

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## HEBREWS 7-8

Once, a little girl came home from Sunday School so excited. She announced, “Mom, God can do anything! He works miracles with His left hand, and heals with His left hand, and holds us close with His left hand.”

Well, the mother was thrilled that her little girl was so enthused about God, but she didn't understand her fixation with God's left hand. She told her daughter, “Honey, you realize God can also use His right hand.”

The little girl shook her head, “No, Mom, He can't! We learned in Sunday School that Jesus is sitting on God's right hand.” Obviously, she was confused, Jesus isn't sitting *on* God's right hand, but *at* His right hand.

Hebrews 7-8 teaches us that after Jesus rose from the dead, He ascended into heaven where He sat down with God. And today, He functions as our eternal High Priest... “He ever lives to make intercession...”

In Chapter 5:10 the writer of Hebrews introduced the priesthood of Jesus, “called by God as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, of whom we have much to say...” Yet the writer was unable to say it because the Hebrews weren't ready for deeper truths. His readers could handle the milk, but not the meat

In his commentary on this book, Warren Wiersbe makes an interesting observation, “The emphasis in Hebrews is not on what Christ did on the earth (*the milk of the Word*), but what He is doing in heaven (*the meat of the Word*).” Wiersbe is saying the basics of the Christian faith revolve around Jesus' earthly life and ministry, while His priestly ministry constitute the meat.

Jesus spent just 30-odd years at work on the Earth, but He's now spent 2000 years ministering in heaven.

The priesthood of Jesus is an important topic we shouldn't overlook. And that's our subject this morning!

Chapter 7, “For this Melchizedek...” This strange fellow is mentioned three times in Scripture... **Genesis 14** speaks of him *historically*. **Psalms 110** sees him *prophetically*. **Hebrews 7** discusses him *doctrinally*.

If I asked you to name the Top Ten major figures in the OT I'm sure Melchizedek wouldn't make your list. He probably wouldn't make the Top Fifty... But the writer of Hebrews surprises us by placing an amazing importance on the life and ministry of this obscure, and cryptic, and mysterious character, “Melchizedek.”

First, we're told Melchizedek was "king of Salem." "Salem" means "peace." It's short for the name "Jeru-salem" or "city of peace." Melchizedek was the king of Jerusalem - and the "priest of the Most High God..."

And that he was both *king AND priest* should immediately tip us off to his unique status in the Scriptures. In Israel there was a sharp division between church and state - *kings were forbidden to serve as priests. Kings were from the tribe of Judah, and priests from the tribe of Levi.* Any crossover was forbidden. In 2 Chronicles 26 when King Uzziah tried to usurp the role of priest God struck him with leprosy.

Under the Old Covenant only the Levites were allowed to serve as priests. You could say the priest had to have the right genes - he needed **Levi jeans.**

That Melchizedek was both a king and priest means he was of a different order of priest - he stood outside the requirements of the OT and Levitical priesthood.

We're told *this Melchizedek* "met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him..."

Remember the story from Genesis 14... Syrian marauders raided the city of Sodom and took Lot and his family captive. Uncle Abraham came to the rescue. He chased down the bandits, and returned to Palestine with *Lot* and the *loot*. And it was on the way back from the rescue mission that Abraham met this man, Melchizedek. Genesis 14:18, "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High." Notice, the "bread and wine."

Melchizedek then blessed Abraham - and we're told in verse 2, "to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all." Of course, a **tenth** is another word for a *tithe*. Here Abraham *tithed* his spoils to Melchizedek.

Elsewhere in the Scripture Abraham's act is held up as example to us. This is where we get the principle of tithing - *or donating a tenth of our income to God.* As Abraham, the father of our faith, gave a tenth to the priest; likewise we who are saved by faith should give a tenth to the priestly ministry of the Lord's Church.

We're told more about the name of this mysterious king-priest, Melchizedek, "first being translated "king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, meaning "king of peace." He's king of righteousness and peace.

Verse 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." How would you like to be the FBI agent assigned to this guy's background check? *No dad? No mom? No descendants? No birthday? No date of death?* If you didn't know better, you'd think ole Melchizedek was in **the witness protection program.**

There's actually great debate over the real identity of Melchizedek! Was he simply a Canaanite prince, or more? Early church father, Origen, believed he was [an angel](#). Other scholars say he was [Noah's son, Shem](#).

Some commentators have explained away his mysterious description, "*without father, without mother, etc.*" as more figurative than literal. To them it's not that he had no parents, but in contrast to the Levitical priests, his parentage was irrelevant to his priesthood. *That sounds good, but it's not what the writer says...*

I personally believe the description in verse 3, *when taken literally*, can have but one explanation. Add up the clues... [King of righteousness, Prince of peace, He carries with Him the elements of bread and wine \(or Christian communion\), no human parentage or genealogy, no beginning or end of life...](#) In my opinion *Melchizedek* can be none other than a pre-incarnate appearance of our Lord Jesus. Long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem He ruled as King/Priest of Salem.

Verse 4, "[Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils...](#)" And now the discussion gets very Jewish. Remember, this letter was written to Hebrews, so its issues and arguments are relevant to Jewish concerns.

What happened to the Levitical priesthood may not jump out to us as important, but it was critical to those who received this letter, and by trying to put ourselves in their shoes there's a lot we can learn in the process.

Verse 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 \(the eleven Hebrew tribes financially supported the tribe of Levi so they could oversee the priestly duties of the sacrificial system\); but he whose genealogy is not derived from them \(i.e. Melchizedek\) received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better.](#)"

Here's a Jewish principle, *the priest who receives a tithe or initiates a blessing* is of greater spiritual stature than *the man tithing or receiving the blessing*.

Thus, when the tribes of Israel tithed to the tribe of Levi, and the Levites blessed the same tribes it was evidence that Levi was of a superior spiritual status.

Likewise, when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek he was conceding that Melchizedek had more chops than he did. Levi might've been superior within Abraham's family, but Melchizedek was superior to the whole family - including Levi.

And here was the point to the Hebrews believers breaking away from Judaism:  
**Melchizedek was a greater priest than the Levites.**

Verse 8, “Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them...” Implied is that Melchizedek isn’t a mere mortal... “Of whom it is witnessed that he lives.” The historical Melchizedek appears in Genesis 14, that’s 2200 BC. But here we’re told “*he lives*” - *present tense*. He lives today! Melchizedek is “a priest forever.”

And in an odd kind of Jewish way, the Levitical priests actually paid tithes to Melchizedek. This is where our western, Greek logic breaks down. Just keep in mind this was written to Oriental Jews.

Verse 9, “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.”

The Hebrews touted a concept called “racial solidarity” - that one man can act on behalf of a group. This was the idea behind the war between Israel and the Philistines. Each side sent a champion to fight on behalf of their army. Instead of risking thousands of lives, David and Goliath fought it out in a proxy war.

In Judaism even ancestors could act on behalf of future generations. So when Abraham paid tithes, the Levites were still in his loins - *in his Levi genes*, so to speak. Thus, Jewish priests paid tithes to Melchizedek in their father Abraham - and in so doing were showing Melchizedek’s priestly superiority over Levi. *It’s strange thinking to us, but it’s a convincing argument to a Jew.*

This all illustrated Jesus was a better priest than the priests of Judaism. *In leaving behind their religion to follow Jesus these Hebrews had found a better priest!*

It reminds me of the Biology final. It was a tough class, and the final exam promised to be very difficult. The professor decided to give the students a break. He told the class they could bring to the exam as much information as would fit on a piece of notebook paper. Most students had written in tiny print cramming as much as possible on a 8.5 by 11 inch sheet of paper...

Except for one student. He came to class, laid a sheet of notebook paper on the floor, and had his friend - *a graduate student in biology* - stand on the paper. His expert friend told him all he needed to know. And he was the only student in the Biology class that day to get an “A.” Proving conclusively, **it’s not as much *what you know* as it is *who you know* that counts.**

And this is true in religion! No one can enter the presence of a perfect, holy God on his or her own. You can only go as far as your priest can take you... This is why the Hebrews were besieged with doubt. In embracing Jesus they’d been cut off from the

only priests they'd known. Yet here they're being assured, **"It's okay, Jesus is a better priest than the Levites."**

Verse 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?"** In Psalm 110:4 David had prophesied that Messiah would be a member of a new priestly order. If the Levites, and the Law they ushered in, were being effective and gaining for the nation access to God, *why did David think a new priesthood was needed?*

**"For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law."** This is interesting, with a new order of priesthood comes a new set of rules governing those priests and their duties.

**"For He (i.e. Jesus) of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood."** Jesus was born into the royal tribe of Judah. The priests came from the tribe of Levi.

Under the OT, Jesus could've never been a priest. That's why God established a New Covenant with a new priesthood, the order of Melchizedek, and new rules. Remember the items Melchizedek brought... ***the bread and wine are symbols of the New Covenant.***

**"And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. For He testifies..."** And he quotes Psalm 110:4, **"You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."** In the OT, priestly authority was conveyed by the Mosaic Law to the tribe of Levi. But under the New Covenant, ***priestly authority is earned.***

And Jesus earned the role of priest by virtue of His resurrection from the dead and now His endless life. He overcame death, hell, and the grave - *who now is better equipped to usher people into God's presence?*

Realize the two kinds of authority: ***delegated and earned.*** On the silver screen when John Wayne *showed up*, the bad guys *shaped up*. *"The Ole Duke"* didn't even need a badge. It didn't matter. When Wayne rode on the scene he was in charge by virtue of *who he was* and *what he'd done*. In all his movies, he was always the most respected man in the room.

The same is true with Jesus. He's our High Priest not because of an arbitrary decree or his family lineage, but because He's *the most-qualified man* for the job!

Levitical authority was a matter of *pedigree*, but Jesus' authority is a matter of *integrity and eternity*. **Jesus doesn't inherit a position, He merits a position!**

He lived a sinless life, died an innocent death, rose from the dead, and ascended to God's right hand. Jesus pioneered His own way to God. Levites were *given* the right to be priests. Jesus *earned* that right!

Verse 18, **"For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect (or complete)...** The Law was like a remedial class. It got you started with God. It caught you up on the basics, but it wasn't credit that counted toward a degree. Only in Christ do we graduate! Verse 19 says, **"On the other hand, (in Christ) there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God."**

**"And inasmuch as He (or Jesus) was not made priest without an oath (for they (the Levites) 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'"), by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant."** God never took an oath regarding the Levitical priesthood. He never pledged Himself to permanently support their ministry for He knew they'd eventually be replaced by Jesus.

But in Psalm 110:4 when the priesthood of Jesus was predicted, God swore to support Him eternally! **"The LORD has sworn... You are a priest forever..."** This is why the hope Jesus brings is so much better!

**"Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing."** Here's another weakness of the Levitical priesthood. Their ministry was always transitory. Levitical priests kept dying off.

The Jewish historian, Josephus, said there were 83 High Priests from the time of Aaron through 70 AD, when the Temple was finally destroyed. The Jewish Talmud held to a higher count - it claimed 18 served in Solomon's Temple, and over 300 in the rebuilt Temple. **The point is no Levitical High Priest lasted forever. The Levites were here today and gone tomorrow.**

It was like the Braves starting pitching this season. They bring up a rookie who surprises the opponent. Then the next outing he gets rocked, and so they replace him with another rookie - the next *fresh arm from the farm*. They keep surprising teams. It's worked, but it's not ideal. **You'd rather have continuity.** And this was the problem

with the Jewish priesthood. About the time you gained confidence in one priest he'd die off, and you'd have to develop confidence in another.

Verse 24, **“But He (i.e. Jesus), because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.”** *Jesus never gets injured, or has a bad outing.* He certainly doesn't keep dying on the job. He's the opposite of *here today gone tomorrow!* Trust Jesus to secure for you access to God; and you'll have the same confidence 100 years from now as you do today. **He is a priest forever!**

Verse 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.”**

Once, an 8 year-old boy came home from school with a stuffed animal he'd won at the Valentine's party. His dad asked him, **“How did you win the prize?”** The little boy recounted, **“Our teacher wrote all our names on pieces of paper, and placed them in a bowl. Then she picked a name out of the bowl, and it was me!”**

That's when a guilty look appeared on the little guy's face. He confessed, **“But dad, I cheated.”** A confused father asked, **“How did you cheat?”** The innocent little guy looked up, and answered him, **“Dad, I prayed.”**

Realize, there's **mega-power in prayer!** Compared to how our unsaved friends and neighbors try to navigate through life, *prayer is almost like cheating.* **A believer in Jesus really does have a hotline to God.**

And yet at times we wonder if God is listening to our prayers. That's not the issue that should concern us. Here's what we should ask, **“Does God listen to Jesus' prayers?”** And of course the answer is, **“Yes!”**

I love this painting of Jesus. He is interceding for the world. Today, He's in heaven praying for us. Verse 25, **“He always lives to make intercession for (us)...”**

When I grow apathetic, or get distracted Jesus still stands before the eternal Judge as my righteousness.

When I blow it horribly, my advocate, *Jesus Christ, Esq.* reminds the court that His blood paid for my forgiveness... *When I ask for strength, or need healing, or plead for mercy, or desire patience, or long for love...* Jesus intercedes and secures for me a blessing.

Because Jesus *occupies eternity* and *always makes intercession* **“He is able to save us to the uttermost.”** Since Jesus is in charge of my salvation it means *I'm saved today*, and *will still be, a million years from now!*

Yet often verse 25 gets misread. Instead of “*save us to the uttermost,*” we read “*save us from the uttermost.*”

It's true, Jesus' blood can save the most disgusting, despicable sinner. Jesus can save the underbelly of society - the drug dealers, pimps, child molesters, and serial killers. He can save *from the uttermost - even the gutter-most*, but that's not what this verse teaches.

The writer says that Jesus is able to save us “*to the uttermost.*” The emphasis here is not the extent *from which He saves*, but the extent *to which He saves us*.

I've heard people remark, “Oh, that guy was saved by the skin of his teeth...” or “She'll barely make it to heaven...” **But that's never true!** Jesus never saves anyone by the skin of their teeth. No one “*just barely*” makes it. *When Jesus saves you - you're saved to the uttermost. You're as saved as saved can get!* All your sin - *past, and present, and future* - gets blotted out!

Jesus' forgiveness is complete, total, permanent. As long as you're trusting in Christ your standing with God is as sure and steady and reliable as it can possibly be.

Realize, some things in life occur incrementally and gradually. For example, *buying a house. I ran across an online buyer's guide with 18 steps...* You prequalify for a loan. You find a house - then offer a contract. The buyer counters. You counter back. Contingencies get added. The contract is signed... Then you actually qualify for the loan. A survey has to be done, a title search, inspection, a termite letter... on and on it goes.

Thankfully, a relationship with God doesn't develop incrementally. You don't have to prequalify. There're no counter offers, or inspections (*Wow, aren't you glad He takes us “as is”*). There's no waiting and wondering if you'll be accepted - if the deal will actually go through.

No, when you embrace Jesus with your whole heart God closes the transaction immediately, and He moves in spontaneously. From the first moment you believe *you're as saved as you can get!* Yes, He saves us *from the uttermost*, but He also saves us *to the uttermost!*

*We're saved from the gutter-most to the uttermost.*

Verse 26, “*For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners...*” Because of His intrinsic worth our Lord Jesus has now “*become higher than the heavens...*”

“*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.”** The Levites sacrificed herds and herds of lambs. A river of blood literally flowed from the Temple in Jerusalem. But Jesus offered just one sacrifice - *Himself*. His sacrifice was **once for all!** Now He never needs to spill another drop of blood. His one sacrifice has permanently cleansed us of all our sin!

“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.” Jewish priests were mortal men. Jesus is God’s Son. *Who would you prefer representing you?...*

Now you’d think this would close the case on who is the better priest, *but there was another argument...*

A priest is only as good as the Temple in which he works. You can be a great ice skater, but if you have no ice... or you can be the best swimmer, but if you’ve got no pool... And likewise, for a person to be an effective priest he needs a Temple in which he can ply his trade. And Chapter 8 tackles the subject of Jesus’ temple...

Verse 1, “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.”

This is no comparison - Levitical priests ministered in the earthly Temple in Jerusalem, but Jesus ministers in *the heavenly Temple*, the very throne room of God.

At the time the Jerusalem Temple had been the center of Jewish life and religion for a thousand years, and these Hebrew believers who read this letter had now been barred from its courts because of their faith in Jesus. Thus, they desperately needed to know that Jesus and His followers access a far greater Temple!

Verse 3, “For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things...”

This is important, here we’re told the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and later the Temple in Jerusalem were actually copies - or small-scale models of heaven itself.

In the book of Revelation, the veil is peeled back and we get a peek into heaven. And we find the realities of what the OT Temple replicated. The furniture adorning the Temple - *the Ark, the altar, the lamp stands, the laver* - were all copies of what’s now found in heaven. **The Temple of old was a shadowland of heaven.**

Verse 5, “As Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, “See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.” Here the writer quotes Exodus 25:40. On Mount Sinai Moses was shown a “*pattern*” of the heavenly throne room and all of its furnishings.

*How Moses was shown this heavenly pattern was a matter of great speculation among the rabbis.* There’s a passage in the Talmud that comments, “An ark of fire and a table of fire and a candlestick of fire came down from heaven. These Moses saw and reproduced.”

Some rabbis taught that Gabriel appeared to Moses in a carpenter’s apron, holding models of the sacred furniture. He then showed Moses how to build them.

The Bible doesn’t give us specifics, but it’s certain when Moses descended from Mount Sinai he not only held the two tablets of the Ten Commandments under one arm, **but a set of blueprints under the other.** The point of the author is that the Jewish priests drove a toy model, whereas Jesus serves in the real deal.

Verse 6, “But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.”

Again, with a new priesthood came new and better promises. The Levites served under an inferior system.

But Jesus is a priest under **the New Covenant.** The rules by which He operates, and the promises He’s made, are far better than that of the OT priests.

“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.” If the Old Covenant had worked - and fully reconciled man to God - a New Covenant would’ve never been initiated.

*But God did promise a New Covenant!* And here the writer quotes a lengthy passage from Jeremiah 31, “Because finding fault with them, He says: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah - not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD.” The two stone tablets given to Moses were *imprinted* with God’s Law, but they couldn’t *impart* God’s power to keep His Law.

**It was regulation, without motivation.** The Law was like an X-ray. It diagnosed the break, but it did nothing to heal. A better covenant was needed to bring healing.

Verse 10, still quoting from Jeremiah, tells us, “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in

their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people..."

Under the New Covenant, God no longer writes on stone tablets. He now etches His intentions and desires into human hearts. When a person becomes a Christian they become a new creation. You receive new instincts and passion. **God gives us a new heart!**

Dr. Christian Barnard was the first surgeon to perform a human heart transplant. Once, he asked a patient if he wanted to see his old heart. Barnard took Philip Bailberg into a room and opened up a cabinet. The doctor took out a glass jar and handed Philip his old heart. For a moment, there was nothing but silence.

Philip Bailberg was the first man in history to hold his own heart in his hands. He asked Dr. Barnard a few technical questions about the procedure; then picked up the jar, took a last, long look at his heart, and said to the doctor, **"So this is my old heart that caused me so much trouble."** He sat it down on the counter, walked away, and never looked back. He left it behind forever.

And this is what the person who embraces Jesus as Lord needs to do. **God has done a heart transplant. He's cut out your defiant heart and replaced it with a compliant heart.** You've received new desires - a new impulse that loves God and others. Now thank God for your new heart and walk away from the old.

*And under the NC you're now on intimate terms with God... Verse 11, "None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them."* Under the NC there are no second-hand experiences with God. You know God not by *proxy* - or by *priest* - but *personally through Jesus!*

During the Pandemic Pope Francis told Catholics if they were locked down and unable to confess to a priest, they could... and I quote, **"go to God directly, and experience God's loving forgiveness."** *Quite an admission for the leader of Catholicism.* Of course, later he qualified his statement, **"as soon as you can get to a priest you should,"** but **according to the Bible the Pope's exception is God's rule!** We don't need a human priest. We have a better Priest, Jesus Christ!

**"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."** This is beautiful - **what God forgives He forgets!** Come to Jesus and you receive **a brand new start!**

So verse 13, **"In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."**

The author of Hebrews is assuring these Jewish Christians that it's no longer necessary to live under the Old Covenant. Judaism, with all its rules and rituals and requirements - it's priests and penalties - are now archaic, and out-dated with the dawning of Christianity.

Through Christ God has struck a New Deal with His people. Here it is... He promises **a new heart, a new start, and a new part** - all He asks of us is to believe!