to be changed!"



7:20-22 Levitical priests took no oath to God; they were simply born into the priesthood. Jesus, however, is the guarantor of a "better covenant," because God proclaimed, "You are a priest forever." (This is the "new covenant" we later read about in Hebrews 9 and 12.)

7:23-27 Jesus lives forever as a permanent priest who can save us completely. He sacrificed his life for our sins. [This concept would have shocked the religious people of the time: NO high priest would ever offer *himself* as a sacrifice.]

7:28 But the 'Times They Are-a-Changin' because of the "Son, who has been made perfect forever."

CONTRASTS OF LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD AND JESUS PRIESTHOOD⁹

| LEVITICAL PRIESTS | VERSE IN HEBREWS 7 | JESUS AS HIGH PRIEST |
|---|--------------------|--|
| Limited access to God | 7:19 | Provides full access to God thru Christ. |
| Weak, sinful; offered sacrifices first for their own sins | 7:26-28 | Holy, blameless. Sacrificed himself for others. |
| Ancestry thru Aaron | 7:11, 14, 16 | Order of Melchizedek |
| Appointed by the Law, not by God's oath | 7:20-22, 28 | Appointed by God's oath. |
| Ineffectual; unable to perfect those who draw near | 7:11, 18-19, 25 | Saves completely; makes perfect forever. |
| Connected with old covenant/law | 7:11-12, 22, 28 | Connected with new covenant |
| Many priests | 7:23-24 | One priest |
| Temporary service due to mortality | 7:23-25 | Permanent service: He lives forever |
| Offered animal sacrifices | 7:27 | Offered himself |
| Sacrifices repeated daily, yearly; a reminder of sins | 7:27 | Sacrificed once for all. Sins cleansed once for all. |

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⁹ Zondervan, p. 2506.