



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

HEBREWS

Lesson 7

We have already touched on the significance of Jesus being our High Priest. In fact, the author introduced it in 2:17; 3:1; 4:14; and 5:6, 10. Now, in chapter 7, he begins to explain the significance of the quote from Psalm 110:4: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." Who is this mysterious, seemingly-mystical man, Melchizedek? Why is the "order of Melchizedek" superior to the priesthood of Aaron's? And honestly, why do we care about a man named Melchizedek, who is only mentioned twice in the Bible (Genesis 14:18, Psalm 110:4)? What real significance can there be in a guy who is barely mentioned?

In chapter 7 the writer will attempt to answer these questions and explain to his readers why Christ's priesthood is superior in "order." Stedman said, "The unfolding of the meaning of the Melchizedek priesthood of Jesus is the goal toward which the author has been aiming ever since 2:17, where he first uses the term *high priest* in reference to Jesus. This chapter establishes Melchizedek's historic identity, his precedence and superiority to the Levitical priesthood, the consequent need for a radical replacement of the law, and the remarkable advantages which the Melchizedek ministry affords."

God had intended to do something new by bringing into history one who would be a priest like Melchizedek, who was a "type" of the ultimate priesthood of Christ. The writer's purpose for his readers is to see that Jesus perfectly fulfilled what was foreshadowed in the Genesis account of Melchizedek. The parallels between Jesus and Melchizedek enable this obscure Old Testament figure to become a human illustration. Through this analogy, several superior aspects of Jesus' priesthood are evident. This was a new, profound truth that had not yet been presented, so try to imagine how exciting and eye-opening it was for them to hear this. Perhaps this will

be a new thought for you as well. Make sure you begin in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to capture your thoughts and give you the ability to spiritually grasp the text and the significance of what the author was trying to say, so many years ago. Have fun!

First Day

1. Read Hebrews 7:1-28. Observe the text. What facts do you find?

2. Write any repeated words, thoughts, or phrases.

3. How many times is the word "forever" used? What is the significance of that?

4. What would you say is the key verse of the chapter?

5. The word "perfect" or "perfection" is a key word in the book of Hebrews. What do these verses say about that? (Remember it means "completed or fulfilled.")
 - A. Hebrews 2:10
 - B. Hebrews 5:9
 - C. Hebrews 6:1
 - D. Hebrews 7:11, 19
 - E. Hebrews 9:9
 - F. Hebrews 10:1, 14

6. The only historical mention of Melchizedek is found in Genesis 14:1-24. Read this chapter to get a picture of the meeting between he and Abraham. This will be essential in understanding why this man is mentioned in Hebrews. Give a brief summary of what brought these two men together.

7. What two roles did Melchizedek fulfill? How does the text show us that he wasn't considered a "fake"? (How do we know he was legit?)

As we read our chapter, remember the High Priest was supposed to come from the tribe of Levi, according to the law (Exodus 29, Numbers 18). Also, remember that in the Old Testament, the throne and the altar were separated; you couldn't be a king and a priest. Those who tried were judged by God. But Melchizedek lived prior to the old covenant so he wasn't bound by it. For the readers, these thoughts were all new. Try to imagine yourself as one of them as you read the text; how puzzling and strange this must have been. But how overwhelmingly encouraging as well!

8. Do you see any immediate application for yourself?

See you tomorrow, ladies. I'm praying that as you read this chapter, you discover some really exciting **"Reasons to Rejoice"**!

Memory Verse of the Week: "But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood." Hebrews 7:24

Second Day

1. Read Hebrews 7:1-28. Let's take a closer look at the description of Melchizedek in verses 1-3. What facts are we given? What does his name mean?
2. The words "righteousness" and "peace" are found many times together in Scripture. Read the following verses and note how they're used.
 - A. Isaiah 32:17
 - B. Psalm 85:10
 - C. Psalm 72:7
 - D. James 3:17-18
 - E. Hebrews 12:10-11

Melchizedek's titles were also a foreshadow of Christ. We know that Jesus became the ultimate priest-king, fulfilling what was promised through Zechariah regarding the Messiah (Zechariah 6:13). His name, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords," will be written both on His robe and thigh when He returns (Revelation 19:16). He is also the "Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6-7) and called the "Righteous" in 1 John 2:1. Jesus is both the King of Righteousness and the King of Peace.

3. Why do peace and righteousness go together? (Can you have peace without righteousness?)

4. When Abraham met Melchizedek, what did Abraham give him? What did Melchizedek give Abraham? What does this tell us about Abraham's opinion of him?

5. What do we know about Melchizedek's family? What are his qualifications in verse 3, which are another foreshadow of Christ?

Because Melchizedek was an actual man, we know he obviously had parents. The writer is simply using a rabbinical method of interpretation of "the silence" to show that his parents, his age, or his death were never mentioned. All levitical priests were able to trace their genealogies back to Aaron, proving they were from the tribe of Levi. "Pedigree was of paramount importance!" (Jeff Snell) Priests also served limited terms of office; no more than thirty years, yet Scripture shows no beginning or end for Melchizedek. "Melchizedek's sudden appearance and equally sudden disappearance from recorded history awakens within a sensitive reader the notion of eternity. What foreshadowed in Melchizedek's having no beginning or end was fully realized in Christ's eternal priesthood."

Again, this man was a foreshadow of Christ who fulfilled the prophecy of becoming our eternal priest and king. In verse 3 the writer uses the word

"like" because of their similarities, but he doesn't try to say that Jesus and Melchizedek are identical. Melchizedek was "king of righteousness" and "king of peace" but he could never make men righteous or give them peace. Jesus "is" righteousness and peace. He also is not from the tribe of Levi. His royal blood line can be traced to Judah (7:14), giving Him no priestly genealogy, yet He will remain our High Priest forever! He is the eternal Son of God. Because He rose again, He lives in the power of an "endless life" (Hebrews 7:16).

So ... this "order" is superior to Aaron's because Aaron couldn't claim to be without genealogy, claim to have an endless ministry, or claim to be both a king and priest.

6. Let's stop for a minute and focus on the fact that Jesus Christ is our "Prince of Peace." He is the essence and sum of all peace; there is no real or lasting peace without Him. Have you taken Him along on your journey through this life? What about your journey through "today"? Are you lacking peace in some situation? How can you get it?

7. Read Hebrews 7:4-10. What is the main point of this section?

8. Why do you think it was such a big deal that Abraham gave Melchizedek his tithe?

I know this is a lot of reading, but believe me, it's worth it. We really need to understand why this is all so significant. The Hebrew writer has used the acts of tithing and bestowing blessings to establish the superiority of Melchizedek. Hughes writes, "In the ancient world, paying tithes to another was recognition of the other's superiority and a sign of subjection to that person. Here Abraham was on a personal mountaintop after slaughtering the invading kings. He had proven himself a man of great courage and of considerable capability. In the eyes of the succeeding Jews, he would be considered to be the greatest of men. He was called the friend

of God (2 Chronicles 20:7), the father of the nation of Israel; the patriarch. But when he met Melchizedek, he recognized his superior greatness and paid him a tenth of the plunder, the choicest spoils of war. This was a calculated recognition by Abraham that he was in the presence of one greater than himself. Our writer expresses proper astonishment: 'Just think how great he was; even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder.' "The author makes this powerful point, but he realizes that some may diminish it in their minds by saying, 'what's so great about that? Levitical priests collected tithes too!' So, in anticipation, he further argues that the Levites' ability to collect tithes comes from provision made by the law (vs 5-6) and not from any natural superiority. But Melchizedek was different. He 'did not trace his descent from Levi,' and yet, as a figure of immense superiority, he collected tithes not from the people, but from Abraham! The writer then appeals to the common belief that an ancestor 'contains' all his descendants within himself. Thus he argues, 'One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor (vs 9-10). Even the Levitical priesthood acknowledges the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood, because it paid tithes to Melchizedek in advance."

"Then Abraham bowed and received a blessing from him. What a stupendous act on Abraham's part! Remember God had told Abraham that 'all people on earth will be blessed through you' (Genesis 12:3). Abraham was the supreme blessing; all the rest of mankind were blessed! But he sees himself as inferior to Melchizedek, who towers above him with mysterious grandeur and receives his blessing."

Melchizedek blessed Abraham, refreshing and strengthening him with bread and wine. Jesus strengthens those who come to His throne of grace for help. Bread and wine are also a symbol for His body and blood in communion. Abraham paid a tithe (ten percent) of all his goods to Melchizedek as an acknowledgment of his position as high priest of The Most High God. So believers are to acknowledge Jesus as the one who bought us with a price and to recognize we are no longer owners of ourselves or all we possess (1 Cor. 6:19-20)" (Ray Stedman)

9. Read Psalm 85:10. What does the psalmist say about righteousness and peace? Who brings these together in Himself? And who do you think He bestows this "kiss" upon?

Think about this: Jesus Christ is our bridegroom, and we (the Church) are considered the "bride of Christ" (Revelation 19:7-10; 21:2, 9). Righteousness and peace have "kissed" in Christ, and it's "This kiss that the King repeatedly bestows on His bride." (Hughes) How awesome is that! The Jewish believers would be blown away with this analogy. But it doesn't stop there. As Melchizedek offered Abraham bread and wine, now Christ, our eternal Melchizedek, offers the same to His church (Matthew 26:26-30, John 6:53-58, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34). His life, His flesh and blood, has secured our righteousness and peace. "And by feeding on Him as our food and drink, we receive sustenance to live as we ought and to bring His healing kiss to a broken world." (Hughes) Let your mind dwell on that for the rest of the day. What an amazing Savior we serve!

Third Day

What's your memory verse?

1. Read Hebrews 7:1-28. Focus on verses 11-19. The writer now compares the insufficiency of Aaron's priesthood (11-14) to the sufficiency of Melchizedek's (15-19). Why was it insufficient? What could it "not" do?
2. What could the "old law" not do? Read Hebrews 10:4, 9:9; Galatians 3:21.

If under the old law Aaron's priesthood had brought about perfect access and nearness to God, it wouldn't have needed to be replaced. But it couldn't. It was only meant to be "provisional." The sacrifices could only "cover" their sins; they couldn't take them away. No animal could substitute for a human sinner. With all the rituals and sacrifices, they couldn't obtain a spiritual life or a clean conscience. The priests could not cleanse the soul from sin. Inwardly, the burden of guilt and the stain of sin remained. Only the blood of Christ will "cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God." (Hebrews 9:14) If this was all true, then what good was the Law?

The Law came from God and had a divine purpose. The Law revealed sin and made man aware of their spiritual state (Romans 7:7,8). Hughes writes, "The Law programmed God's people regarding the necessity of the

atonement, as seen in the repeated demand of a blood sacrifice. Sin necessitated the shedding of blood. Sin ... blood, sin ... blood. This developed a conditioned reflex regarding the need for atonement. Indeed the whole system provided a type of Christ, so that John the Baptist would cry out as Jesus passed by, 'Look, the Lamb of God!' (John 1:35). The Law was, in effect, a teacher, as Paul explained in Galatians 3:24. In reality, the Law was an excellent institution. The real problem was man was sinful (Romans 8:3,7)."

3. According to verse 12, if the priesthood changes, what else had to change? Why?

If the law had to change, God was the only one who could change it. After all, He was the one who made it. Centuries after the Law was written, God Himself said through David, "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind: You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." (Psalm 110:4) God changed the Law by appointing Jesus as the High Priest in a whole different order and confirmed that change with an oath (Hebrews 7:28). "With the coming of Christ, the priestly order was transformed and transferred. With His once-and-for-all sacrifice, Christ fulfilled the law and made the Levitical priesthood obsolete." (Ceslaus Spicq)

4. What tribe was Jesus from? (Hebrews 7:14, Luke 3:23-38)
5. According to verses 15-16, Jesus didn't become the high priest based on the law or His genealogy, but based on what?

Remember in Hebrews 5:11 the writer tells his reader that the things he wants to share with them are hard to explain? This was exactly what he was talking about. It was hard for the Jewish believers to understand that Jesus fulfilled the Law, ending the need for animal sacrifices. Jesus abolished the need for the Levitical priesthood. But although the Aaronic priesthood was over because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, the priesthood of Christ remains forever! This thought would definitely rock their boat!

6. In verse 19 what does the writer call this change? Why? What does it accomplish?
7. With what we've learned so far, are you getting a clearer picture of why trying to "get" to God any other way than "through Christ" doesn't work? Does it seem like a "slap" in God's face to you when we take our salvation and the cross so lightly? Write your thoughts ...
8. We are now "free from the Law." Does that mean we are now "free to sin"? What does it mean? (Romans 8:1-14)

Let's end here for today. I'm sorry if it seems like we are going over and over the same thing. The Holy Spirit obviously thought it was a vital concept for us to grasp. It shows us the complete significance of what Christ did. I pray that we will understand and appreciate the "better hope" we have in Jesus more and more every day.

Fourth Day

Work on your memory verse.

1. Read Hebrews 7:1-28, focusing on verses 20-28. True to the writer's style, he introduces a new thought with a word or phrase and then explains it in more depth in the next few chapters. What two new words or thoughts does he introduce in verse 22? What do you think they mean?
2. God swore an oath when he appointed Christ as priest. According to these verses, is it permanent or temporary?

The word "surety" also translates "guarantee" or "one who guarantees that the terms of an agreement will be carried out." The word "covenant" or "testament" is used 21 times in this letter, which shows its obvious importance. We'll look closer at the meaning of covenant in our next chapter. The exciting point in this verse is that Jesus is our guarantee that all God's promises will be fulfilled! Kistemaker writes, "No promise God has made to us can ever be broken, for Jesus gives us the assurance that His perfection will be our perfection, our bodies will 'be like His glorious body' (Phil. 3:21), and His ascension guarantees our entrance into Heaven (John 14:3)."

3. Why is it so significant that Jesus' priesthood will never change? How does that bring us confidence?
4. According to verse 25, what is Jesus able to do and continue to do?
5. What do the following verses say about this?
 - A. Hebrews 9:24
 - B. Romans 8:34
 - C. Romans 8:26-27
 - D. John 14:6

Jesus is making intercession for us. Intercession means "to meet, to approach, to appeal, to make petition." We are imperfect, sinful people, and Jesus is perfect and holy. Jesus' contact with the Father is unbroken. His intercession is never-ending. Day by day, hour by hour, He prays for us and stands in the gap for us. He represents us at the throne of God. How does He do that? Hughes writes, "He, along with the Holy Spirit, takes our feeble prayers, cleans them up, ennobles them, and presents them to the Father. St. Chrysostom, the great fourth century preacher, provides a helpful analogy. A young boy whose father was away on a trip wanted to present his father with something that would please him. His mother sent him to the garden to gather a bouquet of flowers. The little boy gathered a sorry bouquet of weeds as well as flowers. But when his father returned home, he was presented with a beautifully arranged bouquet, for the mother had intervened, removing all the weeds. The prayers of the church --prevailing,

acceptable, and faithful -- are not a thing of beauty as they leave the lips of saints. As they start their way Heavenward, they are a mixed bag of weeds with a few stray flowers. When they arrive, however, thanks to the intercession of Christ, they are nothing but beautiful flowers. What blessed, comforting thoughts these are as we, amidst our frailties, pray." It's only through Christ that we are able to draw near to God.

Hebrews 7:25 tells us that Jesus can save completely! That means for all time, absolutely, totally, and eternally. The Gospel is the "power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jews, then for the Gentiles (Romans 1:16)." The words are in the present tense, meaning that Jesus didn't just "save" us when we accepted Christ, but refers to the ongoing experience of being saved (1 Corinthians 1:18). Raymond Brown said, "He saves us, not only in the moment of initial commitment, but day by day and moment by moment, through all time! His perpetual saving work brings about our growing sanctification as we are made ever more like Him."

6. How does the writer describe Jesus in verse 26?

7. What is the main point of verses 27-28?

8. Because of Jesus we can confidently approach the throne of God. We don't need any other go-between to come before His presence. Do you understand the access that has been granted you? How will your prayer life change as you fully grasp the freedom of access you have to God's throne? Are you taking full advantage of the gift of access you have?

9. I know we've talked about this, but let me ask you this question again: We know that Jesus is there to help us in our time of need, so ... why do we run to other things or other people?

We have a lot to think about. Let's rejoice together in the complete and perfect salvation we have through an amazing and perfect Savior and High Priest, Jesus Christ!

3. Spend time in His presence now. Give Him thanks for all He has done for you, praise Him for who He is, rejoice in what He's going to do. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with a hunger and thirst for righteousness. As you draw near to Him, He WILL draw near to you. That's a promise you can hold on to. (James 4:8). We have a guarantee!

